

Preservings

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"A people who have not the pride to record their own history will not long have the virtues to make their history worth recording; and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great."

— Jan Gleysteen



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In this Issue

Although for most of Mennonite history separation from the world was the desire, Mennonites have always lived ‘in the world’. That has meant they always had neighbours, and often neighbours who were indigenous—they were there first. Neighbours are the theme of the feature articles in this issue. In Canada, that meant indigenous peoples both during the period of settlement and thereafter. Articles by Gerhard Ens, Darren Courchene, Leonard Doell and a reflection by Maria Campbell explore that relationship. In the Russian Empire indigenous neighbours were the nomadic Nogai and Kazakhs and Aileen Friesen provides a glimpse into those relationships. Royden Loewen points us to the rich interdependency, but separateness of Mennonite relations with their Latino neighbours.

The Plett Foundation has been engaged for a number of years creating a history curriculum for Low German speaking children and new English readers. Rosabel Fast was contracted by the Foundation to author a series of readers for schools in Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba. Rosabel tells us about herself and what it took to write such a history. We also have two educators, Marcela Durán and Robyn Sneath who review this first volume.

Other articles explore a variety of themes. Leonard Doell tells us about the experiences of a Holdeman family facing the pressures of World War II. Ralph Friesen’s article takes us into the cultural and religious rituals and sensibilities that guided Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites when death came. Albert Siemens opens for us the details of the almost mythical Brown hotel along the Post Road of the early West Reserve in Manitoba. We are very excited here at the Foundation to be a part of the creation of a new study center in Manitoba. My short article fills in some of the details of this new Center for Transnational Mennonite Studies.

The issue’s final section has three very different and, in some ways unique, family histories. Arlette Kouwenhoven extends the work she did in her book on the Fehr’s by following up one branch who decided to join an Amish community. Ralph Friesen provides context for an autobiography written by Maria Dueck Reimer Loewen. Finally a very interesting autobiography of the West Prussian Mennonite, David Mantler, gives us a window into the world of Prussian Mennonites around the time of the emigration to Russia. Glenn Penner and Ed Enns collaborated to bring us the the translation from the German version published by Gustav Reimer in the 1940s.

It is our hope, as always, that you will find enjoyment and new insight from the stories our writers so generously provide for us.

Hans Werner, editor

Our Cover conveys the rich interaction of Mennonites and their neighbours. The photo of the Old Colony man with his Tiahumara wife and son is from: Linda Guizar Ponce, <https://plus.google.com>. The photo of the signing of the M.O.U. between Lutherans, Mennonites and the Young Chippewyan representatives in 2006 is courtesy of Leonard Doell. The map is from the collection of the Mennonite Library and Archives, Newton, KS.

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Preservings, a journal of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., is published annually. *Preservings* is edited by: Hans Werner, 1.204.786.9352, plettfoundation@gmail.com. The annual subscription fee is \$20.00, and cheques should be made out to the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, and mailed to Hans Werner, D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2E9. Reader responses are welcome. Please send manuscripts, articles, and/or photographs to the above address at the University of Winnipeg. Our mission is to inform our readers about Mennonite history, and in particular to promote a respectful understanding and appreciation of the contribution made by the so-called conservatives.

I began these thoughts when I received an email from a researcher for the upcoming CBC series that will air in January 2017 called *Pure*. According to the CBC announcement the series will follow “a newly-elected Mennonite pastor as he infiltrates the ‘Menno mob’ in an effort to take down a powerful drug trafficking operation in the community.” The ‘Menno mob’ is, of course, a reference to Mennonites from Mexico involved in the drug trade. The researcher’s request was for someone with Low German knowledge who would translate for them. It was not clear from his email whether this was to translate on-film dialogue, the translation of interviews, or documents, or...? I had already been forewarned that this request was circulating in Ontario and was not surprised that it landed in my email inbox. Due to my parents’ having Low German as their first language, it was my first language and one I speak fluently, have taught, and even used in public presentations.

The request presented somewhat of a quandary. Should I agree to the request and perhaps have an opportunity to influence how Old Colony Mennonites are perceived and portrayed in public media? Should I agree, simply to try to do my part to at least ensure accuracy? The request raised questions about the contradictions in our society surrounding the notion of the ‘other’. We are increasingly sensitive about the cultural damage European settler societies have inflicted upon indigenous peoples. This sensitivity is not misplaced. As articles in this issue show, Mennonites have often participated without critical reflection in this process. We have other groups in society that we are being asked to become sensitive to. Years after the events of 9-11 we are still dealing with the fallout and are constantly being challenged not to consider all the adherents to Islam as the ‘other’. Old Colony Mennonites are also the ‘other’, and now even the public broadcaster will bow to society’s insatiable desire to sensationalize the story of Old Colony Mennonite participation in the drug trade.

Other possibilities came to mind. I could use my position and any influence I might have to protest the CBC’s blatant acquiescence in buying and broadcasting a series that would further marginalize Old Colony Mennonites and in the process trash Christianity more broadly. I could call on like-minded colleagues to join in this protest. After all, if all if no one ever says anything nothing can ever change. Maybe a pointed and well reasoned protest could have some influence on the CBC, at least for next time. I could also email my protest to the researcher to try to influence his journalistic impulse to at least take some responsibility for the implications of the project on an already maligned people.

I pursued none of the possibilities. I did not even respond to the email. I finally concluded that nothing would be gained. Contacts in Ontario had confirmed that the series would not portray Old Colony Mennonites, or indeed Evangelical Christianity favorably, and the request was not for help with historical or cultural context. I concluded that the CBC would proceed in any case and my protests would fall on deaf ears. My hope is that the series will be a dismal failure. I implore you not to

watch it. The best for all concerned is if would fade quietly into the dustbin, or in this case the trash bin on someone’s computer.

The request from the series researcher raised for me the difficult problem faced by those who feel the call to live and ‘be’ in the world, but not to be ‘of’ it. The problem is again before me as I put down these thoughts on the morning after the United States election that has put Donald Trump into the White House. During the ugly campaign that preceded the result now before us, I have wondered out loud about the difficulty American Christians were facing. There are those claiming Christianity who simply cannot see their way to supporting a candidate, Hillary Clinton in this case, that supports abortion and embraces LGBTQ identities. There are those, also claiming Christian faith, that find the language and attitudes towards women, minorities—‘others’—so openly displayed by Donald Trump, offensive and unchristian. What then to do when as a Christian you exercise the vote. There did not seem to be a logic that could bridge these two poles. The two situations above suggest to me that the belief that Christian values are, or ever really could be embraced by society is suspect. It seems that our Old Colony friends, in spite of their many weaknesses and failures have latched on to that important truth. The values of Christians and maybe even more so Anabaptist Christians, is fundamentally incompatible with the world. Hatred, war, demonization, are the ways of the world, there is no way to emerge from political involvement or engagement with modern media without compromising the values that Anabaptists espouse. The Schleithem Confession agreed to by Anabaptists meeting in the forests of Switzerland in 1527 put it like this:

The community of Christians shall have no association with those who remain in disobedience and a spirit of rebellion against God. There can be no fellowship with the wicked in the world; there can be no participation in works, church services, meetings and civil affairs of those who live in contradiction to the commands of God (Catholics and Protestants). All evil must be resisted including their weapons of force such as the sword and armor.

Although the historical context of the article results in a judgmental response to other faith traditions, we might to do well to revisit the relationship with ‘the world.’

Hans Werner, editor

Feature Articles: Mennonites and Indigenous Peoples

On May 14, 2016 the EastMenn Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society hosted an event to celebrate the 3rd Printing of the *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve*. The theme was “Indigenous Peoples and the Land in Southeastern Manitoba.” We are pleased to publish the lectures by Gerhard Ens and Darren Courchene. (ed.)

The *Manitoba Act*, the Métis and the Mennonites: A Tale of Two Reserves

By Gerhard J. Ens, Edmonton, Alberta

I love maps and the *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve* has hundreds of beautifully reproduced and drawn maps that bear examination and re-examination. Maps, however, are also cultural constructs obscuring as much as they reveal. My aim today, therefore, will be to closely examine one of these maps and explain its relation to events in Manitoba during the 1870s, particularly in relation to the provisions of the *Manitoba Act* of 1870. The map, Figure 1, can be found on page 29 of the *Atlas* and depicts the location of the Mennonite East Reserve and the location of the Métis reserve for the Parishes of Ste. Agathe, St. Norbert, St. Vital, St. Boniface, and Ste. Anne. These reserves sitting cheek by jowl give one the impression not only that everyone's requests and needs had been met in a very neat

and geometric manner, but also that there must have been a co-operative or conflictual relationship between the Métis and the Mennonites. It may be somewhat surprising to learn that there was really neither. Given the nature of Manitoba's entry into Confederation in 1870, all public or crown lands remained in the control of the Federal Government and consequently whatever issues, complaints, and conflicts may have arisen for either the Métis or the Mennonites in this part of Manitoba, their focus was almost always on the Federal Government. To the extent that the Métis and Mennonites interacted on land matters it was through the intercession of the Department of the Interior and the Dominion Lands Office. In a very real sense the Métis Reserve and Mennonite Reserve were two solitudes or two separate stories both tied to the Federal Government, even when they intersected.

Section 31 of the *Manitoba Act* and the Métis

The best place to start unravelling these separate stories is with the *Manitoba Act* of 1870. When the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia, whose president was Louis Riel, sent their delegates to Ottawa to negotiate Red River's entry into Confederation, it had four main demands. These included: the protection of the French language and Catholic schools (bilingual institutions), provincial status, local control of public lands, and respect for, and confirmation of, local customs.¹ The three Red River delegates to Ottawa, Father N. J. Ritchot, John Black, and Alfred Scott, began serious negotiations on April 25, 1870. When it became clear that the Federal government would accede to most of these demands, but would not surrender control of lands and resources to the newly created province, discussion shifted to compensation for the loss of control. As Ritchot noted in his journal, control over lands in Manitoba could not be given up without compensation, and in these discussions he first raised the rights of the Métis. If Manitoba could not control its public lands, he noted, the Métis should not lose their rights “as descendants of Indians.”²

From this point on discussion shifted to a land grant for the Métis population to extinguish this alleged title. Ritchot would later admit that Métis title because of their Indian blood was not quite certain, but that in order to find a satisfactory solution, it was deemed best to regard it as certain. It was, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and his Quebec lieutenant, George-Étienne Cartier, told Ritchot, the only way to get a Métis land grant through Parliament.³ These negotiations would eventually

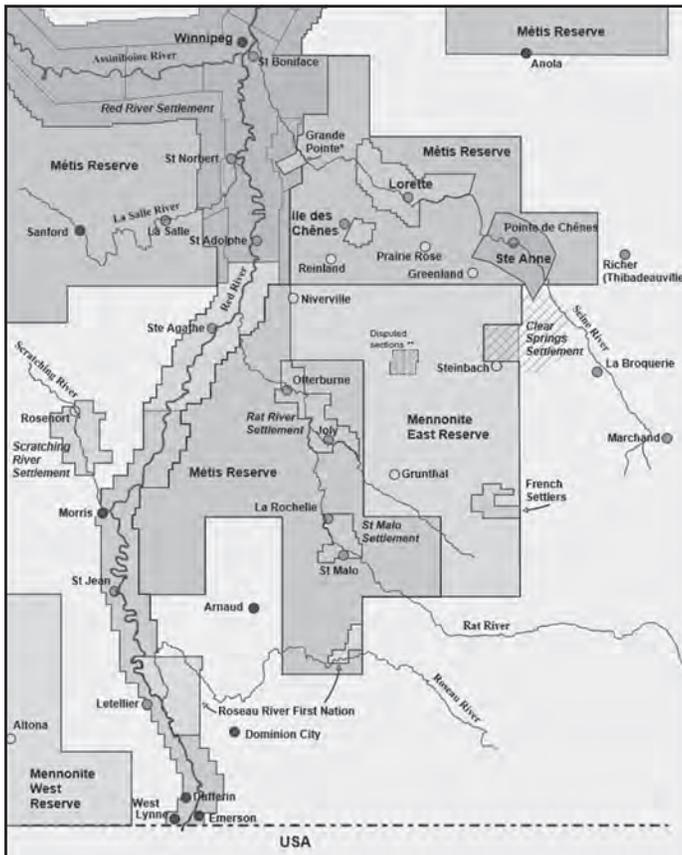


Figure 1. Map Of the Mennonite East Reserve, *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve*, p. 29.

result in Section 31 of the *Manitoba Act* which apportioned 1.4 million acres of land to the “children of Half-breed heads of families” residing in Manitoba on 15 July 1870, and was justified as being expedient towards the extinguishment of Indian title to the lands of the province. This section of the *Manitoba Act* is the one that would result in the creation of the Métis Reserves shown on the map (Figure 1).

The process of selecting the lands for the Métis grant was far from straightforward. Lieutenant Governor Archibald, reporting in December 1870, gave the first indication where the Métis wished to locate their grant. He noted that the English and Protestant parishes, and the French and Catholic parishes, wished to keep the allocation of lands separated on religious and linguistic grounds. For this reason he recommended that the French reserves be located south of Fort Garry and the English reserves north of the Fort.⁴ Less than a week later Molyneux St. John, noted that “some persons desire to take their share in the neighbourhood of the lands now occupied by themselves; others would prefer to receive it in parts remote from their present holdings with the view of obtaining Hay and better grazing country.”⁵ The matter was made more complicated and contentious when an Order-in-Council, passed on 26 May 1871, stipulated that since the survey could not be effected in time to facilitate immigrants already on their way to Manitoba, it was expedient to allow them to claim land in advance of the survey as long as the entries were made for quarter sections according to the land regulations.⁶ Trouble arose when settlers from Ontario began settling on the lands desired by the Métis. The flash point at this early date was an area some thirty miles south of the Assiniboine River along a small river known as Riviere aux Ilets de Bois near the present-day town of Carman (see Figure 3). This was a location the Métis of St. Charles and St. François Xavier had been accustomed to using for hay, wood, and sugaring. Archibald eventually convinced over half of the 80-100 squatters in the area to move elsewhere, but enough remained that the Métis began to become suspicious of the government’s good faith.⁷

In an effort to protect the lands they wanted to have included in their land grant, the Métis of the French parishes began to hold parish meetings to choose the land they desired as reserves, and to publish these spontaneous demands in *Le Métis*.⁸ In the face of these actions, and in response to a letter addressed to him by the representatives of five Métis parishes asking for assurances in regard to their land grants, Lieutenant Governor Archibald wrote to the members of the Manitoba Legislature explaining that in making his choice of Métis reserves he would be guided by the selections made by the Métis themselves. This letter, which was published in the newspapers of the province declared that,

Wherever, therefore, any Parish of Half-breeds, or any body of Half-breeds, shall have made choice of a particular locality, and shall have publically notified the same in such manner as to give notoriety to the fact of their having made such a selection and having defined the limits thereof, so as to prevent settlers entering upon the tract in ignorance of the previous selection, I shall, if the duty should fall to me of acting under the rule laid down by the Governor-General, be guided by the principle I have mentioned, and confirm the selection so made, so far as this can be done without doing violence to the township and sectional series.⁹

In response to this announcement the Métis in a number of English parishes also held meetings to choose their reserves.¹⁰

Archibald’s proposed course of action, while meeting some censure in Ottawa, was finally adopted, with some qualifications, by the Order-in-Council of 15 April 1872 which noted that “it is important that these lands should be selected and set apart at the earliest moment, to prevent a possible conflict of interest that might arise with immigrants that will go into the province in the spring.”¹¹ Under the authority of this Order-in-Council, Archibald would select reserves for the Métis based on their published requests with care taken that “only a due proportion of the Wood lands of the Province, be included in the 1,400,000 acres of land to be granted to the Half Breeds.”¹² As well, the Order-in-Council of 26 May 1871, which had permitted squatting prior to survey, would cease to have effect with respect to those lands reserved by Archibald for the Métis Grant. Those who had already made legitimate entries for land under this Order-in Council would, however, be protected in their rights.



Adams George Archibald was born in Nova Scotia where he lived and was active in politics for most of his life. He attended all of the conferences that created the Dominion of Canada and served as Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba from 1870 to 1872. Image Source: Wikipedia Commons.

In mid-July of 1872 Archibald was authorized to begin the selection of the Métis reserves as the surveys were now sufficiently advanced to permit the selections of reserves by township.¹³ His prompt announcement to this effect and his rapid selection of reserves [July 22] quickly quieted the discontent that had been brewing over the delay. As Archibald noted,

I am glad to say that my proceeding has had the happiest effect on the public mind. The excitement among the Half Breeds has subsided at once and they are quite content that the selection be completed when the preliminary enquiries I deemed necessary shall have been made.¹⁴

What Archibald did in creating these Métis Reserves was to first fix the number of townships that had to be withdrawn from settlement. Based on a census that had just been completed that showed there were approximately 10,000 Métis in the Settlement, he calculated that each Métis should receive 140 acres, which would come to 1.4 million acres. And after accounting for two sections in each township for school lands and one township for Hudson Bay Company (HBC) lands this left approximately 20,480 acres per township to be divided, which would almost suffice to give to 150 persons 140 acres each. On this basis, the Métis of the French parishes who numbered 5,620 would require 39 Townships, and for those of the English Parishes, numbering 4,219 about 29 Townships: in all 68 Townships. He then chose these 68 townships from the preferences noted by the Métis in their spontaneous demands.¹⁵ Archibald would later note that in making these selections he had not committed himself to any final choice of any particular townships, and that the Métis had been made to understand that the only effect of the selection was to have the townships withdrawn from the market, pending the enquiries required to determine a final selection.¹⁶

Archibald was unable to select reserves for all the parishes in 1872 as some of the English parishes on the Red River north of Fort Garry had not yet made their selections.¹⁷ Five parishes in Red River remained to be dealt with, but they were so situated as to create little difficulty in selections. There was an abundance of room and no danger of collision with settlers.¹⁸ These remaining five parishes did not make their selections until 1873, and therefore were dealt with by Archibald's successor, Alexander Morris.

Métis Spontaneous Demands and Archibald's Reservations 1871-1872

Although the spontaneous demands of the Métis regarding their reserves are difficult to map, given the local place names used to delineate these lands (metes and bounds), some indication of their location and extent can be determined. Comparing these descriptions to Archibald's reservations, it is clear that Archibald tried to accommodate these demands and was fairly successful, but that there was not (nor could there have been) a perfect fit as most parishes requested far more land than their populations warranted or the *Manitoba Act* provided for. This becomes apparent when both the spontaneous demands and Archibald's reservations are mapped. The other important aspect of these spontaneous demands to note here is that they did overlap somewhat with those lands that would become part of the Mennonite East Reserve. The issues this raised will be dealt with later in this paper.

The parishes of St. Boniface, St. Vital, St. Norbert, Ste. Agathe and Ste. Anne selected land from St. Vital east to Pointe de Chene, from there southwards to the United States boundary, from there along the boundary to a point four miles west of the Red River, and from there northwards to the Assiniboine River including a four mile strip along part of the Sale River (see Figure 2). By rough estimate this would have exceeded their allotment by more than ten townships. The townships Archibald did select, in negotiation with Archbishop Taché, were located roughly within these bounds, and from all evidence the Métis were satisfied with them. Taché's later account noted that these negotiations had involved detailed bargaining, compromise, and general satisfaction.

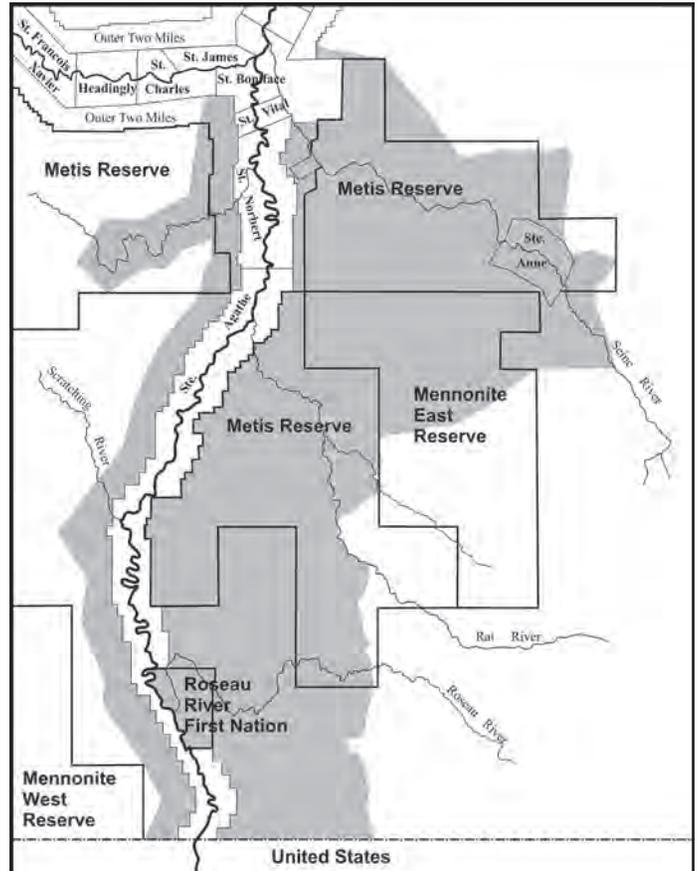


Figure 2. Map of the Spontaneous Demands of the Parishes of St. Boniface, St. Norbert, Ste. Agathe and Ste. Anne.

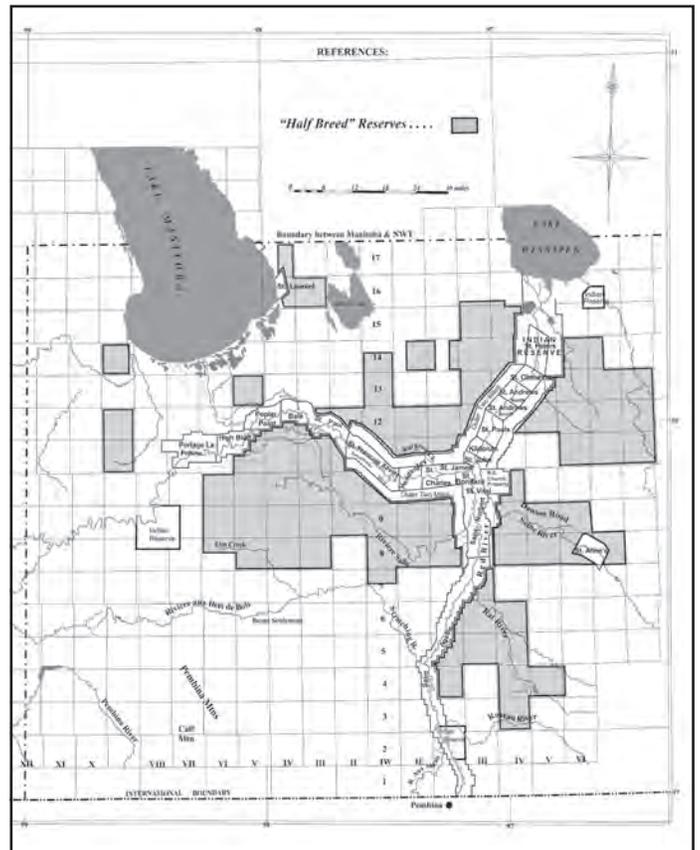


Figure 3. Métis Reserves in Manitoba 1873.

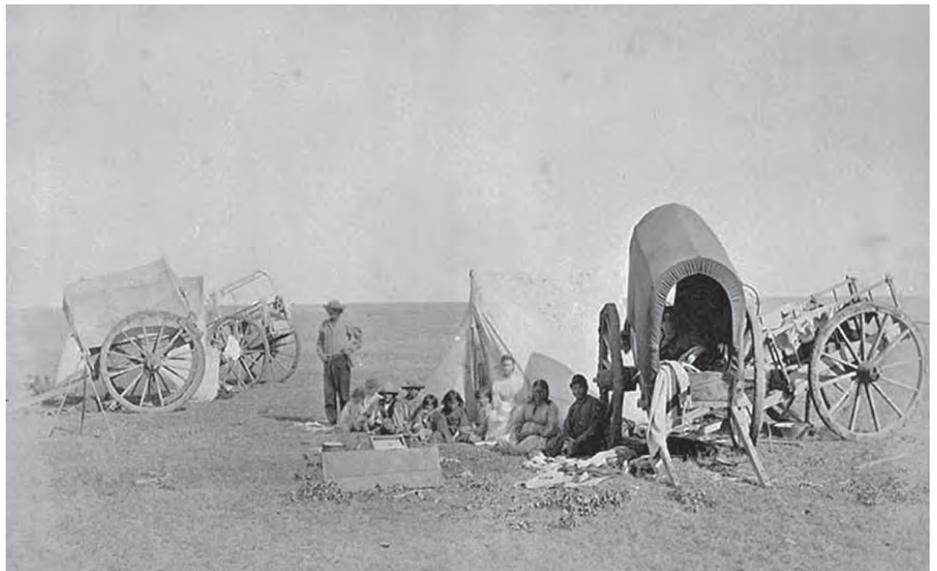
The only point on which Taché remained concerned related to parts of four townships that had been excluded from the reserve because they formed a part of the parish river lots.¹⁹ J. S. Dennis explained that these disputed areas were part of the “Settlement Belt,” and had not been included in the Métis reserve.²⁰ According to the Order-in-Council of 15 April 1872 the Métis Land Grant of 1.4 million acres was to be selected from surveyed townships.²¹ Later in the same Order-in-Council the square township survey was clearly differentiated from the river lot settlement survey. “That in some of the Townships so selected, it may be impossible at present, (the rear lines of the Settlement Surveys not being yet adjusted), to set apart and describe the individual shares.”²² In summary, Archibald made reasonable efforts to accommodate the desires of the Métis in

reserving the lands they wished. The greatest disparity between the spontaneous demands of the Métis and Archibald’s reservations was related to the fact that the Métis had requested far larger blocks of land than were due them. In almost all cases Archibald reserved lands that were within the areas requested by the Métis.

Establishing the Mennonite East Reserve 1874

The designation of the Métis reserves by 1873 opened land for settlement by other groups and individuals, and made possible the designation of the Mennonite East Reserve in 1874. Jacob Schantz had inspected the land in 1872, and in 1873 the Federal Government set aside seven townships for the exclusive use of the Mennonites, pending their approval.²³ When the twelve Mennonite delegates from Russia arrived in Manitoba in June of 1873 this land was offered to them in the area southeast of Winnipeg. While this land was not to the liking of five of the delegates, who went on to inspect land in the United States, the delegates of the *Bergthaler* and *Kleine Gemeinde* accepted the offer. They continued on to Ottawa to make the final arrangements and conditions, and were eventually granted eight townships with the proviso that other townships would be made available if the land proved to be unsuitable. They were also given exemption from military service, religious freedom, and the right to affirm rather than swear to oaths. On the basis of this agreement the Mennonite immigration to Manitoba began.²⁴

By the beginning of August 1874, the first of the 1,543 Mennonites to arrive that year disembarked at the Rat River, where they were housed in immigration sheds until they could locate their villages and farms on the reserve. The method of land registration, established by *Dominion Lands Act*, stipulated that heads of families over the age of twenty-one could enter for a 160 acre homestead and receive patent to it after three years if the homestead requirements were met (residence and improvement of the land). In order for the Mennonites to be able to settle in villages, however, and follow their semi-communal open-field system of agriculture, the Canadian government granted them a “hamlet privilege” that allowed



Métis traders on the plains, 1872-73. Image Credit: Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN 3248493, 4848154

individual homesteaders to fulfill their residency requirement by living in the village.²⁵ By the end of 1874, the Mennonites of the East Reserve had registered 386 homesteads and scores of villages had been located.²⁶

Allocating the Métis Children’s allotments, 1872-1880

If the Mennonite settlement on their East Reserve was an accomplished fact by the end of 1874, the same could not be said for the Métis Reserve. By 1876 not a single allocation of land had been made and not a single Métis settled on the reserve. Part of the problem was due to the nature of the Métis children’s grant. Given it was extended to all Métis children under the age of twenty-one, homesteading was not an option. And given the Métis wanted their land granted to them as individuals, a communal settlement was also ruled out. A way had to be found to allocate a specific plot of land to each Métis individual, and to have it registered.

Following Archibald’s preliminary selection of reserves in July and August of 1872 both the Métis and the government were anxious for the drawing of individual allotments to begin. Alexander Morris, preparing to take over the duties of Lieutenant Governor from Archibald,²⁷ noted in late 1872 that the inaction in granting lands to the Métis due to the delays of the survey was still a source of disquiet, and that:

As the Half Breed reserves have now been selected by the Lieutenant Governor and will doubtless be approved by the Governor General in Council, and as a plan for the allotment to the individuals entitled to them of these lands has been matured, I am of opinion that the Administration should be authorized to give public announcements that the surveys have now sufficiently advanced to enable the 1,400,000 acres, appropriated to the Half Breeds to be divided in accordance with the provisions of the Manitoba Act, that a plan has been matured for the distribution, and that such division will be made early in the ensuing year.²⁸

The Secretary of State, replying to the recently appointed Lieutenant Governor, informed him that the Surveyor General

was about to leave for Manitoba to assist in carrying out the Métis allotment. He concluded by noting that the distribution of the Métis grant was a matter of anxiety to the government, and it was with much relief that they could look forward to a speedy allotment of the lands.²⁹

As early as January of 1873, when Morris was preparing to begin with the drawing of individual allotments,³⁰ the Métis in most parishes began to hold meetings to protest any inclusion of the Outer Two Miles (OTM), that is that land behind the river-lot parishes that had been used as hay lands, in the Métis land grant until claims to the hay privilege and rights of common were adjusted. The OTM had earlier been included in the “spontaneous demands” and in the Métis Reserve Archibald had laid out. In the view of the Métis, the OTM should go to the river-lot owners under section 32 of the *Manitoba Act*, and they wanted these rights of common adjusted before there was any distribution of the 1.4 million acre grant. In their view the ownership of the OTM was essential to the river lot residents who, if the OTM were alienated from them, would be forced to leave their homes.³¹ The government, which did not want the settlement of the Métis Land Grant delayed any longer, could not understand why the Métis could not take their hay privilege or rights of common in scrip.³² The government eventually relented in face of the report of the Hay Commission that rights of common existed,³³ and the resistance of the Métis to accepting scrip as compensation. This was formalized by the Order-in-Council of 6 September 1873, and a public notice was sent to the various parishes to the effect that in those localities where the hay privilege had been recognized by the laws of Assiniboia, lot owners would be compensated in land commencing at the rear of their respective lots and extending outwards no more than two miles or wider than their front lot.³⁴ This, in turn, necessitated a resurvey of the OTM and the allocation of extra land for the Métis Grant. This new allocation was completed by Lindsay Russell, the Assistant Surveyor General, who sent the list of additional lands to Morris in August of 1873.³⁵

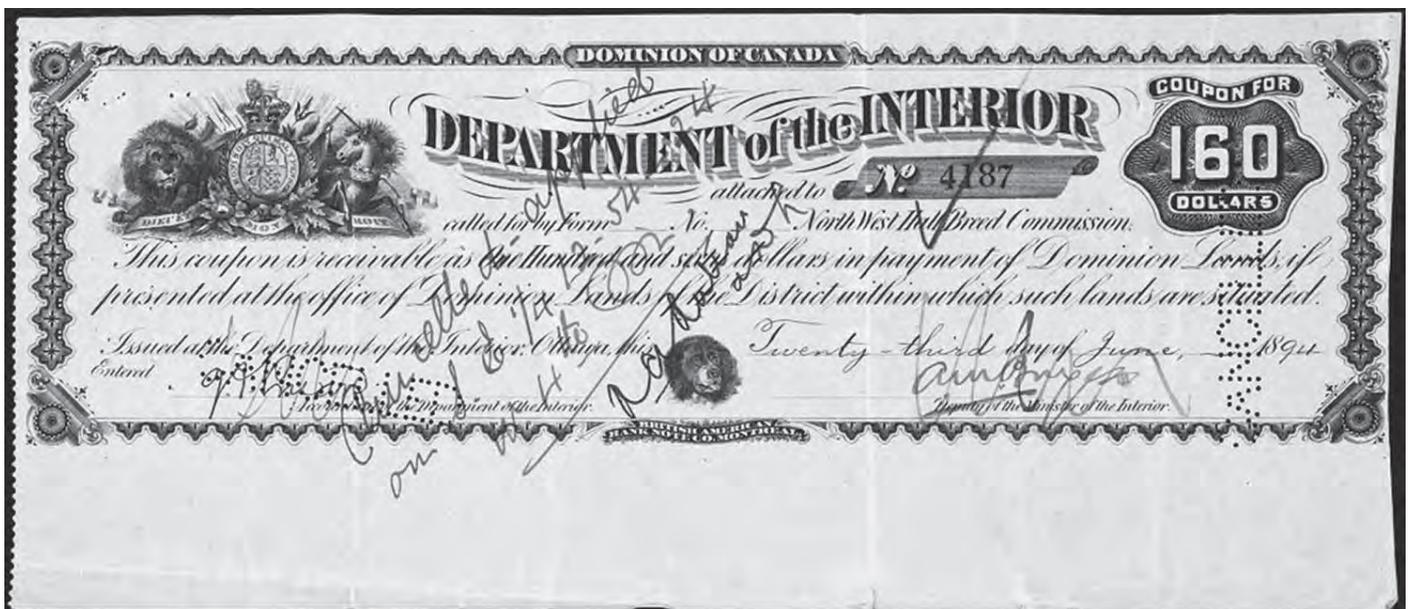
In the interim the government had also decided that Métis heads of family should be excluded from the Métis Grant,

which by a strict reading of the *Manitoba Act*, was intended only for the benefit of the children of Métis heads of family. The details of how this decision was reached need not concern us here, but this decision was made at the request of the inhabitants of Manitoba and was widely supported by the Métis communities and the Catholic clergy.³⁶ This delayed the grant further as all allotments made thus far had to be cancelled and it was now necessary to grant the land to fewer individuals (only children of Half-Breed Heads of family under the age of twenty-one in 1870) in larger allotments (240 acres). At this point it was decided that a Commission be appointed to determine exactly who was eligible for the Children’s Grant, in effect undertaking another more detailed census. As a consequence, the final drawing of individual 240-acre allotments did not recommence until 1876 and would not be completed until 1880.³⁷

This process entailed making a list of all children eligible for the land grant and then drawing the allotments (matching particular names to particular plots of land). This allotment was done on a parish-by-parish basis, and under a cloak of secrecy because if names and locations were leaked speculators would have a heyday.³⁸ Results for each day’s work were entered in notebooks and when a parish was completed the results were sent to Ottawa where they were entered into a register and checked. Once verified, patents were made out and sent back to Winnipeg in batches where they could be picked up at the Land Office by the allottees or their powers of attorney. The first patents began arriving in Winnipeg in 1877 and continued into the 1880s. The process took longer than it should have, but was hampered by the amount of time the Dominion Land Agent could devote to it given his many other duties. Without extra manpower, the Dominion Land Agent noted that he could devote only two days a week to the Métis land allotment process.³⁹

Section 32 of the *Manitoba Act* and Disputed Claims in the East Reserve⁴⁰

There was another section of the *Manitoba Act* (section 32) that introduced an element of discord between the Métis and



Métis received their land grant in the form of scrip in various denominations. It entitled the bearer to claim homestead lands at a later date. Originally the above scrip would have translated into 160 acres. Image Credit: Library and Archives Canada, G15-D-II-8-f, Volume 1395.

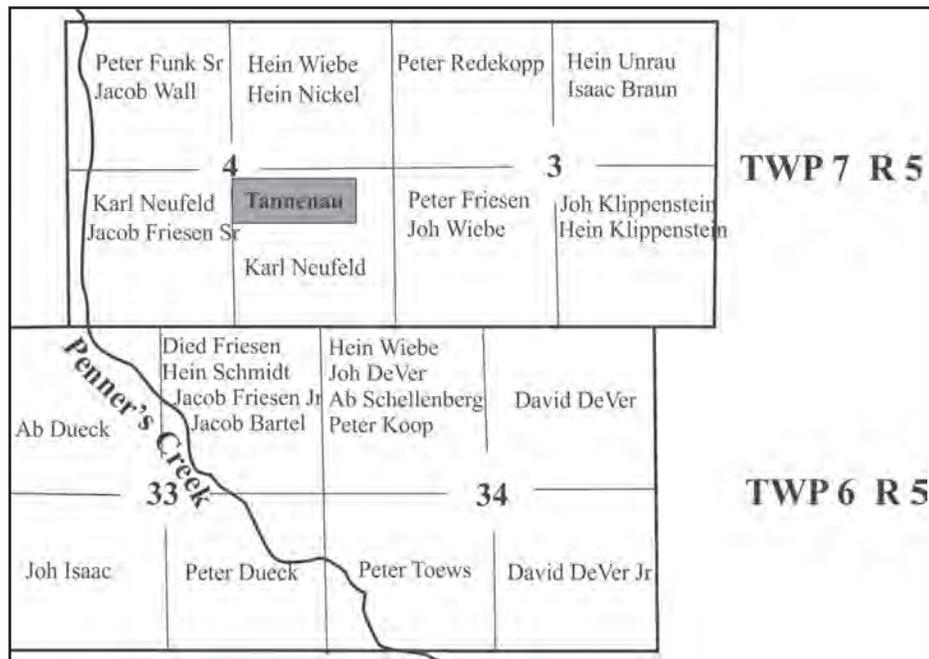


Figure 4. Plan showing the disputed Four Sections and the Mennonites who patented them.

Franco-Manitobans, on the one hand, and the Mennonites on the other, though it really came down to a dispute with the Federal Government. Section 32 of the *Manitoba Act* was intended to confirm the traditional landholding practices of the Red River Settlement. In its preamble it stated that: “For the quieting of titles, and assuring to the settlers in the Province the peaceable possession of the lands now held by them, it is enacted as follows:” The first three subsections dealt mainly with purchases and grants from the HBC, but subsection four was much more contentious. It stated: “All persons in peaceable possession of tracts of land at the time of the transfer to Canada, in those parts of the Province in which the Indian Title has not been extinguished, shall have the right of pre-emption of the same, on such terms and conditions as may be determined by the Governor in Council.”

On the face of it, this seems to be unproblematic. Anyone living on a piece of land was entitled to have that land as a free grant even if no official title was held to the land. This applied to the river-lot parishes and to lands outside of the settlement belt. The government had no problem granting land to those who squatted on unsurveyed land and in good faith had built homes and lived on the land. Indeed, the evidence of administering this section of the *Manitoba Act* shows that those who actually lived on these claims had no trouble getting patents. No piece of land legislation, however, is clear-cut, and the people of Manitoba, led by their Parish clergy interpreted this sub-section of the *Manitoba Act* in a much broader way. Coming back to Red River from his negotiations in Ottawa, Father Ritchot explained the opportunities that existed in the *Manitoba Act*. If lands were claimed before July 15 (date of the official transfer to Canada) these lands could be eligible for a free grant under Section 32 s.4. In doing this, Ritchot instigated a land rush between June and July 1870. Ritchot himself led a party of Franco-Manitobans to Rat River to stake out lots (Ritchot for a mission). The residents of the various parishes also used this opportunity to fill in the unclaimed empty gaps in the parishes of Lorette, Ste. Anne, and Ste. Agathe.⁴¹

The usual process of staking a claim consisted of plowing a few acres and planting some stakes or erecting a square of logs intended to indicate the beginning of a house. In almost all cases, no one lived on these staked claims prior to the transfer. In this initial land rush, fifteen residents of the parishes of St. Pierre, St. Vital and Ste. Anne staked out claims in what would become the Mennonite East Reserve in Sections 33 and 34 of Township 6 Range 5E and Sections 3 and 4 Township 7 Range 5 East.⁴² According to their later testimony these claims consisted of long narrow lots measuring twelve chains wide (241 meters) and two miles deep.⁴³ These lots ran back from the dry creek bed now known as Penner’s Creek and were probably chosen because they represented good hay lands.⁴⁴ This occurred in June of 1870.

Nothing more was done and nothing untoward happened until the Dominion Lands Office began placing the Mennonites on their Reserve in the fall of 1874. Roger Goulet, both a Métis and a Land Office employee, was delegated to show the Mennonites their land. When he approached the lands in question, Goulet was warned not to locate the Mennonites there, and he was shown the extent of Métis claims.⁴⁵ Goulet would later note that he held these lands back (not giving them to the Mennonites) and entered the claims into the books of the Dominion Land Office in pencil as being their claims subject to approval of the government.⁴⁶

The Federal Government, however, had no intention of allowing these types of claims. Section 32 of the *Manitoba Act* had been intended, according to the Department of the Interior, to recognize “peaceable possession” not those claims that had been merely staked and never occupied. Father Ritchot went to Ottawa to lobby the government on this question, but the government remained unconvinced that simply planting stakes constituted peaceable possession. Roger Goulet was then assigned to examine all the staked claims of Ste. Anne and Lorette, producing a lot-by-lot report giving a history of every claim and the current status of occupation.⁴⁷ On the basis of this and other information the Federal Government made its first legal ruling on the matter in an Order-in-Council of 10 April 1876. Under this policy those claimants who had taken up lands in the six months previous to the date of Transfer, and had had the land surveyed, would be granted the land in freehold. Those claimants, however, who had taken up land six months prior to the Transfer and who had not had the land surveyed, but had merely marked or staked the claim prior to July 15, 1870 would not be entitled to consideration. This ruling eliminated almost all staked claims,⁴⁸ including the ones in the Mennonite East Reserve. Following this ruling, sections 3 and 4 in Township 7 and sections 33 and 34 in Township 6 were turned over to the Mennonites.

This, however, did not end the dispute. Following the Order-in-Council of 1876, Fathers Ritchot and Taché, and Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament Joseph Royal, Joseph Lemay, and Marc Girard continued to pressure

the Federal Government. As a result, Robert Lang was sent to Manitoba in 1880, and, accompanied by Roger Goulet, gathered evidence on every staked claim along the Red and Rat Rivers. On the basis of this report the Government offered a compromise settlement embodied in the Order-in-Council of 25 February 1881. It divided all staked claims into three classes: 1) those whose claims had changed hands and the purchaser had gone into possession and was living on the land in 1881. This class would receive a free grant of 160 acres and the rest could be purchased for \$1/acre; 2) those who had staked out claims that remained exactly as staked out. These claimants could purchase the land at the price of railway lands or homestead it; and 3) those who had merely staked out lands and sold the land, and the land was bought by speculators and was now held only to resell with no improvements. These claims would be investigated by a land commission headed by Justices Dubuc and Miller, and they basically decided that the terms would be similar to that of class two claims.⁴⁹

This resolution to the staked claims issue was greeted by cheers from the residents of the old Red River Settlement. In light of this 1881 Order-in-Council, Joseph Riel, Baptiste Plouffe, and Benjamin and Charles Nault renewed their claims, applying for patents to the staked claims in the Mennonite East Reserve, arguing that their claims were no less legitimate than many of those receiving satisfaction after the Order-in-Council of 1881.⁵⁰ Writing in 1892, Roger Goulet opined that under the Order-in-Council of 1876 the land in the Mennonite Reserve had been given to the Mennonites and patented by them, and that nothing more could be done other than granting the claimants homesteads in some other part of the country.⁵¹ The Department of the Interior was even more blunt writing to Charles Sauvé, that being a third class staked claim, and given that the land was already disposed of, there were no grounds on which legally press his claim.⁵² On this point the Land Commission had already ruled that claims could be rejected if the land had been settled by other grants in the interim – that is between the Order in Councils of 1876 and 1881.⁵³ This was indeed the case with the staked claims in the Mennonite East Reserve.

In 1896, however, the Federal Government changed hands with the Liberals under Wilfrid Laurier winning the election of that year, and in January of 1897, Charles Sauvé, in the name of the claimants to these sections, directly appealed to Prime Minister Laurier. He acknowledged that he, and the other claimants, had been offered other homesteads in compensation for the staked lots, but surely this was not sufficient as anyone could take out a homestead. Surely, the Liberals would not be as unjust as the Conservatives had been. He, and the other claimants were not asking for the actual lots they had staked, but they did want full compensation for what they had lost.⁵⁴ Anxious to remove this political headache, Laurier instructed his Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, “to get these people something.” Sifton, in turn, instructed his assistant to deal with it.⁵⁵ After a cursory investigation of the file the Assistant Secretary of the Interior wrote all the claimants that in satisfaction of their claim they would be allowed to select 160 acres of Dominion Land and obtain patent to it by paying \$1/acre. Their further application for a free grant would be considered, but he wrote, it was unlikely that it would be granted.⁵⁶ One month later, the Assistant Secretary confirmed that the application for a free grant had been carefully considered, but rejected.⁵⁷ With this the matter was closed.

Conclusion

By the late 1890s the Mennonite East Reserve was officially opened to general settlement. While many Bergthaler Mennonites had by this time abandoned the reserve to settle on better lands west of the Red River (Mennonite West Reserve), one could consider the Mennonite settlement of the East Reserve to have been a success. By contrast, almost all the lands in the Métis reserve had been sold. While there were stable Métis communities in Ste. Agathe, St. Vital, St. Boniface, and Ste. Anne, it seems clear that the Métis of these communities did not regard the Métis reserves, those lands allocated for Métis Children, as the future location of Métis farms, but rather as a source of family income (through sale) in times that were hard and very trying. Even the Catholic Church, which had viewed these reserves as the birthright of the next generation of Métis, came to accept that the Métis wanted to sell these lands, and the church, in the persons of Father Ritchot and Bishop Taché, became one of the biggest buyers of Section 31 and 32 lands.⁵⁸ Their speculation in these lands was not for profit, but to keep the land out of the hands of English buyers and try to sell them to French Catholics from Quebec, United States, France, Switzerland and Belgium. The legacy of these sales, however, in the twentieth and twenty-first century has been Métis discontent, a feeling of having been short-changed, and a court case that lasted for more than two decades, and was just recently settled in the Supreme Court of Canada in the favour of the Métis.⁵⁹ This decision may open the door for a final resolution of the issue and constitute the end of my tale of two reserves.



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Endnotes

1 See “The Proceedings in the Convention, February 3 to February 5, 1870,” in W. L. Morton, editor, *Manitoba: The Birth of a Province* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Record Society, 1965), 5-24; the Second to Fourth “List of Rights,” in *Manitoba: The Birth of a Province*, 242-250. For a more detailed reconstruction of the negotiations leading to the *Manitoba Act* see Chapter 3 of Thomas Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1991), 29-50.

2 A microfilm copy of Ritchot’s journal is in the Archives of Manitoba (AM), MG 3, B14-1, no. 12 (M151). The French text was published by George F. G. Stanley as “Le Journal de l’abbé N.-J. Ritchot,” *Revue d’Histoire de l’Amérique*

- Française 17 (1964): 537-64. The translated version used here is found in W. L. Morton (ed.) *Manitoba: The Birth of a Province*, 140.
- 3 *The New Nation*, July 1, 1870. This newspaper was here reporting on Ritchot's speech of June 24, 1870 to the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia. A translation of part of Ritchot's speech can be found in Thomas Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba*, 34.
- 4 Adams Archibald to Joseph Howe, December 27, 1870. Library and Archives of Canada (LAC), RG 15, Vol. 236, file 7220.
- 5 Molyneux St. John to Lt. Gov. Archibald, January 3, 1871. AM, MG12, A1 #164a.
- 6 Order-in-Council, 26 May 1871.
- 7 Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba*, 68-69.
- 8 This included the parishes of St. Boniface, St. Vital, St. Norbert, St. Agathe, St. Charles, St. François Xavier, Baie St. Paul, Ste. Anne, and St. Laurent. These notices appeared in the June 8 and June 15 editions of *Le Métis*. As Archibald later explained to the Secretary of State, the Métis believed that the *Manitoba Act* gave them first choice of the lands in Manitoba. As proof of this the Métis quoted a letter from George Cartier to Ritchot and Scott dated May 23, 1870 during the negotiations leading to the *Manitoba Act*. This letter, however, which was printed in *Le Métis* on June 15, 1871, only noted that the 1.4 million acre grant for the benefit of the families of the Métis residents of Manitoba would be of a nature to accord with the desire of the Métis and be granted in an effective and equitable manner. See Archibald to the Secretary of State, June 17, 1871. LAC, RG 15, D-II-1, Vol. 230, File 167. The full text of Cartier's letter can be found in "Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North-West Territories," *Journals of the House of Commons* (1874), Vol. 8, Appendix 6, p. 74.
- 9 Lt. Gov. Archibald to Joseph Royal et al., June 9, 1871. Printed in *The Manitoban*, June 17, 1871. See also Archibald to the Secretary of State, June 17, 1871. LAC, RG 15, D-II-1, Vol. 230, File 167.
- 10 These included the Parishes of St. James, Headingley, High Bluff, and Poplar Point. The publication of their choices appeared in *The Manitoban* on June 24, July 1, July 8, July 15, July 22, July 29, August 12, August 19, August 26, September 2, and September 9, 1871.
- 11 Order-in-Council of 15 April 1872. LAC, RG 15, D-II-1, Vol. 228, File 1089.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 J. S. Dennis to James Aikins (Sec. of State), March 22, 1872. LAC, RG 15, D-II-1, Vol. 227, File 635 (1872). Archibald to Sec. of State, July 27, 1872. AM, MG 12, A1, DB4, No. 7.
- 14 A. Archibald to Sec. of State, July 27, 1872. AM, MG 12, A1, DB4, No. 7.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Adams Archibald to Sec. of State, August 26, 1872. AM, MG12, A1, DB4 #10.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.* These parishes included Kildonan, St. Paul, St. Andrew's north and south, and St. Peters.
- 19 A. A. Taché to Lt. Gov. Morris, January 14, 1873. AM, MG 12, B2, # 20.
- 20 J. S. Dennis to A. A. Taché, April 11, 1873. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 230, file 2454.
- 21 Order-in-Council of 15 April 1872. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 228, File 1089. This Order-in-Council echoed earlier regulations established in 1871 for the distribution of the Métis Land Grant. See "Memorandum on the Subject of the Public Lands in the Province of Manitoba, Approved by His Excellency the Governor General in Council on the 25th April 1871." LAC, RG 15, D-II-1, Vol. 228, File 798 (1872). The Memorandum stated "4. The Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba shall designate the Townships or parts of Townships in which the allotments to the half-breeds shall be made."
- 22 Order-in-Council of 15 April 1872.
- 23 Order-in-Council of March 3, 1873. See Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 14.
- 24 This offer is outlined in a memorandum of the Minister of Agriculture, John Lowe and was legalized by an Order-in-Council of 13 August 1873. See Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens*, 14-17.
- 25 This was formally acknowledged by an amendment to the Dominion Lands Act in 1876. For a full explanation of the Hamlet Privilege see Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens*, 35-37.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 27 At the time Morris was Chief Justice of the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench. He was appointed Lieutenant Governor replacing Adams Archibald on December 2, 1872.
- 28 Alexander Morris to the Sec. of State, November 20, 1872. AM, MG 12, A1, DB3 # 114.
- 29 Sec. of State to A. Morris, December 6, 1872. AM, MG 12, B1, #24.
- 30 "The Half-Breed Grant," in *The Manitoban*, March 1, 1873.
- 31 The reports of these meetings and the sentiments expressed were sent to Lt. Governor Morris and can be found in the Morris Papers in the Archives of Manitoba. AM, MG 12, B1: Public Meeting held at Headingley, January 7, 1873 (#47); Public Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Parish of St. Charles held January 11, 1873 (#55); Meeting of St. François Xavier West, January 12, 1873 (#56); Meeting of St. François East, January 12, 1873 (#57); Meeting of St. Norbert, January 12, 1873 (#59); Meeting Held by People of St. James, January 14, 1873 (#63); Meeting of Residents of St. Boniface, January 11, 1873 (#66); Meeting of St. Andrew's North and South, May 10, 1873 (#223); Meeting of St. Paul, June 5, 1873 (#250).
- 32 For this sentiment see telegrams of J. C. Aikins to J. S. Dennis, January 13 & 18, 1873. AM, MG 12, B1, #62.
- 33 Report of the Commission Appointed to enquire into the nature and extent of Rights of Common and Hay Privilege to Alexander Morris, March 6, 1873. AM, MG 12, B1, #129.
- 34 Public Notice of Commission for Settlement of Rights of Common and of Cutting Hay, sent in letter of A. Campbell, Minister of the Interior to Lt. Gov. Morris, September 27, 1873. AM, MG 12, B1, #502.
- 35 Lindsay Russell, Assistant Surveyor General to Alexander Morris, August 18, 1873. AM, MG 12, B1, #399. These lands had been selected even before the Order-in-Council of September 6, 1873 because as Morris had been forewarned that the OTM would be withdrawn by J. C. Aikins in June of that year. See J. C. Aikins to A. Morris, June 23, 1873. AM, MG 12, B1, #292.
- 36 Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba*, 77-78. Archibald's earlier decision to grant allotments to all Métis (rather than just children) was no doubt influenced by the wording of the *Manitoba Act* which noted that the land grant was in extinguishment of Métis Aboriginal title. If extinguishment was the goal then a grant to Métis children alone would do nothing to extinguish the rights of their Métis parents.
- 37 The rationale, process, and the attendant delays have been fully explained by Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba*, 81-85.
- 38 This drawing was supervised by the secretary of the Lieutenant Governor and the Dominion Land Agent, Donald Codd.
- 39 Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba*, 84-85.
- 40 This issue has been investigated before. See Donovan Giesbrecht, "Métis, Mennonites and the 'Unsettled Prairie,' 1874-1896," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 19 (2001): 103-111.
- 41 This process has been described in Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba*, 173-179.
- 42 Of these fifteen, only eight were Métis. The other seven were "Original White Settlers" most of whom came from Quebec, though some had been born in the Red River Settlement. The Métis included: Louis Desrivieres, Maxime Goulet, Charles Nault, Joseph Riel (for Charles Riel), Julie Lariviere (Mrs. Paul Proulx), Moise Racette, Jacques Tourons, and Damase Morin. The "Original White Settlers" included: Edouard Elemont, Alfred Nault, Boniface Nault, Romain Nault, Benjamin Nault, Jean Baptiste Plouffe, and Paul Proulx. It should also be noted that all of these claimants had other land, either section 32 grants in the settled parishes, or Métis children's allotments.
- 43 Charles Sauvé to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, 16 January 1896. LAC, MG26G, 11441-11445.
- 44 It is instructive to note that these lands were included in the "spontaneous demands" of the Métis and were probably well known.
- 45 Declaration of Joseph Riel for claim of Charles Riel (deceased), 11 February 1885. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2548.
- 46 Goulet Report of 9 May 1892. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2548.
- 47 Flanagan, *Métis Lands in Manitoba*, 174-175.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 49 OIC of 25 February 1881.
- 50 See LAC, RG 15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2548; RG15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2561.
- 51 Goulet Report of 9 May 1892. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2548.
- 52 Secretary of the Department of the Interior to Charles Sauvé, 18 January 1897. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2548.
- 53 Flanagan, 179.
- 54 Charles Sauvé to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, 16 January 1896. LAC, MG26G, 11441-11445.
- 55 George Elliott to Deputy Minister of the Interior, Jas. A. Smart, 14 April 1897. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2548.
- 56 Letter of Lyndwode Pereira to Charles Neault, 16 July 1898. The other claimants were sent the same letter on 18 July 1898. LAC, RG 15, Vol. 150, M.A. 2548.
- 57 Letter of Lyndwode Pereira to claimants, 1 September 1898.
- 58 This statement is based on a lot by lot analysis of St. Norbert parish lots and the analysis of Philippe Mailhot in his "Ritchot's Resistance: Abbé Noël Joseph Ritchot and the Creation and Transformation of Manitoba," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1986), 244-251.
- 59 *Manitoba Metis Federation Inc. (MMF) v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2013 SCC 14. In this case the MMF made three arguments: 1) that the Federal Government had breached its fiduciary duty to the Métis; 2) that the Federal Government had failed to implement the *Manitoba Act* consistent with the "Honour of the Crown"; 3) that the legislation passed to implement the *Manitoba Act* was *ultra vires*. All three claims were rejected by the lower courts, but in 2013 the Supreme Court ruled that while the Federal Government had not breached its fiduciary duty, nor passed regulations that were *ultra vires*, the delays in apportioning the lands granted to the Métis in the *Manitoba Act* unfairly penalized the Métis, and thus the government had not acted in manner consistent with the Honour of the Crown.

Anishinaabe Understandings of Treaty No. 1

By Darren Courchene, Sagkeeng First Nation, Manitoba

INTRODUCTION

Boozhoo nindinawemaaginag. Darren Courchene nindizinikaaz, migizi nindoodem, Anishinaabe-Ojibwe indaaw, Zaagiing nindoonji, makwa ningwiime, gaye Zoongigaabawid Makwa nindigoo. Odinawemaaganan a'aw Ninga onjibaawan iwidi Zaagiing, Beverley Courchene izhini-kaazod miinawa odinawemaaganan a'aw Noos Gizhigowenining iwidi ga-onjibaawan, Reginald Blackbird-iban gii-izhiniikaazod.

Niin nitam-igo wii-gichi-naanaako-nimigoo Gizhe-Manidoo, niwin noodinoog, aki, giizhig, gakina manidoog, nookomisag, nimishoomisag, ninga, noos, minawa gakina nindinawemaaginag. Gi-gii-miinigoziyaan mino-bimadiziwin minawa gi-gii-gikinoo'amaataw zoongi-gaabiwed; gichi-miigwech nindikid. Nindimaagiz Gizhe-Manidoo; wiji'ishin. Gaawiin gegoo ningikendaziin. Gaawiin gegoo nisidootaziin. Wiji'daa-bazagwiya Gizhe-Manidoo zhigo giga-gwejimin Gizhe-Manidoo bi-zhaawenimishin, bi-zhaawenimishin, bi-zhaawenimishin, bi-zhaawenimishin. Ahaaw naagekana.



Darren Courchene, M.A., Sagkeeng First Nation, PhD (cand.), University of Manitoba, Treaty Commission of Manitoba.

As is tradition, I introduce myself in the way that my great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother taught me. I greet you as a relative. I provide you with my name, clan, nationality, home community, animal helper, and Ojibwe name. I also provide you with information about where my parents came from as well as their names. I also give thanks to all for providing me with life. I ask *Gizhe-Manidoo* (the loving spirit) to forgive any shortfalls I have and to come and embrace me.

A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON

Anishinaabeg peoples across *Mikinaak-minis* (Turtle Island) have been entering into treaties for millennia. This long standing tradition eventually ended in new relationships called odishkodekaanan (confederacies), for example: the Three Fires Confederacy consisting of the Ojibwe, Ottawa, and Pottawatomi. I believe that Canada was built on multiple odishkodekaanan. We only have to examine history from an Anishinaabe-Ojibwe point of view to make this all clear.

Jerry Fontaine states, "The British realizing that defeat was at hand (by Pontiac and the Three Fires Confederacy) negotiated a number of truces that officially ended the war. Central to this of course was the Royal Proclamation in 1763, which attempted to address the status of traditional First Nation territory independence and sovereignty." The Royal Proclamation of 1763 established a legal framework for the treaty process through which a sharing of Anishinaabeg land and resources

would take place with all Mooniyashag (newcomers).

A year later, Sir William Johnson came to Niagara Falls to explain the Royal Proclamation to the over 2000 First Nation leaders from all over north America (from as far away as Nova Scotia, Mississippi, and Hudson Bay). Johnson presented the First Nation leaders with the Covenant Chain Belt and the Twenty-four Nation Belt and the British promised the First Nations would not become impoverished, they would provide the First Nation peoples with the necessities of life should the First Nation peoples find themselves in need, and First Nation lands would not be taken. In return, the First Nation leaders provided Sir William Johnson with the Two-Row Wampum and promised that the relationship established would be based on peace, friendship, and respect. This negotiation ended in what is called the Treaty of Niagara. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 in tandem with the Treaty of Niagara was Canada's first odishkodekaan (confederacy), uniting First Nations and Great Britain.

The second odishkodekaan was of the British colonies in 1867 – the United Province of Canada (which was split into Ontario and Quebec), New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia – into the Dominion of Canada. This was only permissible because of the original odishkodekaan.

The third odishkodekaan was established during the numbered Treaties era between 1871 and 1921. This is the odishkodekaan which is most important as it has helped to

create what we know as Canada today. The Ojibwe from Treaty No.1 have a philosophic and legal framework when entering into new treaty relationships known as *Manidoo onaakonigewin* (the Creator's laws) which has seven aspects – this is the creator's garden, the earth is our grandmother, act in kindness, your word is sacred, everything in moderation and everyone is equal. When entering into treaty negotiations at Lower Fort Garry in 1871 the Treaty No. 1 Ojibwe leaders and principle negotiators had these as their negotiation framework.

TREATY No.1 PROMISES

I was lucky enough to hear the promises exchanged between the Anishinaabeg and the Crown from Oliver Nelson during my time at the Treaty One Protection and Implementation Office. This organization developed a research project to interview Elders from each of the Treaty One First Nations to document the history of Treaty One and Elder Nelson was one of the people we got to listen to. Oliver is the grandson of *Asiniwinini* (Stone man) from Roseau River. *Asiniwinini* is one of the children chosen by the original Anishinaabe Treaty negotiators to commit to memory the Treaty negotiations at *Asiniwaaka'igan* (Stone Fort, Lower Fort Garry). *Asiniwinini* would recount the story at Treaty Day events during his life; he would begin with sharing the promises the Anishinaabeg made to the Queen.

Anishinaabeg Agwii'idiwi-ashodamaagewinan (Ojibweg Treaty Promises)

1. *The Anishinaabeg promised they would never break the Treaty;*
2. *The Anishinaabeg promised they would keep the peace and not interfere with the Mooniyashag;*
3. *The Anishinaabeg promised they would never make Treaties with the Gichi-mookamanan;*
4. *The Anishinaabeg promised they would only continue to hunt and trap on land not used by the Mooniyashag (new-comers);*
5. *The Anishinaabeg promised they would respect the Mooniyashag laws when they were on their lands; and*
6. *The Anishinaabeg promised they would share the land with the Queen that they didn't keep for themselves in exchange for the Queen's promises.*

Asiniwinini would then share the promises the Queen made to the Anishinaabeg. Before he would begin he would state the following, "the Queen's men told us that the words they spoke were the same as if the Queen, our Great-Mother, herself spoke the words to us." The Queen's men he was referring to were the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba Adams Archibald and Treaty Commissioner Wemyss Simpson. This is very important to clarify, it appears that we have collective amnesia; we have to remember the province was present at the time of Treaty.



THE MANITOBA INDIAN TREATY.—INDIAN CHIEF HARANGUING AT THE STONE FORT.—See page 103.

A sketch from the Illustrated News of September, 1871. The caption reads "Indian Chief Haranguing at the Stone Fort." Treaty No. 1 was signed at Lower Fort Garry on August 3, 1871. Image Credit: Library and Archives Canada, 2235.

Gichi-Ogimaakwe Agwii'idiwi-ashodamaagewinan (Queen's Treaty Promises)

1. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Aki (land)*
 - a *The Anishinaabeg would keep the pre-occupied lands they were living on and they would be surveyed;*
 - b *The Anishinaabe lands that they were to receive would be equal to, not less than, Giniikaanisinaaniig Waabangong (our brothers in the land of the rising sun) and our Giniikaanisinaaniig Ningaabi'anong (our brothers in the land of the setting sun);*
 - c *The land the Anishinaabeg would receive from the Treaty would be above and beyond those that were pre-occupied;*
 - d *The Anishinaabeg lands to be received under Treaty were Nisimidana-ashi-niizh diba'igaans (32 acres) per person or Ningodwaak-ashi-ingodwaasimidana diba'igaans (160 acres) per family of five;*
 - e *The Anishinaabeg would receive more lands if their children had more children and those lands would be the same as in the Treaty but only out west;*
 - f *The Anishinaabeg would keep the lands they held forever and they would always have a place they can call home;*
 - g *The Anishinaabeg could continue to hunt, trap, fish, and gather on the lands not being used by the Mooniyashag;*
2. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Giwosewin (hunting)*
 - a *To help with the chase She would provide guns, lead and gun powder, snare wire, traps, and fish line to make nets;*
3. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Ashandwinan (rations)*

- a *If the hunt failed She would provide rations such as Zhiiwitaagani-gookoosh (salt-pork), Bakwezhiigan (flour), Ombizigan (baking powder), Bimide (lard), Miskodiisiminag (beans), Zhiiwitaagwan (salt), Niitii (tea), Ziinzibaakwad (sugar);*
4. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Gitigewin (farming)*
- a *If the Anishinaabeg quit the hunt they would be given farm implements such as a plough, a harrow, a spade, an axe, and a hoe for each Anishinaabeg;*
- b *She would provide seed for Anishinaabeg farmers;*
- c *She would provide a farming instructor;*
- d *She would provide farm animals such as a yoke of Ayaybake (oxen), Naabe-bizhiki (bull), Bizhiki (cow), Naabe-gookoosh (boar), Gookoosh (sow), and all other animals (male and female) raised by farmers;*
- e *She would allow Anishinaabeg to sell their grain and animals when they had enough for themselves;*
- f *She would provide hay and timber lands to build their homes and shelter for their animals;*
- g *She would provide a blacksmith and carpenter to help with the building;*

During the negotiations one of the *Mindimooyens* (elderly women) who were present at the negotiations addressed the Lieutenant-Governor and the Treaty Commissioner stating that the materials given were for the men but what about the women. They made assurances.

5. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Gego-wanikeken Ikwewag (women not forgotten)*
- a *Women would not be forgotten they would receive bolts of cloth, sewing needles, thread, soap, and a wash board;*

The Anishinaabeg collectively requested the ban of alcohol in their territories. So,

6. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Gaawin ishkodewaabo (no alcohol)*
- a *She would make laws to keep the evil influences of Ishkodewaabo (alcohol) from the Anishinaabeg, their lands, and elsewhere;*
7. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Gikinoo'amaagewin (education)*
- a *A school and teacher will be provided when the Anishinaabeg asked for them;*

The *Gaagige-bines* (Forever Bird) and *Misko-ginew* (Red Eagle) stated that the mooniyashag had brought illnesses with them and asked “what would the Queen do to help maintain our good health?”

8. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Mino-ayaawin (good health)*
- a *If the Anishinaabeg got sick She would provide medicines;*
9. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Gaawin diba'igewi-zhooniyaa (no taxes)*
- a *That there would be no taxes on the lands kept by the Anishinaabeg;*

10. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Zhi-imaaganish (police)*
- a *Her police would only enter onto Anishinaabe lands for murder, rape, and grand larceny;*
11. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Naa-naakonigewag niigaaniitangig (honouring leaders)*
- a *Distinct clothing for the Ogimaakaan (chief), two Niiganiweniniwag (headmen), and two Giigidoweniniwag (councillors);*
- b *A horse and buggy for the Ogimaakaan, two Niiganiweniniwag, and two Giigidoweniniwag;*
- c *A British flag and Treaty medal for the Ogimaakaan with the year of the Treaty on the medal; and*
12. *The Queen promised, through her representatives, Gaa-gige-onaakonigewin (eternal law)*
- a *The Treaty would last for Ago-minik giizis zaagaade (as long as the sun shines).*

You have now heard the story of Treaty as it was shared with me. You now have a responsibility to remember, share, and remind one another of the relationship we have established which is meant to last forever.

CONCLUSION

The term Canada is usually taken to refer to one odishkodekaan only: from British colonies to provinces within a federal Canadian state. However, as I have shared Canada is a multilayered odishkodekaan. In short, Anishinaabeg have a relationship with Canada, rather than within Canada. These relationships can be called treaties and rights flow from them – *biindigewin (rights of access)* for the Mooniyashag and *ago'idiwin (rights added to existing rights)* for the Anishinaabeg. The odishkodekaan developed between Anishinaabe and Crown express relationships based on intercultural negotiation, peace, friendship, respect, mutual recognition, sharing, and responsibility. Returning to these teachings and understanding that these odishkodekaan make us all Treaty People will enrich our collective Canadian identity.

QUESTION and ANSWER PERIOD

The question and answer period that followed Darren's presentation was not recorded, however excerpts are reproduced here from memory. Our thanks to Glen Klasssen. (ed.)

How did the First Nations feel about the Métis settlement of 1870 in the Manitoba Act?

Can I connect the two (Treaties and Manitoba Act)? Are there any Metis around? I apologize in advance. The First Nations people were 'OK' with it. You had negotiated this arrangement with the Métis. Now, let me throw it back to you. Say you and I were to establish a partnership and then I went away for a year and then I met with your son. And said, OK, I will give you all the rights and responsibilities your Dad was supposed to have. How would that make you feel? Unfairly treated (echoing audience comment). I don't like answering that question. I was asked the question. It's contentious. I think you should have come to ask first. There was a royal proclamation that was entered into in 1763, saying that you had to get our consent for any new immigration and settlement that you owe to our children first.

How much choice did the First Nations have in choosing their reserve locations?

Firstly, we chose our reserves. We knew that we were not really keen on farming but we wanted to retain our fishing and trapping lifestyles. So we chose areas that had a lot of swamp. Now how many of you here are hunters or have hunters in the family? What goes to swamps? (Audience: moose). Right. So we chose territories very wisely. We knew that the swamps would provide a lot of moose, a lot of deer, a lot of waterfowl. In addition to that, it's a pharmacy for First Nations people. We would get over there and get our traditional medicines. So we chose very carefully. Particularly with Brokenhead -- they were originally living close to lower Fort Garry but they chose land where Brokenhead is now because it was a traditional ceremonial site, and they wanted to protect it. And it was beside water as well. So they chose that area and we're going to protect this ceremonial place by now living there forever. With Peguis, another big story. They were in what is called St. Peters just north of Selkirk. Some of the people said, OK, they are in our haying territory, we want more and so a judge said, let's move them and they did. Without their consent. But ...we chose our areas.

How did the First Nations view promises of health care, education, and post-secondary education?

The First Nations right to health is seen by the government (the Indian Act, which followed the treaties) as **policy** -- the same with education, post-secondary education -- it's policy. But if you look back at the negotiations and everything that was promised in the treaties, we claim these things as **rights** because of the promises made to us. But the Crown says, No, just policy.

How did the representatives of the First Nations give consent to the treaties?

We have a long history of putting down our totems, our totem animals. Some just made an X. It all depends. In Treaty #1 we signed with an X. During the time of Treaty #1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 they had ceremonies. These go on and there's no alcohol. We had very specific ceremonies like purification lodges. You don't go to these ceremonies in any way shape or form where your mind is altered.

Were the women involved in the negotiations?

Yes, one woman got up and said, hey, hold on, you're giving all this stuff (what are we giving up in return?) Yes, it goes all



Treaty Time at St. Peters, north of Selkirk in 1880. Image Credit: Robert Bell/Library and Archives Canada/PA-039918.

the way back to our creation story. We trace our roots back not to a male, but to a female.

Have the treaty promises been kept?

The promises have been kept in some cases. The five dollars, every year (laughter). The right to education, health, sometimes were not kept. Is it a good treaty? I'm still here. You're still here. Kind of good, but there are still a few things that need to be hashed out.

Does your oral tradition agree with the archival evidence of the treaties?

The story that I shared with you, the Treaty #1 story, you can find it in the *Manitoban* almost word for word, almost. Of course, a reporter can't get everything in. Sometimes he did embellish a bit. He was kind of derogatory to one or two of the chiefs but you will find that archival and oral evidence usually correspond to each other. And one of the treaty promises was education. We will give you a school and a teacher, whenever you're ready for it. When did the Residential school in Sagkeeng open up? It was as a result of a petition, by First Nations people. They also asked for a school to be put on the reserve. So, yes, there were times when oral history and archival records jived with each other.

Do you find that this kind of face to face dialog, as we are having tonight, is helpful?

Yes, it really helps. When you see someone face to face you are building that relationship, building that trust, whereas if you're seeing something only in print, you don't hear the way he's telling the story --you don't hear the cadence, the pauses, those kind of things. The interaction is what helps. (applause)

How does the treaty involve us?

It's time for you guys, as the newcomers, as you remind your government, our government, that there are some historical wrongs here that have to be rectified; that have to be changed. I'm a beneficiary, and you're a beneficiary and we have to make sure that treaty relationship is maintained. I have shared my view of the treaty with you, and now it's your turn to share your treaty. This is the role and responsibility of treaties.

Do First Nations want to go back to more hunting and trapping?

There are some people who really want to go back to be a hunter, fisher, trapper-- I'm not one of them. I like to go to the grocery store for my food. Killing a moose is hard. I went hunting as a teenager with my uncle -- they made me do all the heavy lifting. Dragging that thing out is hard. And then having to bleed it and dry it to ensure it doesn't rot. Going back, living that lifestyle is extremely hard. But it's OK not to have to do that. You can be a perfectly good Anishinaabe person living in the city and following traditional protocols without going back to that life-style.

Was there opposition to the treaties from First Nations at the time?

There was one troublesome chief during the negotiations. His name was Yellowquill. God help me. He pushed for a lot more. So they said, if you're going to do that, you're going to have to negotiate on your own. And so he did. He got a buffer zone around his community of five miles in each direction.

And you'll notice in the memorandum of Treaty #1 It says: Every chief, except for Yellowquill, gets all this extra stuff, and he gets a five-mile buffer zone. And the Treaty #2 the negotiators were actually at the Treaty#1 negotiations. They sat and listened and when it came to their own treaty they said. They're giving us the exact same things they gave our siblings in Treaty #1 -- we're going to take the treaty.

How do First Nations nowadays react to the deficiencies of the treaty and its implementation?

Some use it as a weapon. It's not supposed to be that. But it can be misused. But essentially, the other First Nations people will say: Stop. You've got to stop abusing our treaty and using it as a blunt object with which to hit people over the head. It's about maintaining and establishing that relationship. A good relationship. Baby steps.

Young Chippewayan Indian Reserve #107¹

By Leonard Doell, Aberdeen, Saskatchewan

The Young Chippewayan Indian Reservation (also known as Stoney Knoll) #107, is located in Treaty Six Territory, the traditional home of the Nehiyawak or Plains Cree people. There are thirty square miles of excellent farm land located near the present town of Laird, Saskatchewan that was chosen by Chief Chippewayan and his people in 1876. The following year, Chief Chippewayan died and his son Young Chippewayan became the hereditary Chief. Life following the Treaty was very difficult. With the disappearance of the buffalo, many people faced starvation. In 1885, Louis Riel and his Metis people confronted the Government about the way they were being treated and expressed concerns about the loss of their land. The Federal Government feared that local First Nations people would join with the Metis, so their guns were taken away to eliminate the possibility of them fighting with Riel. Young Chippewayan heard that buffalo had been sighted and headed south to Cypress Hills to find food for his starving people. The Young Chippewayan people were afraid of returning to their land at Laird for fear of retaliation from the Indian Agents and eventually many of them made their home with other Bands near North Battleford, while others died from starvation and disease.

To the Young Chippewayan people, the reserve land at Laird was chosen as their home and was occupied from time to time. The Carlton Trail, leading from Prince Albert to North Battleford, crossed this land and was bustling with activity. The site known as Stoney Knoll (Opwashemoe Chakatinaw), the highest point on the Reserve, was and still is considered a sacred piece of land and held in high regard by Young Chippewayan descendants. Oral history has confirmed the presence of sacred burial grounds on this property.

In May of 1897, this land (Reserve #107) was taken from the Young Chippewayan Band by the Federal Government and opened to Mennonite homesteaders and later German Lutheran settlers from the USA. The Young Chippewayan people were never contacted and were not aware that their land



Fort Carlton in 1871. This Hudson Bay Company Fort located north of Laird near Duck Lake on the North Saskatchewan River was the venue for the negotiations for Treaty No. 6 in 1876. Photo Credit: Library and Archives Canada.

had been relinquished, for it was done without their surrender or consent. In 1895, the Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve was created, when the Federal Government offered Mennonites a large tract of land north of Saskatoon up to Rosthern. As this land filled up with homesteaders, Mennonites petitioned the Federal Government for more land and in October 1898, this land at Laird was added to it. So the former Young Chippewayan Indian Reserve now became part of a Reserve for Mennonite farmers. With the influx of settlers looking for a chance to homestead, the Government felt a need to open every inch of available land, since agricultural settlement was more in keeping with the Government's idea of proper land use at the time. The Federal Government regarded the Mennonites as ideal colonists.

Mennonites became beneficiaries of this land transaction but were unaware at the time of the history of the Young Chippewayan people and their loss. In August 1976, a group of

descendants of the Young Chippewyan Band visited the Laird area after the 100th Anniversary gathering of Treaty Six at Fort Carlton. They were frustrated by the litany of broken promises and fundamental rights promised by the Federal Government under Treaty Six that had never been honored. So they travelled to Laird, to visit the land that many had never seen before in an attempt to talk with farmers about their connection to this land. This created a lot of fear and anxiety in the settler community and the Young Chippewyan folks who came to this land hoping to build some understanding and empathy for their situation, left frustrated by the experience. This became the catalyst though for Mennonites to learn about the injustice that had occurred that had removed the Young Chippewyan from this land and allowed Mennonite to settle here. These courageous but awkward first steps for change became the impetus for us to learn more about the land where we lived and a first step on a journey of three peoples eventually working toward justice.

In the spring of 2006, Chief Ben Weenie approached MCC Saskatchewan about the possibility of the Young Chippewyan Commemorating the 130th Anniversary of the signing of Treaty Six at Stoney Knoll together with the Mennonite and Lutheran settlers who now resided on this land. Chief Weenie and Gary Laplante (a Young Chippewyan Descendent), had been travelling together, when Chief Weenie shared his vision of working with settlers to seek justice for the land they had taken from them. By taking this risk and extending the olive branch, Chief Weenie began a journey of reconciliation, hoping that there would be receptive people from the Mennonite and Lutheran communities to walk alongside on uncharted ground.

In 2006, 2011 and 2016, Young Chippewyans, Mennonites and Lutherans have gathered at Stoney Knoll to Commemorate the 130th, 135th and 140th Anniversaries of the signing of Treaty Six and to continue the journey of building friendship and understanding. On each of these occasions, they decided to meet at Stoney Knoll (Opwashemoe Chakatinaw), the highest place on the Reserve and considered to be a sacred place by

the Young Chippewyan people. In 1910, the Lutherans built a Church and Cemetery on this site, the church was moved into Laird in the 1950's, so they too have a strong spiritual connection to this land.

In 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding was drafted by all three groups: giving thanks to the Creator, indicating respect for Covenants including Treaties and calling for a committing to peace, justice and sufficiency for all communities. We agreed that we did not want to fight amongst each other but to hold the Federal Government responsible for the injustice that they had created. Chief Weenie has emphasized that these gatherings were not a time of confrontation but as a time of healing between our peoples. The emphasis has been to be a spiritual one of healing, where perhaps said Chief Weenie we could set an example to the rest of the country of how our peoples could live in peace and harmony with each other. Chief Weenie has made it clear that the Young Chippewyan respected the current ownership of the land by the settlers and in turn Mennonite and Lutheran communities pledged support for the Young Chippewyan band's ongoing struggle to obtain compensation for the land owed to them under Treaty Six after all these years. These gatherings brought renewed hope to all those that were gathered there.

The Young Chippewyan Band has never been compensated for the land they had taken from them. Most of the descendants of this Band reside in the North Battleford area and others near Prince Albert but are considered to be squatters in the communities in which they reside. The Band is working to seek redress for their Specific Land Claim by meeting the requirements of the Indian Claims Commission (ICC). In 1995, the ICC concluded in its report on the Young Chippewyan Claim that the Department of the Interior had illegally taken from the Band without their consent but that genealogical research was needed to prove that there is an "identifiable community" or Band, so that their Treaty promises could be honored. A historical researcher has been hired, who is familiar with Plains Cree history, culture and kinship structures to complete this band

membership list. All three communities have offered prayer, moral and financial support for this cause and are working together towards a timely and respectful solution to this issue.

Treaty Commissioner Judge David Arnot has said "Our lives and our futures are bound together". The Young Chippewyan, Mennonites and Lutherans continue to work at our mutual commitment to honor the covenant between our peoples, to strive for justice and to create healthy space for us to live together in peace and harmony. May the Creator grant us strength, courage and wisdom as we continue on our journey of reconciliation together.

Endnotes

- 1 Revised and updated from Leonard Doell, "Young Chippewyan Indian Reserve No. 107 and Mennonite Farmers in Saskatchewan," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 10(2001): 165-167.



Leonard Doell is MCC Saskatchewan's Indigenous Neighbours Program Coordinator. Here he is making a presentation in April 2015 to students at Rosthern Junior College about the Young Chippewyan Land Claim which remains unresolved. Image Credit: Donna Schulz, *Canadian Mennonite* 19 (11) (2015).

Kookoom Mariah and The Mennonite Mrs.¹

Maria Campbell, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College

This is the story of two wonderful old women who were an important part of my early life. One of them was my Kookoom Mariah, the other was her friend “the Mrs.,” an old woman who lived across the big meadow from her. The Mrs. was Mennonite, although I didn’t know that at the time and if I did it meant nothing. She was just one of the grandmothers who worked with Kookoom Mariah, who was a midwife and healer. But before I tell you their story, I would like to tell you about Kookoom Mariah’s homeland, which was the community where I spent my childhood and the place my family still calls home.

Today it is called Park Valley, but prior to 1925 it was known as Nugeewin, which means “the stopping place” in the Cree language. Kookoom Mariah’s people used to camp here on the way to their hunting and trapping territory, which was across Puktahaw Sipi (Net-throwing River), where her mother-in-law, my great grandmother, lived with several other families. “Hiee, akee katowasik oma aski kiyas” (Oh my, this land used to be so beautiful), Kookoom Mariah would tell us as we drove by wagon through the countryside. To my young eyes it was still beautiful, but Kookoom remembered it when it was still old growth forest and the trees were so big that three men together couldn’t put their arms around one. She would point out the different landmarks and make us say the Cree names: Kiseyineew Isputinawah (Old Man Hills), where our father and uncles hunted deer; Omisimaw Pusqua (Oldest Sister Prairie), the place where we picked the medicine she used for midwifery; and Notikew Sakhkikun (Old Woman’s Lake), the place of ceremony.

Around 1915, the Federal government decided to turn the territory around Notikew Sakhkikun into a national park, and the families who lived there (had lived there for as long as they could remember), were told they had to get out. They moved to Nugeewin, where they were joined by other displaced non-status Indian and Metis families. They built homes, planted gardens and continued to live as trappers and hunters until the 1920s, at which time Nugeewin and the land around it was opened for homesteading. Among the homesteaders to come were the Mennonite people. A few Metis families also took homesteads but the majority of them didn’t, moving instead onto the road allowances and becoming “road allowance” people. Within a short time the land was cleared, a post office and store were built and place names were changed. Nugeewin became Park Valley, Puktahaw Sipi became Sturgeon River, Kiseyineew Isputinawah Ladder Hills, Omisimaw Pusqui Bergan’s Meadow and Notikew Sakhkikun became Mariah Lake. Kookoom’s homeland and history were erased.

We never knew the Mennonites who came to our territory. They were not friendly people and they kept to themselves, and so my early memories of the Mennonite people are not good. As a child I was afraid of them. They always seemed so angry and disapproving. In those years if I had been asked to think Mennonite and pick a color, I would have chosen gray. The people just seemed so gray and gloomy. You can imagine my surprise when years later I met Isaac Glick and Rudy Wiebe, Mennonites with a sense of humor! And then, the biggest

surprise of all, I found out that maybe I was a Mennonite.

My late father, after listening to me one night going on about the Catholic Church for the umpteenth time, calmly said. “I don’t know why you’re so mad about them, you’re not even a Catholic.”

“Not a Catholic, what am I then?”

“You’re either a Mennonite or a Lutheran. We were on the trap line when you were born and you got sick. You mom was scared you’d die and wanted to bring you out to be baptized, but then this horseback preacher came and we asked him if he would do it and did it. Well you got better and we came home and your mom never told anybody cause she was scared the priest would get mad. She prayed for a long time to be forgiven for making you one of them.”

My father didn’t know what religion the preacher was for sure, but he did know that he came from the little log church at Lake Four. A Mennonite church. When I told my friend Leonard this story he said Mennonites do not baptize babies. Well, according to my dad, this man, “poured water on your head and said a big long prayer, so you’re one of them.”

Now let me tell you about these two women. This is written as a story and I would like to dedicate it to our children, yours and mine.

It was a clear sunny day, almost hot. The kind of day you remember when you start to become an old woman and you search for role models to help you make the transition. The kind of lazy day when you can smell wild roses, brown-eyed Susans, the rich black earth, and amo may, bee poop in Cree, or honey as it is called today.

A soft breeze touched the willows where I, an eight year old girl, sat with my Kookoom Mariah and her friend “the Mrs.” They were making medicine: sitting on a blanket spread on the ground, grinding roots between two stones. I was their helper, running errands, snaring a partridge for our lunch, hauling wood for the little fire where a tea pail was hung from a tri-pod. I was as full of self-importance as a little girl can be when she is chosen, of all the girl cousins, “Kah weechihaht notikewwah” (to be the “helper of the old ladies”).

I was hot and puffed out, taking a breather after making a one-mile run to the store for tea and black licorice candy. Do you know that even today I think of black licorice as old lady candy and no, I haven’t started to eat it yet...but pretty soon.

Anyway, there I was taking a break, leaning back against the old canvas bags that contained the dried and ground medicines. I listened to Kookoom Mariah sing as she ground the roots and watched as fine red powder fell onto a clean sugar bag. Without thinking, because I certainly knew better, I reached out, touched the powder with my finger tips bringing it to my face, rubbing it round and round on my cheek bones like I had seen my Aunt Mary do with a box of rouge.

“Hey hey awa!” Kookoom Mariah reached out and smacked my hand. “Muskee kee anima!” (That’s medicine!)

“The Mrs.” laughed, her body shaking like an old bear’s. Still laughing, she dug into the old blue apron she always wore and pulled out, not a black old-lady licorice, but a red one. Patting my shoulder gently she handed me the candy,

then went back to grinding the medicine. Kookoom Mariah pretended not to see.

I can still see those two old women: Kookoom Mariah, as tiny and skinny as a burnt willow, “The Mrs.,” big and round like a brown bear. Both in long, much-mended dresses and old sweaters. One in moccasins, the other in laced-up felt boots.

Sometimes I see them on a hot day, bent over digging sticks in wet meadows or picking berries along the road. I see them in the garden exchanging wild ginger and dill. In the summer kitchens making headcheese, cooking moose nose. I see them helping my mother deliver my baby brother. I walk with the two of them to the place where old women bury meeko, the afterbirth.

I hear them talking, one in Cree, the other in Low German, although I didn’t know then that’s what it was called. Nor did I know that they did not speak each other’s language. All I knew as a child was the love and respect they had for each other: their laughter, their sharing.

Many years later when my father and I were walking around Kookoom Mariah’s home place, we came to the willows where these two old women often sat. The willows are gone, cut down for another bushel of wheat, the farmer oblivious to the history of this place. Dad and I laugh as we remember the things we had learned about life as we sat with the two of them. “Dah Mrs. was a strong woman.” Dad said, remembering the time our horse got stuck in the muskeg. “Me and Alec we just can’t pull him out. Den dat ole lady he come along and he talk to dat horse so he stop jumping an being scared, den he pull him out. Boy we shore feel stupid us two big mans.”

I remembered the time I went blue berry [sic] picking with them and we ran into a mamma bear and her babies. I was scared and they were too. The mamma bear was not going away, she was pacing back and forth sniffing the air. Quickly the two old women opened their grub sacks and out came our lunch. Head cheese and bannock, then slowly we backed away until we were out of sight, at which time they grabbed by hands

and ran as fast as they could, dragging me between them.

“Why did we call her the Mrs.?” I asked Dad.

“I don’t know what his name he was,” Dad said. “Dat’s what his old man he always call him.”

Many years after that conversation I decided to go to university to get a Master’s degree. I went so stories like this one would have some authority. We all know that the oral tradition does not have as much power in the academic or white world unless you have some letters behind your name. Then, as my Uncle Robert said, “You can click them up with high language and footnotes and everyone will think they are sacred.” So off to university I went to learn high language and footnoting and for my first major research paper I asked the question: “How do a people retain their identity when they have lost their homeland?”

I wanted to prove that for my people, who had been displaced and dispossessed for over 150 years, identity had been preserved, maintained and nurtured through music and storytelling. I wanted to tell the world that the music and stories born on the homelands had been, metaphorically speaking, wrapped in the finest fabric the people had and carried from camp to camp; from one hastily built log shack to another, where each night the bundle was lovingly opened and the music and stories shared with the people, most especially the children. In my family the homeland stories are not about a place called Park Valley, rather they are about Nugeewin. Not about Ladder Hills, but about Kisaynew Sputnikawah. Not about Bergan’s Meadow, but about Omisimow Pasqua. Not about Lamire’s wheat field, but about Notekew Nipissah, Willow Place of Two Old Women. And among those stories is the story of Kookoom Mariah’s friend the Mrs., an old Mennonite woman who understood what it was like to be erased and made invisible.

Endnotes

1 This article was originally published in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* Vol 19 (2001): 9-12. It is reprinted with permission.

Canadian Mennonites and ‘Whiteness’ in Latin America: A Study of Race and Religion, 1912-2012¹

By Royden Loewen, Winnipeg, Manitoba

In his memoir recounting the emigration of Old Colony Mennonites from western Canada to Mexico in the 1920s, Minister Isaak M. Dyck slammed the 1916 school legislation in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. This wartime product enabled governments to force Mennonite children to learn a British-Canadian curriculum. The law’s aim was clear, “even the Mennonites were going to be made into 100 per cent Canadians.” Their only option was to leave the Dominion of Canada, seduced by that “all-British Empire.” Old ways could only be sustained in exile, far from this British Canadian land most Canadian Mennonites had called home since their emigration from Russia in the 1870s.²

But, as Dyck saw it, the Mennonites must find a particular kind of land. Canada was too patriotic, too assimilative, too wealthy; its white middle class culture threatened to transform

the simple agrarian ways of the Mennonites. Where to go? According to Dyck, Mennonite minister Jacob Wiens of Saskatchewan had the answer; in 1913, just outside the village of Reinland, Saskatchewan, “while looking out over a field... of swaying wheat with its beautiful ears,” Wiens had heard “a voice come from above, saying... ‘you will not be able to stay here [in Canada] forever; the [Mennonite] church will once again have to take up the walking staff.’” Indeed, “if the church wishes to maintain itself in the pure gospel,” said the mystical voice, “it will once again need to settle among a heathen people.”

A “heathen” land denoted a primitive and strange place, consisting of non-western Europeans, a land far removed from the comforts of Protestant, white Anglo Canada. Only in such a land could the Mennonites secure their eternal salvation.

Thus began a complicated Canadian-descendent, Low-German speaking Mennonite sojourn in Latin America. In the early 1920s 6000 Old Colony Mennonites left western Canada for northern Mexico – Chihuahua and Durango – while another 1500 travelled even farther and settled in the Paraguay Chaco. Over the next three generations secondary migrations took these Mennonites to southern Mexico, Belize, East Paraguay, northern Argentina, and especially to the Bolivian Oriente lowlands. Here in these disparate places in Latin America lay their ‘heathen’ land. A place where Mennonites cultivated a strong minority self-identity; they would be separated from the wider latino/a society by virtue of their pacifist Anabaptist faith, but also by their language (of daily Low German and sacred High German) and by their race; in Latin America they became “Dietsch,” literally “German,” but in reality, ‘white’, orderly, hardworking, frugal, disciplined and ethnically exclusive.

To examine the history of these Mennonites is to study the social construction of race. It is to consider ‘whiteness’ in the making. But ‘whiteness’ in a particular context: here was not as in Matthew Frye Jackson’s work on US immigrants a group battling non-whiteness to seek entrance into a dominant society, nor as in David Roediger’s labour history a group anxious that non-whites were eroding their own sense of dominance, nor in as in Adele Perry’s history of a Victorian engendering of frontier BC a group of social architects of a wider society. Rather here was a group deliberately resisting full entrance into a broader ‘white’ society, and seeking in their ‘whiteness’ and in their minority status in a ‘non-white’ land a way of maintaining old ways. The non-white majority would protect the plain, pacifist and anti-modern ways of the Mennonites. The Mennonites viewed members of their new host ‘heathen’ societies as a godsend: they were good ‘heathens’, neither requiring conversion to non-heathenness nor hostile resistance of any kind.

But it was clear; their neighbours were essentially “other”; secondary relations with them – business and economic – was to be expected, but primary relations – marriage, religion and close cultural exchange of any kind – were to be rejected. And within this construction was a division that followed class lines, with poor Latinos derided as hapless and disorderly, middle class and professional Latinos deferred to as experts and sophisticated. But both were part of the ‘other’ required by Mennonites to safeguard their anti-modernity.

Memoir and Mythologizing Mexico, 1913-1921

This racialized thinking, evolving as it did into a shifting social boundary making, was apparent between 1919 and 1921 as no fewer than six delegations of Mennonite farmers headed out to ‘heathen’ Mexico. In February 1919 an historic delegation of farmers inspected lands in Chihuahua, Durango and Sinaloa states, and then visited President Álvaro Obregón at his palace in Mexico City. The delegates were certainly introduced to a ‘heathen’ land. From his train perch, Rev. Johann M. saw the nightlife, “a wild striving among the world’s children,” corrupt enough to qualify for God’s warning of Genesis 6: “I am surely going to destroy them and the earth.”³

But at least these people could be identified as the ‘other’, unlike the British Canadian neighbours in Canada who lured Mennonites to cross from their exclusive societies. Moreover, as the Mennonite delegates discovered at the culmination of their trip in Mexico City, Obregón could enable that separation. In the evening of February 17 Loeppky and the other farmers visited Obregón’s palace to ask for a set of privileges, mostly found in separate schools, local government, and military exemption. Historian Martina Will has noted, Obregón, despite his revolutionary credentials, proved very open to the arrival of northern white farmers wishing to cultivate Mexican soils. That night Loeppky was exuberant; he had observed in



A team of oxen hitched to a plow in Mexico in 1923. The man with ‘hand to the plow’ would appear to be an indigenous Mexican whom one could not marry but with whom one could have economic relations. Photo Credit: Krause Collection, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 592-3.

Obregón what the Queen of Arabia had seen in King Solomon in the Bible: “it is true what I have heard in my land, about your nature and your wisdom.”

Upon their return northward, and having crossed in the United States, Loepky felt relieved to be on the way home but Mexico had left its mark: “now we sat on a different train than we had in Mexico,” he observed. And even though it was superior to Mexican technology, it felt strange for “we had grown accustomed to the Mexican manner among the people.”

Upon arriving in Mexico, the racial barrier became a constant, cultural feature of the new life. Indeed, it was there in accounts of the actual migration. The arrival of the first Mennonite chartered train at El Paso, Texas, in April 1922 was met by relief, but entry into Mexico was another matter. Isaak Dyck noted “a feeling of fear swept over us, for once we entered Mexico it was as if we were the children of Israel,” “Mexicans surrounded our train because they had never before seen Mennonites.” We felt very “uncomfortable, for we had never seen such dark people.... These were to be our neighbours.... O how strange and unfamiliar everything was.” Quickly it became apparent, these “dark people” could be their guardians, for Mexican soldiers on the train turned out “to be very friendly and benevolent” and “[we] grew accustomed to our new companions.” Soon Dyck recalled Psalm 74: it was God who set [things so]...that each land possesses its own character.”

The biblical trust in the “dark people” evolved into a lasting cultural divide. Indeed, the early letters from Mexico published in the Canadian-based, immigration newspaper, the bi-monthly *Steinbach Post*, not only described a broadening Mennonite social network, they positioned the new settlements to Mexico itself, especially its people, and drew strict social boundaries between themselves and the host society.

The letters described distant neighbours and even ‘primitive’ strangers. In a 1923 letter, P.K. Doerksen, a young Manitoba visitor exclaimed: “I had never thought that Mexico was so backwards, some of the people say that it is a hundred years behind, and I believe it. It has all the appearance of Bible times”Here one rides on donkeys, walks bare foot, eats... and sleeps on the ground. In the middle of the room one has a small fire.”⁴ In a subsequent letter he emphasized that these “backwards” people were of no threat of the Mennonites. In fact when he asked them, “what should I relay to the people in Manitoba [about life in Mexico] their answer was, ‘we are doing well and we are all happy; the Mexicans leave us entirely alone, only the ploughing is hard.’”

Over the next generation this racialized social boundary seemed impermeable. In 1936 and 37 the Mexican government shut down the Mennonite schools, and for a year engaged in a confrontation that the Mennonites eventually won. Threats of mass emigration – to Paraguay, South Africa, the Dakotas, Quebec, even Papua New Guinea – eventually solicited a favourable response from government officials and the Mennonites’ German language, church-run schools reopened. In 1945 a Frau Guenther wrote, reflecting Mennonite thinking in Mexico. “What would have happened if I had gone [to public school in Canada]?... Boys who joined the army, girls who would have mocked the old ways. The children would not have valued the simple rural life they now live out in Mexico.”⁵ Guenther had maintained old ways in the bosom of ‘heathen’ Mexico.

Speaking Through the Academic Gaze: 1960s and 70s

In the 1960s drastic change came to the Mennonites in northern Mexico. Good times brought threatening devices – the rubber tire, the car and the electrical grid – each signaling



The iconic photograph of Mennonites from Canada arriving at San Antonio de los Arenales, now Cuauhtémoc in 1923. Isaac Dyck would describe the people who came to offer to help them unload as having a “dour and forbidding appearance.” (Dyck, 95). Photo Credit: Preservings 16(2000): 44.

an approaching world the Mennonites had hoped to leave in Canada.

Thus, after a long generation in Mexico, a large number of Mennonites in the 1960s were on the move again. Most of the traditionalists looked not northward back to the country of their origin, but southward, to places across the boundaries of Central and South American countries. Here, in the south, traditionalists, so-called 'horse and buggy' Mennonites, found greater guarantees of isolation from modernity.

The largest of the various migrations from points in Mexico farther southward began in 1967, leading some 10,000 Old Colony Mennonites to locate in the dense bush land just to the southeast of Santa Cruz. And bolstering the social boundaries of both was an implicit contract with the Bolivian government in which the Mennonites 'promised' to advance its respective national economic policies in exchange for guaranteed cultural independence. Both relied on a Bolivian law passed in 1962 at the request of a vanguard Mennonite community in Bolivia; the special 'Mennonite' law exempted these newcomers from military service, state schools, modern welfare programs, participation in municipal government, and national inheritance laws.

The Mennonites, themselves, understood their importance to Bolivia. In 1970 a young Texas A&M student, James Lanning, arrived in Bolivia to undertake research on his Master of Social Work thesis and he discovered a people devoted to maintaining social distance. The Mennonites at the first colony, Riva Palacios, presented themselves as religiously motivated migrants, global wanderers, seeking a life of Christian simplicity.⁶

They especially emphasized a sharp separation from the old Mexico colonies. Law 6030 they noted had been issued at the "governmental palace in the city of La Paz" and bore the signature of a national president. It permitted the Mennonites to "settle down in any territory of the country" so long as they would "dedicate themselves to...agricultural labours." And those aspects of the Law which seemed to press the Mennonites to integrate aspects of Bolivian society, such as Article 10 requiring Mennonites to "engage teachers for learning Spanish," were simply ignored at Riva Palacios.

Race in the Last Generation

Over the years the Mennonites' relationship to the host society of Bolivia maintained its old course of separation. It was a view expressed clearly shortly after the launch of a new Canadian-based newspaper, *Die Mennonitische Post*, in 1977. In July 1977 J.J. Driedger of Las Piedras colony answered the question, "whether we are fully at home here?" with a short rebuke: "in this world we are never fully at home. We are all on a journey to the greatest homeland and cannot make our home here."⁷ Six months later Driedger added to his view on being at 'home' in any one nation state: "the world is large, and one can live anywhere one wants to, as long as no one tells us where we have to live."⁸ For Driedger ultimate citizenship lay in heaven and any citizenship in this life must yield to the primacy of religious ideals.

In 2009 and 2012 an oral history project asking the Bolivian Mennonites about their anti-modernity and relationship to Bolivia indicated a well-honed narrative of racialized boundary, now a cultural artefact at the root of their society. All the pieces seemed to be in place. First, an absolute determination

to maintain old boundaries with a populace the Mennonites usually deemed disorderly and undisciplined; second, a willingness to engage in selective market-based interaction with the Bolivians, but one in which class determined position of power; third, a naming process, employing a multifaceted taxonomy of 'othering' their neighbours.

The outside world was almost always kept well at bay. Occasionally stories of Mennonites marrying Bolivians arose, and sometimes with full acceptance. Margaretha Siemens said that she didn't "mind that only one of her siblings is with the Old Colony Mennonites," although it is "sad that one of [these x-Old Colonist] siblings is with the 'Einheimisch'."

On other occasions Bolivians were spoken of with respect, even high esteem. Especially Bolivian doctors' advice was carefully heeded and Mennonites praised Bolivian craftsmanship: But more often these relationships were coloured by suspect Bolivian culture. Maria Harms said that she and her husband "were asked by a Bolivian to open a store together with him," but as the primary customers would be Bolivians and they're really bad at paying their accounts" so the invitation was turned down.

Oftentimes even the workers lived in separate worlds. Peter Berg said many "Bolivians have worked... in the colony; when the Mennonites need workers to build houses they have hired the Bolivians. [But] the Bolivians don't live in the colony - they have their houses in Santa Cruz, but they spend a lot of time in the colony."

Not infrequently the Bolivian workers have represented a lack of discipline and disorder. Some farmers expressed outright negative feelings towards the Bolivians. Jacob Friesen said he hired the Bolivians "only to work around the yard and help build buildings; few Bolivians know how to drive tractors," although he concedes he "might be able to teach a few." Generally he said "Bolivians are stupid and learn a different way; the Brazilians "have more know how."

Indeed the outside Bolivian world was marked by chaos and wildness. In the most extreme cases, the Bolivian stood as an outright threat to the artifact of life the Mennonites treasured the most. The Mennonites' perspective of land settlement reflects an old colonist perspective that forested land is wilderness that awaits the transforming hand of orderly transformation into commodity producing farmland. The only real obstacle have been unscrupulous Bolivians who use the country's porous laws to extract unethical payments from the Mennonites or indigenous Bolivians who inhabit the Mennonites' new lands illegally. Peter Wiebe says that "Sommerfeld [Colony] had to return two of its land [territories] to indigenous Bolivians."

In all of these various cases the Mennonites rarely in fact use the term "Bolivian." They have their internal designations, the highland indigenous Colla people (pronounced Coija) are seen as nomadic and untrustworthy, while the lowland and more Europeanized Camba people are seen as potential employees and even occasional business partners. Anna Berg said that Evo Morales can't be trusted: he has made "some changes," making "land claims...a little more strict," offered rural credit for the indigenous (meaning more new cars on the roadways), but he is "Colla and not a Camba," certainly the country's "foremost drug dealer."

Reflecting a cultural divide transplanted from Mexico in the 1960s, many Mennonites ironically referred to their Bolivian neighbours as Mexicans, or as they pronounce it, Mexa. Sara



Bolivian Mennonite women and the 'other'. Photo Credit: <http://patagoniayprotestante.blogspot.ca>

Friesen employed the word to describe the custom work clearing bush land her son does for the Bolivian neighbours. As she puts it, he does "krupa" [bulldozer] work for "Mexa" who rent land "from a 'Dietscha'", a nephew of her husband.

Conclusion

Mennonites left Canada in the 1920s because it was too 'white', too middle class, too luring for potentially 'white' blond, fair skinned, hardworking Mennonites. For Mennonites to be fully accepted into British-Canadian society they needed only to acquire the English language and perhaps warm to

Canada's national symbols, certainly its membership in a militaristic British Empire. In the 1920s almost 8000 Mennonites from western Canada left their country of birth and migrated southward, to "heathen" lands inhabited by "dark people", ruled by benevolent leaders and possessed of large tracts of land affording the establishment of secluded rural societies. One of the cultural tools of that separation was an abiding self-identity that turned the Mennonites' sense of 'whiteness' into a guarantor of anti-modern ways. Ironically their own 'whiteness' in Latin America kept at bay the 'whiteness' that had threatened their parents and grandparents in early twentieth century western Canada.

Endnotes

- 1 Materials in this article are also examined in Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations: 'Canadian' Mennonites in a Transnational World*, 2013 and *Horse and Buggy Genius: Listening to Mennonites Contest the Modern World*, 2016.
- 2 Isaak M. Dyck, "Emigration from Canada to Mexico, Year 1922," trans. Robyn Dyck Sneath, 2005 (unpublished manuscript in possession of author). This book was published most recently as Isaak M., *Die Auswanderung der Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde von Kanada nach Mexiko 1970* (Cuauhtémoc: Imprenta Colonial, 1993), 13. See also: Isaak M. Dyck, *Anfangs Jahre der Mennoniten in Mexiko* (Cuauhtémoc: Heinrich Dyck, 1995); Isaak M. Dyck, *Hinterlassene Schriften vom Ältesten Isaak M. Dyck, Blumenfeld, Mexiko* (Cuauhtémoc: Jacob Klassen Fehr, 2000).
- 3 Johan M. Loeppky, "A Travel Report to Mexico in the year 1921," translator Robyn Dyck Sneath (unpublished manuscript in possession of author).
- 4 *Steinbach Post*, 9 May 1923. A similar description appears in a 25 February 1925 letter.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 24 October 1945.
- 6 James W. Lanning, "The Old Colony Mennonites of Bolivia: A Case Study," Masters of Science Thesis, Texas A&M University, 1971.
- 7 Letter from *Die Mennonitische Post*, 21 July 1977, quoted in Lukas Thiessen, "Land, and Heimat: The Concept of Home in the Letters of Low German-Speaking Mennonites from Bolivia in *Die Mennonitische Post*," University of Winnipeg, Unpublished Undergraduate Essay, 2009.
- 8 Letter from *Die Mennonitische Post*, 17 February, 1978, quoted in Thiessen, "Land and Heimat," 14.

Muslims-Mennonite Encounters in Imperial Russia

By Aileen Friesen, Waterloo, Ontario

In 1891, Mennonites from the Molochna settlement founded a new colony on a tract of land purchased east of the Volga River. The settlement of Neu-Samara included fourteen villages, one of which, Krassikov, was located on the opposite side of the Tock River from the Bashkir village of Juldashewo. The Bashkirs were primarily Sunni Muslims of Turkic origin, the majority of whom focused their energy on their herds of horses, cattle, sheep, and goats. Growing up in Krassikov, Peter Kornelsen recalled the generosity of these Muslim neighbours, as they invited Mennonites to take tea in their homes, as well as the aural manifestations of Islam present in daily life, such as the call to prayer, every morning and evening, from the mosque across the river.¹ Across the empire—in Molochna, Crimea, Kuban, Terek, Ufa, Neu-Samara, Orenburg, Slavgorod, Pavlodar, and Aulia Ata—Mennonites settled next to established Muslim communities, who practised a variety of nomadic, semi-nomadic, and settled lifestyles. These interactions revealed the ways in which Mennonites benefited from their

settler status; however, despite the privileged position of Mennonites, local conditions and dynamics, as well as the cultural traditions of each group performed a significant role in determining and shaping their relations.

Muslims formed the second largest religious group in the empire. According to the 1897 census, Muslims in the empire numbered over 13 million. The extension of Imperial Russia's borders through the incorporation of territories on its periphery contributed to the growth of the Muslim population. The Russian state subdued these regions through a variety of methods, from the co-option of local elites to full-scale war. Such policies created opportunities for land-seeking peasants—not only Mennonites, but also Ukrainians, Germans, Russians, and others—to take advantage of the state's desire to integrate the newly conquered territories of New Russia, Crimea, the Caucasus, Siberia, and Central Asia between the late 18th to early 20th centuries. In these territories, Mennonites settled near established Muslim populations (such as the Nogai, Kazakhs, Tatars, and Bashkirs). Driven by their primary concern with



The handwritten note at the back of this photo simply names the two men as “2 Tatars in Ekaterinoslav Gouvernment” suggesting they lived near the Chortitza Colony. Image Credit: Bethel College Library and Archives.

who found their access to the land restricted by the arrival of this new group.⁴ In these portrayals of early life, it is rarely acknowledged that Mennonites disrupted the land practices of the local population. The Nogai followed a lifestyle that mirrored the environmental conditions of the steppe: the seasonal pasturelands for their livestock allowed them to counteract the drought conditions of the region.⁵ Such compensatory measures were jeopardized with the appearance of settlers and their proprietary understanding of the land.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, competition for land pushed Mennonites into new regions of the empire. Mennonites highly prized affordable land, which became increasingly difficult to find in the territory west of the Urals. J.D. Enns emphasized this economic factor to explain the movement of Mennonites to Samara, Orenburg, Ufa, and beyond the Urals, predicting that this intense desire for land would lead Mennonites to the furthest reaches of the eastern edges of the Russian empire.⁶ For Enns, this contact between west and east, which included the original settlement of Mennonites in southern Russia, represented the civilizing force of agricultural development. In contrast to Enns, most Mennonites shied away from celebrating their tilling of virgin lands as a victory for civilization and instead emphasized the

prosaic themes of land, crops, and weather in their descriptions of their new settlements, as Hans Werner has demonstrated in the case of Siberia.⁷

In Siberia, the Russian state accommodated the growing settler population by confiscating lands assigned to the indigenous Kazakhs. In the Kulunda steppe, where Mennonites established the Slavgorod settlement, the state opened a large portion of the Kazakh pasturelands as it was designated as being surplus to the needs of the Kazakhs. By 1912, the Kulunda steppe was bustling with settler activity, according to state reports, as Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians had established villages on this land formerly belonging to the Kazakhs. Prime Minister Stolypin and the Head of the Main Administration of Land Management and Agriculture, Aleksandr Krivoshein, argued that the reduction of Kazakh land was justified since the presence of settlers would help marketize the land and its produce, which would in turn benefit the local indigenous population.⁸ In reality, these actions constrained the traditional land use of Kazakhs who habitually allowed their cattle to roam freely. They now found their access to pastureland restricted by the fields of Mennonites, who resented the damage inflicted on their crops by these animals. Both groups stood their ground, with the Mennonites imprisoning



The famous painting by Ilya Repin portraying the reply of the Zaporzhian Cossacks to the ultimatum of the Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire to submit to Turkish rule in 1676, even though the Cossacks had defeated the Ottomans in battle. The Zaporzhian Cossacks lived in the area that would become the Chortitza Colony and were disbanded by the Russian Empire about the time that Mennonites established the Chortitza Colony in 1789. Image Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

any Kazakh animals that wandered over their land, only to release them after a stern warning to the owner.⁹ Kazakhs found their own ways to retaliate against the restrictions imposed on their traditions by the presence of Mennonites. A resident of the village of Zabarovka established by Mennonites in 1907, recalled a fire that tore through the grasslands almost wiping out the village. To stop the fire, Mennonites prayed for rain and ploughed furrows around the town. Although it was never proven, there was a rumour that the Kazakhs had started to fire to show their displeasure with the new settlers.¹⁰

Economic relations defined much of the interaction between Mennonites and their Muslim neighbours. Across the empire, Mennonites consistently entrusted their livestock to Muslim herders who were viewed as experts in this task. For instance, in the Kuban settlement, Mennonites employed Circassians as herdsmen to take the horses out on the steppe, arguing that such a duty could not be assigned to a German or a Russian as only a Circassian had the vigilance and the skill to care for the herd.¹¹ Yet these relations were not unidirectional, with only Muslims benefiting from the economic activities of the Mennonites. As John Staples has shown, in the Molochna region, the sheep economy established strong economic ties between the Nogai and Mennonites, with the herds of the Nogai growing considerably during this time.¹² Mennonites also profited from building projects in the villages of the Nogai. For example, an account book for the building of a mosque in the Nogai village of Akkerman in 1850 lists payments to Mennonites for materials and expertise.¹³

Many Mennonites showed a level of indifference to the religious identity of Muslim neighbours (and, in fairness, Christian neighbours as well). Peter Wiens, one of the first settlers to Siberia rarely mentioned the Kazakhs in his published descriptions of Siberia, as he reassured readers that this indigenous population hardly posed a threat to settlers since the Kazakhs were “too lazy” even to engage in thievery.¹⁴ According to Enns, the lands of Western Siberia were endless and empty, with only a small population of Kazakhs and Cossacks who both showed little aptitude for sophisticated agriculture.¹⁵ This unfavourable association of the agricultural capabilities of Kazakhs (Muslims) with Cossacks (primarily Christians) indicates that factors other than religion formed the foundation for Mennonites to judge their neighbours. Helmut Anger, who travelled through western Siberia visiting German villages, made a similar observation as he recalled his interaction with a group of Mennonite farmers and a Kazakh coachman. Anger caught a ride with the group; during the journey, the owner of the wagon informed Anger of the high level of confidence he had for his coachman, even sending him alone with several hundred roubles to Semipalatinsk for kerosene and other goods. This was a task, he claimed, that he would never entrust to a Russian.¹⁶

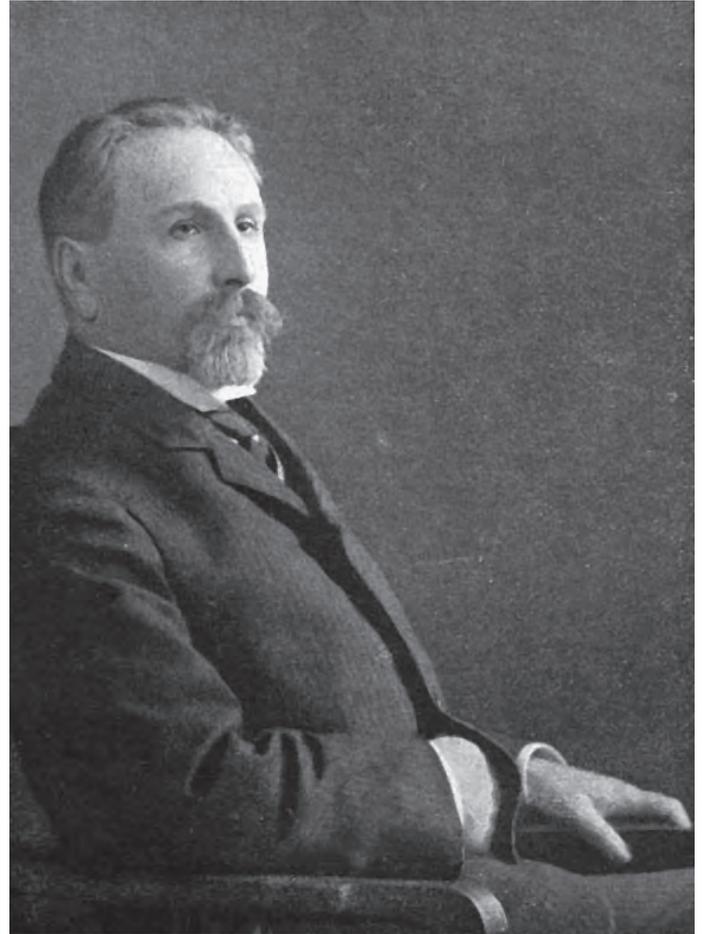
As they interacted with their Muslim neighbours, Mennonites demonstrated a strong belief in the obligation of the Russian state to protect not only their communities, but also their property. Despite the strong mythology of Mennonites’ self-sufficiency, they readily and frequently appealed to



Piotr Stolypin was a determined monarchist, but also the initiator of major land reforms in the late Russian Empire. He was appointed Prime Minister in 1906 and was assassinated in 1911. Image Credit: Library of Congress, George Grantham Bain Collection, File no. ggbain.07327, Wikipedia Commons.

Russian state officials for help. In the case of the Molochna settlement, rumours started circulating among Mennonites prepared to migrate that the land was infertile and that their lives would be in danger from attacks by the “Tatars.” In his communication with officials St. Petersburg, Leontius von Trefurt reported that he had assuaged Mennonite fears by communicating that the land was indeed fertile and that Tsar Alexander I had assigned soldiers to the region to guarantee their security.¹⁷ Over a hundred years later, Mennonites once again appealed to the state for protection from their neighbours by sending three representatives (J.J. Nikkel, C.P. Toews, and Hermann Neufeld) from the Terek settlement in the Caucasus to St. Petersburg. An audience with Prime Minister Piotr Stolypin, during which they expressed their discontent with the level of violence, corruption, and thievery experienced by Mennonite settlers, resulted in the Russian military employing violence against the local Muslim population in order “to protect” Mennonites in the region.¹⁸

It is difficult to judge Mennonite thoughts about Islam as they seldom referred to the faith of their neighbours. One exception is the ethnographic report on the Nogai written by Johann Cornies, which was published in the Russian journal *Teleskop*. Cornies recognized the deep commitment of the Nogais to Islam, reporting “The Nogais are Muslims without exception. There are eleven principal mosques with minarets... in the district and all villages have places for prayer. In matters



Alexander Krivoshein was the Minister of Agriculture between 1908 and 1915. He worked under Stolypin to implement the Stolypin land reforms. Image Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

of religion, they are under the authority of the superior Mufti in the Crimea...[The Mullahs] sound the call to prayers, pray over the sick... and are present at weddings, sacrifices and funerals.”¹⁹ He further notes that the Nogai were filled with pride in their people and ancestors; for them “Christians [were] not even worthy of consideration.”²⁰ Despite their understanding of Christians as beneath them, the Nogai, according to Cornies, lavished hospitality on any guest, regardless of their religion.²¹ In other words, the Nogai adhered strongly to the Islamic tradition of generously entertaining their guests and this generosity was a sign of their faith and not necessarily an indication of respect for Mennonites.

Historical sources also reveal acts of neighbourly kindness by Muslims towards these settlers who arrived suddenly in the region. In the province of Semipalatinsk, the Kazakhs showed hospitality to lost and endangered Mennonites when snowstorms reduced visibility along the road to Pavlodar, making the route impassable. Friendly relations, according to one Mennonite, were established after Mennonites confirmed to the Kazakhs that they too believed in one God, after which the Kazakhs referred to the Mennonites as “brothers.”²² This issue of monotheism appeared to have been quite important to the Kazakhs. In the settlement of Aulie Ata, Mennonite Brethren missionaries encountered resistance against the concept of the trinity by the Kazakhs, as they insisted that they could only believe in one God.²³



A Kazakh family inside a Yurt, the traditional home of nomadic Kazahks, 1911. Photo Credit: Sergei Ivanevich Borosov, Wikipedia Commons.

The Mennonites who participated in the Great Trek to Central Asia in 1880 benefitted from the knowledge and expertise of the local Muslim population. Countless times they helped Mennonites find water, an issue of life or death while travelling across the desert.²⁴ They also showed a willingness to share religious space. Elizabeth Schultz recounts how they received permission to bury their dead in a corner of a Muslim cemetery. Schultz describes the mutual “astonishment” at each other’s burial practices: Mennonites could not understand why Muslims buried their dead without coffins, in standing and kneeling positions. In turn, Muslims viewed the Mennonite practice of burying their dead horizontally in coffins as a serious mistake that would interfere with resurrection.²⁵ At one stop, the local Muslim community allowed Mennonites to use the mosque for church services.²⁶ This was not the first time a mosque had offered religious shelter to Mennonites as the Mennonite Brethren believers held a service in a vacant Nogai mosque in the early years of the movement in the Molochna region.²⁷

Muslims and Mennonites lived as neighbours across the Russian empire. Little attention has been paid to these interactions, in part, because only sporadic references exist in the historical record. The references in Mennonite writings that do exist are laden with Mennonite moral judgements based on their own culture without acknowledging how the broader context of Russian imperial rule, directly and dramatically shaped relations. Nonetheless, the privileged position of Mennonites was not the only factor that determined interactions between these groups. Local conditions and dynamics as well as the cultural traditions of each group performed a significant role

in shaping how these relations unfolded.

Endnotes

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- 6 J.D. Enns, “West Siberien,” *Mennonitische Rundschau*, March 19, 1902, 1.
- 7 Hans Werner, “Siberia in the Mennonite Imagination, 1880-1914: Land, Weather, Markets,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 30 (January 2012): 159–72.
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- 14 P. Wiens, “Aus Omsk,” *Odessaer Zeitung* 93, April 23/May 6, 1900, 3.
- 15 Enns, “West Siberien.”
- 16 Helmut Anger, *Die Deutschen in Sibirien: Reise durch die deutschen Dörfer Westsibiriens* (Berlin: Ost-Europa-Verlag, 1930), 31.
- 17 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA), f.383, op.29, d.232, ll.18ob-19.
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- 19 Harvey L. Dyck, John R. Staples, and Ingrid I. Epp, eds., *Transformation on the Southern Ukrainian Steppe. Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies. Vol 1: 1812-1835* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 468.
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- 22 Fast, 233.
- 23 Fred Richard Belk, *The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia, 1880-1884* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1976), 146.
- 24 Jacob Klaassen, *Asienreise II: 1880-1884*, trans. Henry Klaassen, (Oshawa: 2011), 12.
- 25 Elizabeth Unruh Schultz, “What a Heritage: Autobiography of Mrs. Elizabeth Schultz Nee Unruh,” trans. Annie Schultz Keyes, 1950, 30. Finding a place to bury their dead proved difficult. In Samarkand, a Russian priest objected to the idea of burying a Mennonite in the Russian cemetery. See Franz Bartsch, *Our Trek to Central Asia* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1993), 78.
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Mennonite History For Young People

Creating a Series of Mennonite History Readers for Young People

By Rosabel Fast, Toronto, Ontario

For three years, the Old Colony Mennonites in Canada had looked for land. They had searched all over, in the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Quebec and finally in Mexico. This gave the people a lot of time to think and worry. They had to wait until September 19, 1921. On that day this telegram arrived from El Paso, Texas, on the border of Chihuahua, Mexico: "100000 HECTARES OF LAND BOUGHT IN CHIHUAHUA MEXICO."

How does one go about creating a series of Mennonite history readers for young people? I can only speak for myself. For me the idea started several years ago, when Eddy Plett from Chihuahua, Mexico walked up to Abe Warkentin's desk in the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada office in Winnipeg to make a request. Abe Warkentin was director of MCC's Low German program. Eddy Plett was the manager of Centro Escolar, the Education Centre for the *Kleine Gemeinde* school system in Mexico based in the Los Jagueyes Colony. Eddy wondered if MCC might send a teacher to Mexico to assist them in upgrading their school materials. For Abe Warkentin the answer to the request was obvious. The question of "improving schools" had already been on his mind for some time.

I believe Eddy and the community he represented may well have had in mind someone like Harvey Barkman. As I recall, Mr. Barkman was a soft-spoken retired school teacher who had some time earlier taught a teacher training course at Los Jagueyes. The course had been well received. But, instead Abe Warkentin approached me to take on the position. Having recently completed a graduate degree in Education, I had undergone some upgrading of my own. I was full of new ideas and *many* ideals: about history, communities and schools. I had not yet had time to try out these ideals.

But things turned out well. Three and a half years later, Centro Escolar had a new series of German readers for use in the *Kleine Gemeinde* school system of Mexico: *Meine Welt, Unsere Welt* (My World, Our World) and *Die Weite Welt* (The Wide World). These readers were, and still are, being used in various other school systems, including Old Colony Mennonite private schools in Ontario.

Approximately six months after the completion of that project with Centro Escolar, I was invited by the D. F. Plett

Historical Foundation to submit a proposal for writing a Mennonite History for Young People (MHFYP). I accepted the invitation, wrote the proposal and the Plett Foundation board accepted my plan. I'm sure the Centro Escolar environment was in the back of my mind when I wrote the proposal: a school materials bookstore, a workroom with computers and printer, a typist and a small printing press, all in one space. During my work on that project, there had also been an advisory committee to oversee the project. I had been appreciated for the knowledge I brought to the project, thanked warmly for my assistance, cautioned, given plenty of advice and re-directed when I headed in a wrong direction.

For the MHFYP project, I had a generous funder in the Plett Foundation, a project committee, the Foundation's Executive Director Hans Werner to consult as needed, and my own home office with a new computer and a printer with scanner. But this time I worked very independently. Although I was not without support, I had little idea how solitary that would feel at times.

My History

My first encounter with formal history was in Grade Five. For reasons known only to ten-year-olds, it was cool that year to "hate" history. We even coined what we considered a very clever nickname for the subject. By combining the first syllable of history with a somewhat smutty Low German word, we came up with something that sounded like

'disgusting history'. I was right in there with the other grade fivers "hating" history. At the same time, however, I thoroughly enjoyed every history lesson Mrs. Wiebe taught us that year. I did hate history once, for one year in high school. Our textbook was a heavy, light brown tome, with many pages of fine print. We were assigned long sections to read in preparation for each class. The teaching method was strictly lecture.

But that year was an exception. I find discovering things about the past exciting, especially when I can see the direct influence of specific pieces of history on my world or the wider world around me. History also provides us with important missing pieces from the past that inform our present and provide direction for the future. I believe that the past, present and future are all part of who we are. As we live in the present and look ahead into the future, we need guidance: from God, wise teachers, family, friends and from the knowledge stored



*Rosabel Fast is a curriculum development professional and author of *Leaving Canada*. Photo Credit: Kerry Fast.*

in our own minds. Another word for that knowledge could be “history,” information about the past that informs our present and future.

Getting Started With Community Research

Writing history begins with research and the more solid the research the better the history. My research for the MHFYP project had two components: community and academic. I began with the community, the potential users of the history I planned to write. I set out to meet a range of people, as many as I could think of, who might be interested in a new Mennonite history written for a younger audience. I visited Mennonite schools – both private and public – and spoke with school committee members, directors, principals, teachers, school division consultants and other potential users. I listened carefully and recorded the ideas I gleaned from the visits. Interest was high and the people I spoke with all had ideas and opinions about what this history should look like. It appeared that the Plett Foundation had chosen well in its decision to initiate their new project.

Of course, I could only meet a sampling of people, mostly in Ontario, and also some in Alberta and Manitoba. Nova Scotia, Kansas or Texas in the United States, Chihuahua in Mexico, Riva Palacios in Bolivia, and other regions where Old Colony Mennonites attend classes, go to school, or educate themselves as best as they are able, were well beyond the scope of my time-frame. Perhaps I will meet some of the folks in these far-flung regions later on, as the MHFYP project continues to unfold.

Academic Research

During this phase of interviewing and visiting with community members, I set out to read any and everything I could find to create a set of history readers that would be interesting, relevant, meaningful, well researched and as accurate as possible. I believe history for young people should be just as well researched and written as a university history textbook. Once I got into the sources, all the while still meeting more interested community members, I found it hard to stop reading. I needed enough information to envision the scope of the project and establish which Mennonite history I would write. But at some point, a friend who has done a lot of research and writing herself, said to me, “There comes a time when you have stop researching, stop reading and interviewing people. Close the door and start writing.” And that is what I did, with some relief. Once the research door is shut, the information that has accumulated starts to fit together, sometimes almost on its own.

Young and Not so Young Readers

After reading enough Mennonite history to feel that I had an overview of the big picture and a good idea of how I would organize the material, I could move back into the “real” world: the world of schools, students, school subjects, teachers, principals, other educators and parents. My experience as a teacher has often been with children, and later with adults, who faced challenges in public school systems. Many children struggled in English schools because they were not fluent in the language of instruction. Some students had never learned to read as children and came back as adults to learn. Some came from homes that were too poor and stressed to adequately support their education. Others had trouble fitting in when the schools seemed foreign to their own culture. As a teacher, it was clear

to me that there was nothing wrong with these students’ minds. There was often something wrong with the systems they were trying to fit into.

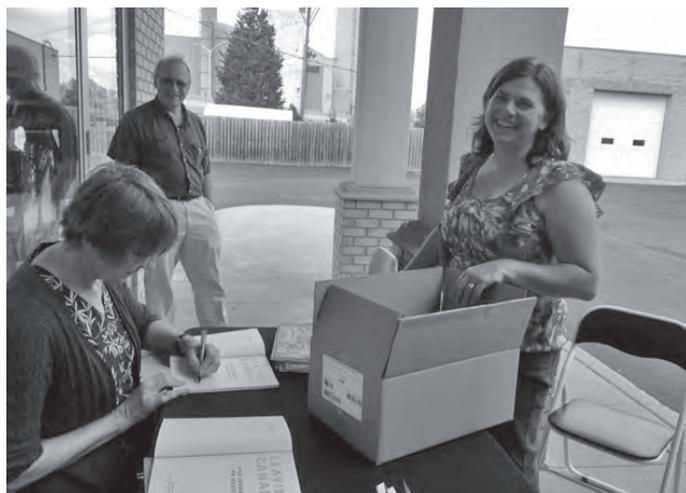
Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico tells the history of a group of Mennonites whose history is not well represented in school curricula. The book is written in uncomplicated English and includes as many interesting tidbits of history as I could fit. I believe that history can be especially profound when presented through stories. I was pleasantly surprised at how many stories I was able to find, tucked away in my sources. These stories will appeal to both younger, and older first time readers.

Why Old Colony Mennonite History?

Consider the vast extent of Mennonite history. The Mennonite story begins on January 21, 1525 in Switzerland. On that day, a small roomful of Christians were ready to make a very bold move. All of them had been baptized into their state church as infants. All of them believed that they needed to be baptized again. Only as adults had they come to understand what this important act meant. On that day in 1525, in the face of likely persecution and for some, death, they re-baptized each other.

That was almost five hundred years ago and Mennonite history continues into the present. Since 1525, Anabaptists, some of whom later became known as Mennonites, have spread in large numbers across the world. Today Mennonite history is set in locations around the world, including Russia and other countries in Europe, Canada, the United States, Mexico and across Latin America, India, Africa, China.

Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico is a very small piece of a very long history. It is the first of a series of readers that feature the Old Colony stream of Mennonite history. This content decision had already been made, to some extent, when I started working on the project. Although Old Colony Mennonites are a very large group, less has been written about their history than that of many other Mennonites. Among this group in Canada, the United States, Mexico and other Latin American countries are many children and young people. In Canada many of these children attend private schools. Many others go to public schools. Adults are also going “back to school,” to learn English or to upgrade their education to a high school level.



Rosabel Fast signing books for an area educator at a book launch in Leamington, Ontario in June 2016. Hans Werner, Executive Director of the Plett Foundation looks on. Photo Credit: Kerry Fast.

Conclusion

The mandate of the Plett Foundation is to support the research, writing and distribution of the histories of the conservative Mennonites who came to North America in the 1870s and their descendants throughout the Americas. The Mennonite History for Young People extends that mandate to include younger readers and those for whom English is a new language. Certainly telling the story of those who moved to Mexico in 1922, honours the legacy of the Foundation's originator, Delbert F. Plett who had a vision for producing Mennonite history that was outside of the box: to write about groups of conservative Mennonites whose history was less well known or about whom little had been written.



I believe that having access to one's own history is important and also that people who are considered to be "too young," or do not know English very well, are not keen on reading, or have little academic background should not be barred from learning about and participating in this history. *Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico*, volume one in the Mennonite History for Young People series, is my effort at writing a piece of history that supports this belief in making history accessible to all.

In am indeed grateful to the Centro Escolar for my first immersion in writing a history curriculum in a Mennonite context. I also want to thank the Plett Foundation for envisioning the project and then encouraging and supporting my extensive plan for a full series of nine books. As *Preservings* readers, I also need to thank you for your interest in what we believe will be a great new resource for classrooms certainly, and also for any and all who are curious about their own history, or the history of their parents, students, friends, and clients, and any others who believe, as I do, that knowing about the past is important, even essential, for negotiating the present and engaging confidently with the future as it unfolds.

Endnotes

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Book Reviews

Leaving Canada:

The *Leaving Canada*, the first volume of the Mennonite History for Young People was launched in Aylmer, Leamington and Kitchener-Waterloo in June 2016. We have asked two childhood education professionals to review this first volume. (ed.)

Marcela Durán

is an educator with extensive experience in Teacher Education and Public Education in Ontario, in the areas of Equity in the Curriculum, Curriculum Development, Administration of Programs, and Professional Development design and delivery. She currently teaches in the Concurrent Teacher Education Program, Faculty of Education, York University. Between 2004 and 2014 she coordinated the first year Community Field Experience Practicum for teacher candidates. Marcela would like to be known as a Social Justice and Human Rights Educator who advocates for the rights of children and families in multicultural-multiracial societies.

I read with great interest, Rosabel Fast's *Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico*, Volume One of the series "Mennonite History for Young People," and learned a great deal in the process. *Leaving Canada* tells the story of the move from Canada to Mexico by Old Colony Mennonites between 1921 and 1924. It focuses on the establishment of the Swift Current and Manitoba colonies in the state of Chihuahua.

The story is told in an engaging and carefully documented way. We learn about Old Colony Mennonites as a people, and the reasons why they felt they had to leave Canada to preserve their culture, belief system and modes of schooling their children. The reader comes to understand the difficult decision making that was involved in the process of moving: the complicated negotiations with the Mexican government, acquiring the 'Privilegium' and the ensuing move to Mexico.

With features like historic photographs, maps and excerpts from an old journal, the writer invites the reader to witness the emotionally trying times that the community experienced. The reader comes to understand what it must have meant for the people to decide to sell their properties, organize travel by train for whole families and their farm animals, and move through the pioneering stage of establishing villages on the Swift Current and Manitoba colonies.

The encounter with Mexicans is told in a careful, thoughtful, well documented way that is also easily accessible to the imagination of a young audience. The introduction to *Leaving Canada* opens with an invitation to young readers to understand how social history works and how it should be understood: "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" (p. ix).

The book, although dedicated to young audiences, is also a rich source of information for adults as it highlights a chapter of Canadian people's history that is rarely explored in history textbooks. The book seems to be designed not only with young people in mind but also the teachers and parents who will be reading it with the children. Teachers will benefit greatly

from this resource as primary research material that should help them guide young people into further explorations of the history of their people.

From the first pages on, careful pedagogical insight is apparent. For example, the section “Words, Words, Words” in the Introduction shows the reader how to understand the content, with a guide to the writing conventions used in the book, such as bolded words, italicized words and asterisks. This approach and conversational style invites children to think and learn. For example, “These are words you may not know. Don’t worry, the meaning of the word usually comes after the word.” and “Do you like to learn new words from another language? If yes...”

Throughout the book, visual resources help readers understand the content of each chapter. Photographs, art work, maps, and green, orange and mauve textboxes call attention to important facts about the story being told. Green and orange boxes raise points to “think about,” from interesting details, such as the Mexican president being left handed, to inviting young readers to think about the faith that helped the community through trying times. Blue textboxes with the title, “This might also interest you...” entice children to research interesting facts. Finally, vignettes in the mauve boxes bring in the voices of Mennonite and also Mexican children, illustrating the promise in the Introduction that the book, “is about people who were *alive* in the past.”

In reading *Leaving Canada* children will not only learn about the heroic journey of Old Colony Mennonites to Mexico in 1922. They will also become curious to read the next volume, where, as promised in the last chapter, they will hear more about the establishment of the Hague Colony in Durango between 1924 and 1927.

Robyn Sneath

is currently completing her PhD in Education at Oxford University where she is part of the Religion, Philosophy and Education research group. Her thesis topic is a study of Old Colony perceptions of schooling. Robyn is originally from Winnipeg and has been the recipient of numerous academic awards. Her undergraduate degree at the University of Winnipeg included Mennonite Studies, German and Geography. She has been a high school Social Studies teacher and was a participant in a Plett Foundation workshop that read early versions of the first volume and commented on how the Mennonite History for Young People series was conceived. Robyn lives in Brandon, Manitoba with her family.

Leaving Canada is an immensely welcome volume and fills a major gap in the literature—a clearly written, accessible historical account of Mennonite emigration from Canada intended for a young audience. Though the work is presented as a sort of textbook, it reads much like a story, with primary source material in the forms of diaries and memoirs interspersed

with creative vignettes, both of which help to create a patchwork of images from which the reader may conjure the story of the Mennonites leaving Canada for Mexico in the 1920s. Authentic materials in the form of photographs of the settlers on the journey, delegate David Rempel’s diary, and extensive passages from Ältester Isaak Dyck’s memoir all contribute to this vibrant, quilted image.

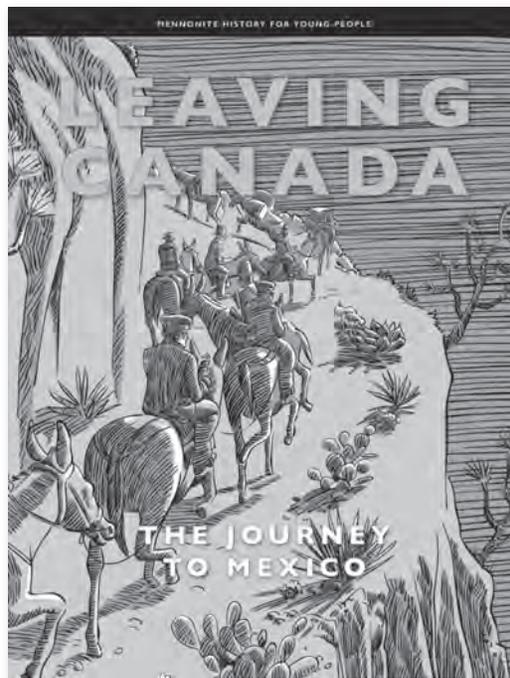
The book is beautifully presented; the typeface is clean, the sections are well-marked, and the illustrations, maps, and photographs all create a text that is accessible and inviting. The introduction is particularly helpful; Fast sets up the narrative well by providing a brief history of the Old Colony Mennonites, ranging from their time in Russia to ‘what makes a good colony’ (9). Throughout the text she highlights words that are potentially new to the reader in bold formatting and presents them in an index at the end. She also includes phrases in *Plautdietsch*, High German, and Spanish, with translations in the footnotes, but instructs the readers to ignore the translations if languages do not interest them.

This personal tone creates a sense that the author is as much guide on the journey as expert on the topic.

Throughout, Fast effectively depicts the challenges of the move, and the many conflicting feelings experienced by the migrants as they sought to follow what they believed to be God’s guidance to a new homeland. She describes the terror and the thrill experienced by the Mennonites on the chartered trains as they felt the shriek and sway of a fast-moving vehicle for the first time (35). The initial apprehension in Mexico is also well depicted—the fear of encountering people with darker skin and a foreign language, armed soldiers, unyielding soil, sickness and frequent death. These struggles are balanced with a clear presentation that the migrants felt God’s provision for them throughout the journey and

settlement years (66).

Although this work will surely find a welcome place in the classrooms of Mennonite schools, I think it could have been more useful to teachers and students had the author included a section at the end of each chapter with questions prompting reflection. It is possible that Fast opted against this approach in order to maintain the widest possible readership, for example, by not directing the questions to a particular Grade level. However, by including questions or related tasks, the work would have given teachers—who, in private Mennonite schools sometimes lack formal pedagogical training—a guide for how to use the text to best effect. Perhaps a teacher’s guide, or workbook could be written as an accompanying text. Another next step would be to translate *Leaving Canada* into German so that it can be used as a text in Mennonite schools throughout Latin America. And for those whose days in the classroom is long behind them, *Leaving Canada* is nevertheless a very friendly introduction to Old Colony Mennonites and their journey from Canada to Mexico.



Articles

Saskatchewan Holdeman Mennonites respond to WWII

By Leonard Doell, Aberdeen, Saskatchewan

A number of years ago, I purchased a box of papers at a garage sale in Hague, Saskatchewan. In it, there was a black notebook that contained songs, letters and stories written in German Gothic script. Recently, I asked Esther Patkau if she would translate a few pieces of this material for me and by doing so, she helped me to appreciate the rich contents of what I want to share with you in this paper.

The story that I want to tell you is about the Unruh family from Waldheim and later from Hague and their experience in trying to be faithful followers of Christ during World War Two.



Toby Unruh was in his early twenties when the family was arrested for not registering under The National Resources Mobilization Act in 1940. Photo Credit: Leonard Doell

I want to begin by sharing something Toby Unruh, an honorary member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, wrote. This is the story of the experience that he and his family had at that time.

Toby writes:

At the turn of the century, my grandparents Cornelius and Helena Unruh emigrated to Saskatchewan Canada from Springfield, South Dakota in the USA, when my Dad was about 8 years old. They arrived in Rosthern and then staked a homestead near Waldheim by the North Saskatchewan River, before there were railroads to Waldheim and Duck Lake. My Dad was David C. Unruh, he found a girl named Helen Becker, the daughter of the Holdeman Minister Peter and Eva (Deckert) Becker. She was also born in South Dakota and by 1916 they were married and settled on the old homestead farm that came complete with telephone or speaking wires as they were called in those days. This is where I, Toby was born in 1919 and raised. Our parents started to move or run from the district schools on account of the bad and corrupted things that were taught to the children and so they left everything behind to avoid trouble with the law. Our parents belonged to the Holdeman or Church of God in Christ Mennonite Church and did not like what they saw going on in the district, so they finally ended up on an isolated spot near the South Saskatchewan River, east of Hague, Saskatchewan.

I myself was the oldest of the boys in the family and had to do most of the chores during the winter months, which included feeding and watering the livestock, as well as chopping and sawing our wood supply for the winter months. During the summer, I spent most of my day sitting on the sulky plow, getting the land ready for seeding and summer fallow. I remember when the stock market crashed in 1929 and the bottom fell out of everything, this was the beginning of the ten lost years. During 1937, we did not harvest, there was no crop, only grasshoppers. They chewed up everything, even the handles on the pitchforks. I remember when my Dad sold his number one wheat for fifteen cents a bushel and a good feed cow brought \$2.00. Our neighbour boys got married and moved in with his or her parents but there was nothing else you could do. Then slowly the turning point came and soon war broke out, which also put another hardship on us boys.

The rest of the story is now written by Toby's sister Susanna, who was one year older than Toby. She was a single woman, who had a good reputation for her hard work and being a trustworthy person, who helped many family members through their trials of sickness and death. I have also added articles from the Saskatoon *Star Phoenix* that fill in some of the pieces of her story.



Threshing crew at Waldheim Saskatchewan, David C. Unruh is one of the men on the left side of the photo. Photo Credit: M. Unruh



The David C. Unruh homestead near Waldheim, Saskatchewan. Helena (Becker) Unruh is on the photo with her daughter Susanna. Photo Credit: M. Unruh

Susanna writes:

I want to in my weakness write down a few things that have happened to us in the past. We have been faced with various difficult and sad times. In the end of the year 1940 and the beginning of the year 1941, there was a one time law sent out from the Government in August, that from the age of sixteen everyone was to be registered. Since we could not do so with good conscience, because it is written, "No one can serve two masters," and so we could not register, because we could not obey God's laws and people's laws. "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). And it is also written, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) and also "Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Also in the book of Moses it is written: "O Praise the greatness of our God" (Deut. 32:3). To God alone be honor given. And then it happened that we had been accused before the authorities. So a police man came out and investigated the case, all of which we answered with "no" and we also said that we could not do it. So immediately the policeman gave us summons papers that we should appear in court. Because we read in Matthew 10:18, "On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles," the police arrested us and took us to the Town of Hague to court, where we were interrogated. The judge read out the punishment, that each one pay \$4.25 or two weeks jail time. This time all seven of us bought ourselves free, the parents, three brothers, myself and my sister. That was September 23, 1940.

On 17 September 1940, the *Star Phoenix* reported that in addition to the Unruhs, the RCMP arrested the Becker family from Waldheim, who also refused to register. This included seven Beckers, the Aunts and Uncles and cousins to Toby Unruh. The article wrongly refers to them as Hutterites because the men wore beards and the women were dressed in black. When the RCMP attempted to get them into the automobiles to bring them before the magistrate, the Beckers asserted that they did not believe in riding in automobiles nor, in fact, using any kind of machinery for any purpose. However, they explained that they would not raise any objection if they were placed in



The Becker family on a Sunday afternoon ride. John P. and Eva in the front, Elizabeth, Annie and Helena in the back. The photo comes from a time before the Beckers came to the understanding that cars were 'worldly goods.' Photo Credit: M. Unruh

the police cars by force. The police obliged them and the party proceeded on its way to court.

Susanna Unruh goes on to write that

they then left us in peace for a brief time, about two weeks. Then they came again and arrested us because of the same issue and took us to the City of Saskatoon, father and three brothers: Tobias, Daniel and Abraham and me and my sister Elizabeth. That was October 11 1940. They left our loving Mother at home because the younger four brothers: Isaak, Jacob, Peter and Johan could not stay alone. The next day they again took us to court where the judge again read us the punishment, about \$25-\$30 dollars or two months in prison. Then we did not free ourselves by payment of money. So they took the four of us: Tobias and Daniel, myself and my sister Elizabeth, we who remained steadfast, because it was contrary to our conscience. They took the two brothers, Tobias and Daniel to the Prince Albert Prison on October 12, 1940. Also me and my sister Elizabeth, with our five dearly loved aunts, because of the same issue were taken to the women's prison in Battleford. That also was October 12, 1940.

The *Star Phoenix* reported on 11 October 1940, that the Tobias Schartner family from Dalmeny (also Holdeman) had also refused to register and had to appear before the court.

And so Adam was thrown out of the garden and evil got loose in the world," said Tobias Schartner, 62, bearded Mennonite patriarch of the Schartner family of Dalmeny district farmer, as he stood with his two sons and three daughters at the Dalmeny Schoolhouse on Thursday afternoon, all charged with the failure to register as required by the National Registration Act. Magistrate J. T. Leger however did not see the connection between the Garden of Eden and the failure to register, so Tobias was stopped just when he nicely got under way. He was fined \$5.00 and costs, with the alternative of one month in Prince Albert Jail and his two sons Thielem and Joseph the same. The daughters Elizabeth, Sarah and Lydia were each sentenced to \$2.00 and costs or two weeks in the women's jail in Battleford. None of the fines were paid and the six all went to jail. Tobias, seeking to enlighten the court as to why they would not register, anxiously sought permission to quote from the big book that he carried under his arm or from the Scriptures. The book was written in German by Thielem Von Braght [Martyrs Mirror]. He had brought it with him from the States. It contained some of the teachings of Menno, father of the Mennonite Faith, he said. 'I have listened to that at Hague, Saskatoon and Waldheim for hours and some more today in Saskatoon. I don't want to hear anymore,' Magistrate Leger said.

There was a huge cost to the families and individuals that refused to register and it brought them into direct conflict with the laws of the land. The *Star Phoenix* reported on Oct 12 1940, that Joseph and Aron Becker had appeared in court and told Judge Leger that they could not register because it was against their conscience and religion. It was the second time they had appeared on the same offence. They were fined \$25.00 and costs each and after staying in jail until after 5:00 pm Thursday afternoon, they paid their fines but still did not register. Then they left for home. They did not believe in cars

and so started to walk home the 50 miles to their farms. Joseph lived two miles northwest of Waldheim and Aron nine miles northwest. Both were strong looking men, weighing over 200 pounds. They had no food with them for the journey. Joseph arrived home at 5:00 pm Friday evening but Aron collapsed on the way and his wife came to pick him up with a wagon. The newspaper indicated they would both be charged again having still failed to register and Magistrate Leger had indicated to them that they would be given a long jail sentence the next time they appeared in court.



A sketch of Peter and Eva (Deckert) Becker by Jacob E. Friesen, Hague, Saskatchewan. Image Credit: M. Unruh.

The Unruh girls, Susan and Elizabeth, were also charged with the failure to register and also told the Magistrate that they had not registered nor would they do so. The *Star Phoenix* described them as being dressed long black dresses, black shawls and suggested they answered the courts questions meekly. "I feel that if I registered I would be eternally damned," one of them had said. "I am in your hands now" she said, addressing the magistrate. "There will be a day yet when nobody will take me away from God", she concluded. Judge Leger responded, "Yes, I know that you are in my hands and I wish it was somebody else's." He fined them each \$25.00 in costs with the alternative of two months in the women's jail in North Battleford.

The *Star Phoenix* described Joseph and Aron Becker as "big bearded farmers of the Waldheim district who had proclaimed that "cars are worldly goods and the Scriptures say that we should not be proud." Apparently up until two years before their court date, Joseph and Aron were what their neighbours referred to as regular fellows. "They went to dances and generally enjoyed themselves. They had a fine new car. Then their friends say, they got religion. The first move was to get rid of the machine of the devil, their car. And so they dug a hole in the centre of a straw stack, drove the car in, set fire to the straw and left it there."

On 20 October 1940, Tobias Schartner wrote a letter from prison to his family, directed to his oldest son Isaac. He writes,

Dear Son, It ain't allowed to write German, so I try and write English. Hire a good strong boy that's taking care of all the stock at home, if he has not work all the time, he can help you on the farm. I think it's best to feed all the pigs at the self-feeder. Lift all the troughs where they are fed now so they don't freeze on the ground, I'll pay the boy.

The second part of the letter is addressed to his wife.

From me your husband, to yourself my dear wife. I received your letter yesterday and was very glad to hear from you. I seen Joe and Thielem the first days I got in here, since then I have not seen them. Do not send anything to here. I was very afraid here but I prayed to God and he helped me, so that I can stand it. Write often to me, how everything is at home. But I can't answer, I only can write 2 letters a month. Your loving husband, Tobias Schartner.

Susanna goes on to write that,

because the parents heard nothing about the two brothers Tobias and Daniel, they went to the prison in Prince Albert and paid money to free them from the prison which was \$66.00. That was November 22, 1940. They also didn't hear much about us two sisters in Battleford because we were under stricter observation and were not allowed to write. We would not do their arrogant work, because it is written: "For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and what he does, comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away but the man who does the will of God lives forever". (1 John 2:16-17). In Ephesians 5:11, it is written: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness



The three Becker sisters (l. to r.), Helena (Becker) Unruh, Eva and Mary, the daughters of Rev. Peter and Eva (Deckert) Becker. Photo Credit: M. Unruh.

but rather expose them". When we two sisters and our five dear Aunts had put in our time there, we were freed from there, that was November 30, 1940.

On October 30 1940, Helena Unruh writes the following letter to her daughters Susanna and Elizabeth in prison.

My dearly loved children, Susanna and Elizabeth. I have eagerly waited for a letter from there but have received nothing till now. So I wish for you the grace of God and the love of Jesus Christ in a heartfelt greeting. O, dear children, in what a troublesome time we are. Yes, we need to complain to the dear Lord. Yes, let us take refuge in the Lord, who can direct all things and we want to commit ourselves to Him. Dear daughters, I have received your precious letters, which you wrote from Saskatoon. Yes, I was very happy to hear from you and that you have written so earnestly, that I am in full hope that you have turned to the Lord. Yes, let us earnestly pray to the Lord that He may rescue us from all our suffering. Yes, also for the two brothers, Tobias and Daniel. O, I have to call to God day and night. May the Lord have compassion on us and not give us more than we can take. Yes, we commit ourselves totally into the hands of the Almighty God, according to what is His holy will and as He leads us. We have heard nothing from Tobias and Daniel. I have already written three letters but they all came back. Dear children, write to us when you have the opportunity. Yes and also the two brothers Tobias and Daniel. I have also written them again, in hope that they will receive the letters. So, good night dear children. Greet also the dear sisters. Good night from your loving Mother.

Susanna then continues to tell the story.

Now the dear Lord directed it so that each one of us could return to our home, for which we praise alone the Lord God because it is written, "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). "The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord; He directs it like a water course wherever He pleases" (Proverbs 21:1). In Psalm 33:15 it says: "He directs each one's heart and He considers all their works". "His counsel is wonderful and excellent in working" (Isaiah 28:29). But they did not leave us in complete peace. The police threatened us severely. Finally they sent a spiritual bishop named D. Toews, who according to their opinion should clarify the issue and try to persuade us to do what we cannot obey. Jesus says, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them". (Matt. 7:15-16)

The *Star Phoenix* also reported on 25 Feb 1941 about the visit of Bishop David Toews to the Unruh home. According to the paper the "aged spiritual leader of the Mennonites in the district went to the Unruh home to persuade them to register. With the Bible in one hand and the Holdeman creed in the other, Mrs. Unruh out talked the Bishop, who had to leave with his mission a failure."

Susanna then writes that in the month of January,

our dear fifteen year old brother Isaak became very ill and after seven days of severe illness, he died on January 31, 1941. Because the authorities have a law for everything and that



Rev. David Toews, Bishop of the Rosenorter Mennonite Church. Susanna Unruh suggests in her account that he visited them at the request of the government. Photo Credit: Mennonite Archival Image Database, Mennonite Heritage Centre.

a doctor should be there for everyone who is sick, which we could not do. It is written, "We must obey God rather than men" and honor Him. This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord...But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him." (Jer. 17:5-7) And Moses also wrote: "I am the Lord who heals you" (Ex. 15:26). So immediately we again were brought into many difficulties. The next day after the boy's death they sent out a doctor, who investigated everything himself. The next day, two police came and also investigated everything again and even took the dead boy's body with them to the Town of Warman and there they did an act of unrighteousness, which is an abomination before God and which He will punish someday. Even though the authorities have a law that each one must bury the body of a dead person in a cemetery, they didn't allow us to bury our loved one on our own land. So we bought a plot in Blumenthal cemetery for five dollars and had him buried there on February 7, 1941. But the issue was not yet finished because we had called no doctor. So a policeman brought some papers for four people, that is our parents, for brother Tobias and sister Elizabeth that they should come to the Town of Warman for the legal investigation on February 18, which we could not do, for it is written, "They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors and all on account of my name" (Luke 21:12). So it was postponed one week. On February 25, the police came again and arrested the four and took them to the Town of Warman and only because it is against our conscience, they laid no charges on us.

The death of Isaak Unruh in his parent's home only complicated the tense relationship that the Unruh family already had with local authorities. Because he died at home and no doctor



Dr. W.I. Wilkin, respected medical Doctor from Warman, who served the community for nearly 35 years. Dr. Wilkin conducted the inquest into the death of Isaak Unruh. Photo Credit: Leonard Doell

had been called to check in on him, the Coroner Dr. Wilkin from Warman ordered an autopsy to be done and an inquest to be held. The inquest was adjourned because the Unruh's failed to appear to give their testimony and so the RCMP were contacted to bring them to the next inquest. The *Star Phoenix* reported on Feb. 25, 1941 that the RCMP would have to travel 20 miles by sleigh and that it would be the third time in five months that the Unruh's had been arrested. The autopsy showed that Isaak had died of acute appendicitis. The Unruh's had done all they could to help their son but Mrs. Unruh who clasped her hands tightly on her Bible and her finger upward said, "we are not guilty, God gives and God takes. When a man's time to die has come, he must die. No mortal should be allowed to interfere, so says God." The inquest showed that the Unruh's had done everything that they had always done when someone became ill but the Father said it did not seem to help this time. They were not accustomed to calling for a doctor. As Susanna writes, no charges were laid against them because of the inquest.

On 6 March 1941, the *Star Phoenix* reported that the Saskatchewan Government had been reimbursed by the Becker, Unruh and Schartner families for the board and lodging that they received in jail. The Government received money orders amounting to \$80.00 from these families along with a letter that said the following:

Since we could not comply with your wish, namely registration because the scripture and our conscience would not per-

mit. God the Lord hath permitted us to be delivered into your hands through your power. From October 11 to November 30, we have not eaten our own bread but that of the government. Because we read in II Thessalonians 3:8 "Neither did we eat any man's bread for naught and God the master has richly blessed us in all things, we send you a money order for the government.

The Attorney General returned the money to them. The *Star Phoenix* also reported that David Unruh, at the conclusion of the inquest into the death of his son Isaak, tried to give the RCMP constable \$30.00, to reimburse him for the labour he had performed in connection with the arrest. The officer of course refused the money.

Conclusion

As I worked on this story, I thought about the many responses that Mennonites had to World War Two. I thought about my Dad and the other young Mennonite men who had registered with the government, went for a medical, stood before a judge to defend their choices and then worked in lumber camps, National Parks, mental hospitals or taught in Indian Residential Schools. Their lives were not easy as they stood for their faith, against a government and many peers who said they should enlist. Many Mennonite boys also enlisted for a variety of reasons. I was deeply moved by the stance of the Unruh, Schartner and Becker families, as I learned about their struggle to be faithful to their understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Christ and the cost they paid in living that out. I have only recorded the events from 1940 to 1942, there is more research that is needed to be done on what happened to them throughout the rest of the war. I knew Toby Unruh and appreciated his friendship but this is a story I never knew about him. If he were alive today, I would love to ask him more about this experience and the impact it had on him and his family.

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School of Suffering: Views on Death and Dying in the Kleine Gemeinde Tradition

By Ralph Friesen, Nelson, British Columbia

The Kleine Gemeinde Worldview

The Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* (KG) as an entity has been thoroughly described and documented in the many books and articles of the late Delbert Plett. In his exhaustive research and writing, Delbert brought to light many things that were previously unknown and unacknowledged. We might even say that he single-handedly created a new KG identity. Delbert was devoted to redeeming the reputation of what he thought of as a spurned minority group within the larger Mennonite story. Whether it is reasonable now to use such a phrase as ‘Kleine Gemeinde worldview’—how would it be different from a ‘Bergthaler’ worldview, or an ‘Old Colony’ worldview?—I do not know for sure. But I’m using the phrase anyway, keeping my focus quite narrow, because I come from the KG, and I’m loath to speak for other traditions, even when they may be very close to my own.

For all that, I might well be guilty of inventing a ‘reality’ which never existed, and this article could perhaps be as well

filed under ‘fiction’ as ‘history.’ In any case, I hope that the reader will come away with new information and even a slightly new perspective on the issue we are looking at.

This is the issue: death and dying as experienced and written and spoken about in the lives of Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite pioneers who came to Manitoba in 1874. In the latter part of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, these pioneers passed on, and newspapers like the *Nordwesten*, *Menmonitische Rundschau*, *Steinbach Post*, and a KG publication called the *Christlicher Familienfreund* published death notices and obituaries. Family members also gave accounts in diaries and letters, some of which are published in Delbert Plett’s series of books on the KG. So we have a written record to examine.

With words, we tell a story, we make meaning, without which we cannot truly live. Of all that threatens our sense of meaning, nothing does so more than the knowledge of our mortality. Like other Mennonites, the KG depended upon a meaning structure derived almost entirely from the Bible.



The Last Judgement, an engraving by Pieter van der Heyden after a drawing by Pieter van Bruegel, the Elder.

Image Credit: www.metmuseum.org

And, although they had emerged from the Reformation with a traumatic history of persecution and suffering at the hands of the Holy Roman Empire in the Netherlands in the 16th and 17th centuries, they still shared in the general culture of northern Europe, and their understanding of the universe and their place in it was not so very different from that promoted by the Medieval and Renaissance Roman Catholic church. You could believe in adult baptism instead of infant baptism and be persecuted for it while still sharing with your persecutors a conviction that humans were created by a God who wants a relationship with His creation and intends redemption for us all.

One of the notions carried on by the KG, central also to the larger Christian tradition, was that life does not actually conclude when we die. The soul lives on. The KG participated in the larger prevailing story of medieval Europe, as summarized by Ernest Becker:

When man lived securely under the canopy of the Judeo-Christian world picture he was part of a great whole; to put it in our terms, his cosmic heroism was completely mapped out, it was unmistakable. He came from the invisible world into the visible one by the act of God, did his duty to God by living out his life with dignity and faith, marrying as a duty, procreating as a duty, offering his whole life—as Christ had—to the Father. In turn he was justified by the Father and rewarded with eternal life in the invisible dimension.¹

At least, the reward was hoped for. I will say more about “cosmic heroism” shortly.

However sheltered they felt under the canopy of their world picture, traditional Mennonites naturally still shared the universally human fear of death and the pain of loss when loved ones passed on. For the most part, however, they kept these natural emotions out of their obituaries, in favour of a narrative both humble and perhaps unconsciously triumphant.

Keeping Account

Most of the earliest accounts of pioneer deaths are not obituaries at all, but simply death notices, so that relatives and friends, including those still in Russia, may be informed. In the November 5, 1880 issue of the *Rundschau*, the anonymous correspondent devoted two lines to the death of Steinbach pioneer Mrs. Johann R. Reimer, nee Anna Warkentin (b. 1844). But even here, we learn something about the circumstances and the person: “In the evening she was in good spirits and going about her tasks, and the next morning at 5 o’clock she died in childbirth.”

Mortality rates in those pre-antibiotic days were of course higher than they are now, and women died in childbirth, and children in infancy, at a much higher rate as well. Glen Klassen has noted that the infant mortality rate of those times hovered between 100 and 150 deaths per 1000 live births, compared to a present rate of 6.3 per 1000. Death was present for these people, much more forcefully than we can easily imagine today. When

fatal illness swept through the settlements, like the diphtheria epidemics of 1884 and 1910-11, human vulnerability became brutally evident.²

What we call an ‘obituary’, the traditional Mennonites called a *Lebensverzeichnis*, literally, an account or inventory of a life. They were in the habit of tracking interactions in all things financial and material, in large, bound account books, and this record-keeping penchant extended also to spiritual matters. Besides, each person would have to give an account of his or her life to God, to the last detail of every idle word spoken, on the great Day of Judgement. The *Lebensverzeichnungen* roughly prefigured a pattern of the account-giving to come in the invisible world.

Most of the obituaries observe a more-or-less set protocol, giving the person’s place and date of birth, dates of baptism and marriage, number of years married, number of surviving children (generally named, but not always), and the number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Almost always, with that Mennonite predilection for exactitude, the person’s age is given to the day, as for example “old Mrs. Peter B. Friesen,” nee Elisabeth Barkman (b. 1841) of Neuanlage, who “reached the age of 75 years, 10 months and 4 days.”³ Usually the day of the funeral is also given, along with the names of ministers who presided, and occasionally with a mention of the number of mourners attending. Names and numbers are set forth as significant.

Even as a young boy, Steinbach inventor Isaac D. Plett was absorbed with details of time when called in to witness the dying moments of his grandfather, KG Aeltester Abraham L. Dueck (1841-1899) of Kleefeld:

It was July 18, 1899, in the late afternoon. I was shoved into the room along with others. We all stood by the bed. Age 12 at the time, I was seized by the earnestness of the moment. On the wall at the foot end of the bed hung the big clock, and at the other end stood Dr. Harrison with his snow white beard and hair. The last minutes went by quickly and then I heard the doctor say: “It is all over now.” [in English] I can still see him pressing Grandfather’s eyelids shut. Then I looked at the clock and saw the hour hand pointing at 4.⁴

Time marches on in linear fashion, and stops for no one, culminating in death. This tragic consciousness seemed to be prevalent among Mennonites as for Europeans in general.



Isaac D. Plett invented a machine used for reinforcing wax foundation that enabled the C.T. Loewen firm to be a leader in the bee equipment industry for 25 years. Image Credit: *Reflections on Our Heritage*, 115.

Heroic Suffering

Rather than emphasizing the person’s life and accomplishments as is the common practice today, almost all of the accounts detail the person’s sickness and suffering, and the moment of death. The usual term for the moment of death is *Erlösung*, which translates variously as release, redemption, deliverance, or salvation. The suffering is never described as

a curse. Instead, it is framed as necessary, a kind of refining process, readying the person for salvation. East Reserve teacher Heinrich Rempel (1855-1926) went so far as to declare: "I think that when we are given a period of illness before being called from here, this is grace." Grace, because such a period allows the individual to settle his or her accounts, ask for forgiveness and prepare their soul for death.⁵ In a communion sermon in 1829, first KG Ältester Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) enjoined his congregants to "pray for the sick and the weak that they would endure patiently and accept the suffering for their souls' benefit."⁶ It is not so surprising, then, that in 1894 the son of beloved Steinbach teacher Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-1894) could write:

The worse his condition became, the more patience he showed in his suffering. Although he longed greatly for the hour of his delivery, he also wanted to persevere through his time with Christian patience [Christlicher Geduld].⁷

Kornelsen longed greatly for the hour of his delivery, perhaps not only because of the physical pain, but also the mental anguish of knowing the end was coming, but not when.⁸ The person had to endure, and not lose faith, and humbly submit to his or her circumstances in obedience to God. To suffer this way was to share in Christ's suffering.⁹

Such suffering could be unimaginably severe, as it was for Blumenort KG minister Peter W. Loewen (1835-1917):

After a very hard, seven-month-long illness, Peter W. Loewen died on November 15, 1917. During his illness he suffered from a burning feeling in his feet; in his right foot especially he had much to endure. Both of his big toes fell off, and at the end the right foot was completely black. He prayed much to the Lord, to be given the patience to be able to carry through the battle and the great pain to the end. It was heart-breaking to witness. As well as the pain in his feet, he had almost unbearable pain throughout his body so that he hardly knew how to be in it or not in it, but still he did not lose courage.¹⁰

Loewen's wife and friends and family members, who "prayed much for him and did everything possible for him" and "spent many nights with him" had to be helplessly present during his great suffering—surely a test of their faith as well. In the Roman church, the dying person would have been attended by a priest who would administer the last rites, presumably effective in helping the soul avoid eternal punishment. Among the Mennonites, the family members, with or without the presence of a church minister, had to carry that heavy burden.¹¹

"He did not lose courage," says the writer. What if he had? That possibility is not mentioned. Presumably, in holding fast through his trials, he earned his salvation. The KG believed in salvation as a gift of God's grace, but also as a state to be achieved through living as Christ-like a life as possible. So we come back to "cosmic heroism" as a response to the universal human concern of personal value. Ernest Becker says that our sense of individual value as humans is existentially threatened, so we struggle to stand out, to justify ourselves as "objects of primary value in the universe."¹² That is, it is somehow not enough for us to think we are created in God's image; we feel we must justify ourselves in our very existence. Becker sees a heroic dimension to this struggle.

The KG emphasis on non-resistance and radical humility made it impossible for individuals to be thought of as heroic in any conventional sense. They had spurned conventional communal symbols of the eternal heroic, like temples and cathedrals. Although their beliefs and attitudes were shaped by the stories in *The Martyrs Mirror*, they were not themselves martyrs. They could not be soldiers. They could not be explorers and adventurers. Non-proselytizing as they were, they could not even be missionaries to foreign lands. They were not supposed to become commercial giants—though a few, amidst great controversy, did embark on this path, which their descendants followed with enthusiasm. Instead, they were supposed to be "men [and women] of low estate," farmers close to the earth, without pretension.¹³

But they did have one avenue toward heroism open to them—a spiritual one. Every true-hearted Mennonite was tasked with accomplishing the humanly impossible. In everyday life he or she was to try to fulfill Jesus' central commandment to love others as we love ourselves, and even to love our enemies. Mennonite pioneers also valued physical work very highly, and their work ethic was entwined with their ideas of how to achieve salvation. They could love heroically, work heroically, and finally, if they fell short in these aspects, most adults and even some children still had a final opportunity—the heroic Christian death.

Assurance—or not—of Salvation

After which, a great reward might be expected, expunging the sting of suffering and loss. The KG's Confession of Faith declared:

We believe in and acknowledge a day of final judgement, which will occur on the last day, when God will awaken the dead. The judge will be the Son of God . . . Those who have been obedient to God and His word will be filled with great joy, but those who have been disobedient will be beset with terrible fear and heart-felt sorrow.¹⁴

The reward was not assured, then. Nor would it be immediate, if it were to be at all. At death, the soul separated from the body, but it did not immediately fly to its eternal destiny. That journey was postponed until "the appearing of the Lord," that is, the Second Coming, coinciding with the Great Judgment Day. Instead of enjoying immediate eternal delights or enduring unimaginable torment the souls of the dead were consigned to some vague state of suspension. Many obituary writers referred to it simply as *Ruhe*, or rest.¹⁵ While still alive, however, a person or his or her relatives could not know for sure if he or she had been obedient enough to avoid punishment. The KG thought it presumptuous and arrogant for any human to pronounce on a matter only God could decide.

Already in South Russia in 1845, Second KG Ältester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), fulminated against funeral eulogies: "With the eulogy they praised the deceased in spite of his evil works which, according to Revelation 14:13, will follow him. This was done on behalf of the bereaved to give them assurance of salvation of the deceased." Friesen called it an "evil practice" which Gemeinde members were to avoid.¹⁶ High standards indeed, worthy of the strongest Stoic. No assurance for the bereaved? Should they have no comfort, then, and should the contributions of the life of the deceased have no

recognition? This did, indeed, seem to be the steely protocol demanded of faithful church members. A kind of religious fatalism seemed to be the only approved response. KG members could rely on a much-used proverb, encapsulating their value of *Gelassenheit*, or resigned yieldedness: “What God does, is well done” [*Was Gott tut, das ist wohl getan*].

Even so, being human, some wavered when they felt the chill hand of death, and the imminent dissolution of the sense of self, including the necessity of letting go everyone and everything they had held dear. Sensitive souls might be tortured by the onset of fear of God’s judgement upon them. When extreme, such doubts and fears were thought of as the attacks of the Devil.¹⁷

In 1870 when the KG were still in South Russia, Mrs. Peter L. Dueck, nee Justina Wiebe (1844-1870), dying of typhus, was described by family friend Isaac L. Plett (1844-1871) of Friedensfeld as “at times [looking] as if she was writhing in Hell.” He was shaken by what he witnessed but noted as well that, after this period of emotional chaos, “at the last she became more peaceful and talked calmly and expressed her concern for her beloved children.” Still, the KG’s detractors among the larger Gemeinde, especially the Pietists, took Justina’s fear attacks as “a great example that the right rebirth is lacking.”¹⁸ The narrative of the death experience was appropriated as a weapon in the religio-political conflicts between different groups and different ideologies.

In fairness, it should be mentioned that KG founder Klaas Reimer was not above employing such political strategies; he comments rather harshly on the death in 1817 of Molotschna Colony Aeltester Jakob Enns, with whom he had long been in conflict: “According to what the people said he died in great terror of departing from this world.” Reimer doesn’t much soften this judgement with his next sentence: “Perhaps he also experienced the grace of God in his last hour like the thief on the cross.” Then when another disliked Ältester, Jakob Fast, died “calmly and peacefully” in 1821, Reimer comments, “O, what a horror!” since this now is evidence of spiritual complacency and “false holiness.” One Ältester left the world in terror, the other in peace, but in both cases their spiritual integrity was questioned.¹⁹

It has been speculated that individuals in the KG were especially vulnerable to these attacks of the Devil, or *Seelenangst*, because they would not preach a gospel of certain assurance of salvation. However, Peter P. Isaac, a Holdeman who attended at the death of his 36-year-old son David in Greenland, Manitoba in 1911, records a similar experience: “at the beginning of his sickness Satan’s attacks lasted two days and two nights . . . we all felt a deep compassion for him. I was reminded of the battles I had overcome in the days of my youth.” The elder Isaac concluded that his son “had the desire that God would take his soul unto eternal rest, washed in the blood of Christ.” But he did not go so far as to pronounce that this desire had been fulfilled.²⁰ Apparently any given individual might be vulnerable to death-bed anxiety, regardless of assurances given or not given.

Although the KG official position of refusal to make explicit statements about the eternal destiny of the deceased was maintained well into the 20th Century, the actual obituaries often showed a less rigid attitude, while not going quite as far toward proclaimed certainty as the Holdemans and Bruderthaler²¹ did in their letters and obituaries. When Steinbach pioneer

Johann R. Reimer (b. 1848) died in 1918, his daughter Margaretha ended the obituary with: “We are left in great sorrow, yet not as those who have no hope.”²² This wording—also widely used by writers from other Mennonite denominations—is taken from 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul enjoins the church “not . . . to be ignorant . . . concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” As early as 1912, Steinbach pioneer Abraham S. Friesen, still at that time a KG member

(he later joined the Bruderthaler), declared upon his wife Katherine’s death that “this was no death, but only a passing over to a better life where there will be no more sorrows. If we only believe.”²³ As time went by, more and more KG members imitated other denominations with increasingly confident assertions concerning the eternal reward of the deceased.²⁴

The same Margaretha Reimer who had expressed hope for her father’s eternal reward died herself just a few years afterward, in 1921. Her brother, Peter J. B. Reimer, who later became a KG minister himself, declared himself to be shocked at the funeral:

*It had never occurred so much to me before that in our church, the Kleine Gemeinde, the minister was only supposed to preach an ordinary sermon and not mention anything about the deceased. In other words, the dead were not to be praised. This time, when the minister Jacob R. Dueck preached only an ordinary sermon, I was hurt very much. He was not to be blamed and it was a good sermon otherwise, but, my sister, who had fought such a fine spiritual fight in her life, was getting no praise, no acknowledgement, of her wonderful talents of leadership and humility.*²⁵

Reimer is actually not especially concerned about what was said about his sister’s salvation as such. Apparently, he felt assurance about that. Rather, he laments the absence of a personal touch, of recognition for a life well-lived. These elements were to find their way into funeral sermons and obituaries increasingly as time went by, as the tradition KG value of radical humility faded.

Grieving

Writers of death accounts routinely spoke of the sorrow of the loved ones left behind, normalizing the experience of grief.



The gravestone of Mrs. A.S. Friesen in the Pioneer Cemetery in Steinbach. Photo Credit: Ralph Friesen.

But in actuality, such sorrow was meant to have its limits. The unrelenting demands of pioneer life created a natural social pressure for everyone to get on with the business of contributing to the welfare of the community. As Roland Sawatzky has said: “Too much expression of emotion was considered self-centered. Did you still want the dead person alive and suffering?”²⁶

But sometimes a heart-felt cry of dissent was uttered. In his memoirs, Nebraska KG minister Heinrich Ratzlaff (1848-1922) reflected on the death of his wife Aganetha (nee Janzen, b. 1850), in 1881:

*Grief and pain were difficult to bear so that I hardly knew what to do. My mother-in-law was with me, but what did it help? When she saw me weeping with sorrow, she also wept. When I could control myself, then my little four-year-old Nettie came to me, reached out her hand to me and said, ‘My loving mother has died,’ which broke my heart and then we both cried.*²⁷

For a brief interlude, death and grief erased the usual patriarchal hierarchy, and Heinrich and his little girl were on the same level, grieving their loss. But the prevailing order was soon restored, and a little more than two months later Heinrich married a new wife and had many more children.

Mothers sometimes let out their grief in letters to relatives, especially when a child died. Sara Siemens Janzen (1809-1885) wrote to her children in Manitoba in October 1874 to report that when “tiny granddaughter Sara” died, her mother exclaimed in the “deepest agony: ‘Oh but how we so dearly wanted to keep her.’”²⁸

Music—that is, voices lifted in unison, without instrumental accompaniment, in German—was an integral part of the Mennonite response to loss and death. It was customary to sing at the bedside of the dying person, helping them make their transition. Songs were sung at funerals and at the graveside as well, providing the opportunity for the broader community to mourn. For example, when Steinbach pioneer teacher Cornelius Fast died in 1927,

*at his request, the beloved song, ‘Lord, how great is your goodness’ [Grosz ist, Herr, deine Güte] was sung. As people looked upon the departed for the last time the congregation sang: ‘Come now, and let us sing’ [Kommt lasst uns einmal singen] according to the familiar melody.*²⁹

These songs and others like them taught an attitude of acceptance of God and God’s workings, including the allowance of human suffering and death.

Conclusion

In sum, the KG pioneers approached the experience of suffering and dying as a kind of opportunity to be deeply tested in one’s faith. For the most part, individuals seemed to rise to this occasion. Not just in their lives, but in the manner of their deaths, the faithful proved the truth and validity of what they professed. In doing so, they heroically transcended the hardship and ordinariness of their lives.

In an ideal death, if we may use such a term, the individual, attended by devoted family members and friends, approached a future day of judgement with a combination of humility and hope, endured suffering with patience imitating that of

Christ on the cross, and made the transition to eternity peacefully. Those left behind were meant to witness these deaths as reminders of their own mortality and their own duty to live always in obedience to God’s will.

Endnotes

- 1 Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1973), 159-60.
- 2 Glen Klassen, “Child Survival in the Mennonite East Reserve before the Age of Antibiotics,” *Preservings* 32(2012): 24-30.
- 3 *Steinbach Post*, September 19, 1917. This obituary was written by Editor Jacob S. Friesen.
- 4 In *Abraham L. and Elizabeth Dueck and their Descendants*, n. d., 20.
- 5 *Mennonitische Rundschau*, December 20, 1893. On the occasion of the death of KG minister Jakob L. Dueck.
- 6 In Delbert Plett, *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874* (Steinbach: Crossway Publications, 1993), 189.
- 7 *Mennonitische Rundschau* September 5, 1894.
- 8 This urge can be very strong; in the Sufi cartography it is called “Suicidal Panic.” Cf. Kathleen Dowling Singh, *The Grace in Dying* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 195.
- 9 Bill Block email, April 23, 2015.
- 10 *Steinbach Post*, November 21, 1917. Account written by Peter R. Reimer (1870-1946), a son of Abraham R. Reimer and grandson of patriarch Abraham F. Reimer.
- 11 See Alan Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 209-212 for a compelling description of the administration of the last rites.
- 12 Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 4.
- 13 This notion was articulated most explicitly by early KG elder Heinrich Balzer (1800-1846) in his treatise *Verstand und Vernunft* (Faith and Reason), published in 1833.
- 14 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Mennoniten Klein-Gemeinde in Nord-Amerika*, 1940, 28-9. My translation.
- 15 “The belief was that the dead were lying in a period of waiting. Only during the Second Coming would their souls actually be judged by Jesus Christ, and be allowed into heaven.” Roland Sawatzky, “Mennonite Funerals in Manitoba,” *Preservings* 30 (2010): 72. Most Christians today would probably reject this understanding, choosing instead to believe that if Jesus could say “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” to one of the thieves being crucified with him (Luke 23:43), they will also be with Jesus immediately after death. Nevertheless, the traditional KG seemed to think differently.
- 16 Ältester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), “A Simple Declaration” [*Eine einfache Erklarung*], 1845. In Delbert Plett, *Leaders*, 283. The KG followed the no-eulogy practice for many years before acceding to the pressures to eulogize the dead.
- 17 Alan Watts says that historical Christianity is “a religion in which anxiety plays a far greater part than faith, and in which this anxiety is even valued as a virtue because it is a constant check to presumption and pride.” He goes on to quote a foundational verse for the KG, Philippians 2: 12: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Alan Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity*, 208.
- 18 In Delbert Plett, *Storm and Triumph* (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1986), 223. See also *Prairie Pioneer: The Writings of John W. Dueck* (Rosenort, MB: The John W. Dueck Book Committee, 1995), 23. It should be noted that confusion and delirium are symptoms of a person suffering from typhus. Isaac L. Plett was the grandfather of the previously mentioned Isaac D. Plett.
- 19 Klaas Reimer, quoted in Delbert Plett, *The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia* (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1985), 175 and 177.
- 20 Peter P. Isaac, in Delbert Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1990), 202-3.
- 21 In the East Reserve, families of both of these denominations had their origins in the *Kleine Gemeinde*.
- 22 *Steinbach Post*, March 27, 1918.
- 23 *Mennonitische Rundschau*, September 18, 1912.
- 24 When Helena, nee Penner, wife of prominent Steinbach mill owner J. I. Friesen, died in 1917, the Bruderthaler minister, J. B. Schmidt, did not hesitate to describe her eternal home in florid detail:
“We walk with the blessed, hand in hand
By the River of Life, where the trees of life
Wave their branches as on Creation’s third day
Where, in eternal youth, no one grows old
No more subject to the gnawing teeth of Time
There, where no eye can fail or heart grow cold
And no sickness, no pain, no death can plague the blessed.” *Steinbach Post*, September 12, 1917.
- 25 In Marj Heinrichs, *Johann R. Reimer: A Family History* (Altona: Friesens Corp., 2009), 130-1.
- 26 Undated conversation.

27 In Delbert Plett, *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874* (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1987), 192. "Four-year-old" Nettie was actually 3½; she was born in 1878. There was also a baby, Sara, born in March of 1881. The second wife was Elisabeth Flaming (1859-1941). Ratzlaff had moved to Nebraska from Rosenort, Manitoba.

28 Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 102. Born in South Russia, little Sara Klassen died in the United States at the age of two. She was her mother's 10th child, though some older siblings had predeceased her.

29 G. G. Kornelsen, *Steinbach Post*, March 2, 1927.

William Brown, Innkeeper on the Post Road, 1880-1894

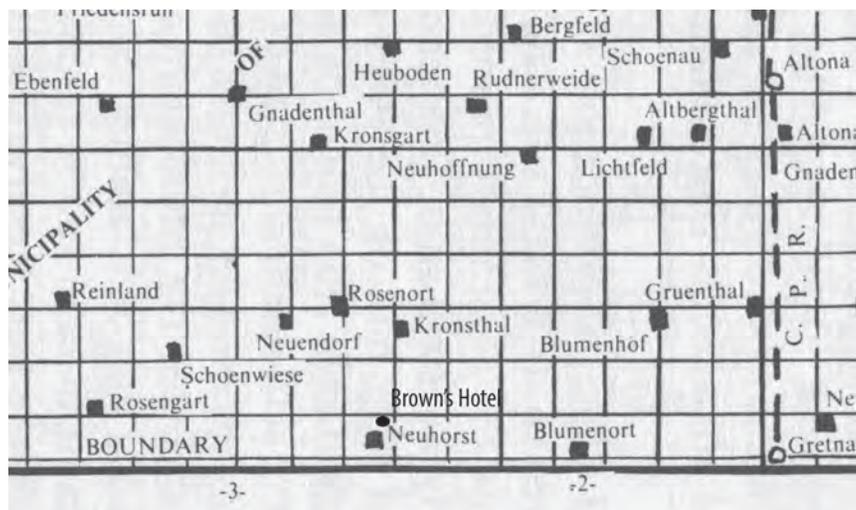
By Albert Siemens, Winkler, Manitoba

When Isaac Müller, *Obervorsteher* of West Reserve ordered the establishment of the Post Road in May of 1878, which at its zenith in pre-railway days stretched from the village of Waldheim through Osterwick, Reinland, Neuhorst and Blumenort on to Emerson, he could not have foreseen that it would also be the main entry point to the lands west of the West Reserve and that it would attract English speaking settlers from Ontario to the Pembina Hills and beyond. Müller would also become the main protagonist in the story of one William Brown who recognized a business opportunity in establishing a 'stopping

place' about halfway between Emerson and Mountain City, located a few miles west of the last Mennonite village of Waldheim on the Post Road. The distance of about fifty miles between them meant a two day trip by oxen, making a house at the halfway point a convenience or a necessity for settlers and travelers who needed overnight lodging, food, and 'entertainment' for themselves and stabling, hay, and oats for oxen and horses. The halfway point of twenty-five miles was at 11-1-3 just outside the village of Neuhorst where Müller resided. William Brown of Sarnia, Ontario and his short term predecessor



A 1883 sketch by Richard N. Lea of a post on the Post Road in the foreground, with the houses and a windmill in village of Reinland in the background. The sketch is the only known depiction of a post from the Post Road. Image Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 506-26.0



An excerpt from Otto Gaube's 1898 map of the West Reserve shows the location of William Brown's Hotel near the village of Neuhorst. Image Credit: Reinland: An Experience in Community.

James Stephens set out to meet that need. The idea for a stopping place may have come from George Helliwell, another Ontario settler, who offered stage service from Emerson to Nelson from 1879 to 1884. It operated twice weekly in both directions; the need for a rest stop would have been obvious to the driver, Harry Brown, who was not related to William Brown.

Who was this hotelier William Brown, who had the audacity to defy the stated right of Mennonites to have 'exclusive' use of lands in the West Reserve as indicated in what became known to Mennonites as the *Privilegium*, issued by the Canadian Government in 1873? From earlier reading I had become aware that Brown and his family resided in Sarnia, Ontario. While staying overnight in Sarnia on 5 September, 2015, I took the time to seek out his gravesite there. I found it just a few blocks from the international crossing, in the Lakeview Cemetery about 50 feet from the gravesite of Alexander Mackenzie, Canada's second Prime Minister. The marker read:

<i>William Brown</i>	<i>Wife Phoebe Fletcher</i>
<i>73 years of age</i>	<i>Born</i>
<i>Born</i>	<i>1 August 1821</i>
<i>5 December, 1820</i>	<i>Died 17 January 1900</i>
<i>Died 18 May, 1894</i>	

Interestingly the upper part of the headstone had a border of wheat sheaths. In the family plot there were six sites, but four were unoccupied. William Brown's body must have been returned to Ontario after he died in Gretna shortly after selling his property on Manitoba school section 11-1-3. Upon doing census research the name Brown proved to be a barrier as the county of Lambton, in which Sarnia is found, had

Brown	William	m	51	-	England	C. of England	English
	Phoebe	f	51	-		"	"
	Eliza	f	18	-	United States	"	"
	William	m	17	-	Q	"	"
	Isaac	m	14	-	Q	"	"
	Harriet	f	12	-	Q	"	"
	Elizabeth	f	10	-	Q	"	"
	Phoebe	f	9	-	Q	"	"
Mason	James	m	35	-	England	"	"
Mason	James	m	25	-	Canada	"	"

The entry for the William Brown family in the 1861 census of Lambton County, Sarnia, Canada West. Image Credit: Albert Siemens.

hundreds of them!¹ But sure enough, there in the 1861 Canada census he appears.

The Browns may have been married in England about 1848. The entry in the 1861 Census suggests, based on the age of daughters Mary Anne and Eliza, that the family moved to the United States from England between 1849 and 1853 and then from the USA to Canada West ca.1853, since Eliza was born in the USA and son William a year later in Ontario. According to the census, the family was Anglican and Brown was railway inspector, a position of some importance. By 1871, the census lists Brown as a hotelkeeper. The family may have been attracted to Lambton County because of the boom times in the developing oil fields of Petrolia and the refineries of Sarnia. Clearly the oilfield boom times provided a windfall for hoteliers and William Brown took note. He must have taken advantage of the opportunity after 1865, as the family was listed as residents of the nearby township of Inniskillin in that year.² In the late 1870s he refocused his attention on the growing province of Manitoba, where in 1878 he bought the renowned Davis Hotel in Winnipeg.

The hotel was named after R. A. Davis who went on to become Premier of the province for a brief period. The Davis Hotel started out life as the Emmerling Hotel before 1870 and in the days of Riel's Provisional Government it became the

centre of the American party which advocated annexation to the USA. When Louis Riel was successful in attaining provincial status for Manitoba, Emmerling pulled up stakes in disgust and sold his Main Street hotel to Robert Davis who promptly enlarged it and renamed it the Davis Hotel.³ The Davis Hotel would briefly factor in the story of Mennonites in Manitoba when the Mennonite delegation would be accommodated there upon their arrival in Winnipeg in 1873. When William Brown bought the Davis Hotel, it was a prime 'watering hole' in what was still a largely rough and rowdy society. Although the reasons behind the sale are not clear, Brown sold the Davis House about two years later. He then made an agreement to buy out James Stephens' 'squatter' rights to 11-1-3, a school section in the midst of the West Reserve, which was signed by Stephens on 10 December 1880.

It is not known exactly when James Stephens squatted on this section because it appears no documents were made.⁴ However, the newspaper *The Emerson International* noted on June 24, 1880 that "A Mr. Stevens [sic] had squatted on a school section in the Mennonite Reserve on the post road about 28 miles west of Emerson and is putting up a house 28x40, two stories[sic], in which he will keep a stopping place. A house of this sort is much needed in that section, and will have no doubt Mr. S will do well. It is about the right distance from town." From this we can infer that his actions were widely known and that he may have deliberately selected this school section.

In later correspondence in the file on this case, the Department of the Interior made it clear that it would deal much more harshly with squatters who knew that the land was a school section when occupation occurred than those who randomly selected a section in advance of surveying, which then became school lands and thus were not available for homesteading. Significantly, in surveys of the prairies, school sections were inflexibly assigned to sections 11 and 29. In this case it was clear that Stephens knew he was on school lands. The newspaper also seemed totally oblivious to the fact that the Mennonite Reserve lands were to be exclusively reserved for Mennonites,



View of Winnipeg's Main Street, looking north, in 1880. The Davis Hotel, or "Davis House," can be seen on the left side of the street, in the middle of the photo. William Brown purchased the hotel from R. A. Davis in 1878 and sold it about two years later. The building was demolished in 1890. Image Credit: "View of Main Street looking north," City of Winnipeg Archives, (P00004:0004).

no exception being made for school lands even though in practice the Mennonites respected the lands set aside for the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) (section 8 and three quarters of section 26 – sometimes the entire section). Clause number three of the *Privilegium* stated: “the said reserve of eight townships [later applied to West Reserve] is for the exclusive use of Mennonites.” No exception was made for school lands, but judging by the documents in the files, this seems to have been ignored by almost all public servants and politicians. Significantly not one piece of correspondence from Mennonites, including Isaac Müller, is found in the over two hundred images in the homestead files relating to section 11-1-3, although there are a few early references made to them.⁵

In the same June 1880 issue of *The Emerson International*, where notice was taken of Stephens’ occupation of 11-1-3, it was also reported that Isaac Müller lodged a complaint in Winnipeg:

*Ober Schultz Miller [sic], chief of the Mennonites returned from Winnipeg on Wednesday where he had been interviewing Surveyor general Roswell [Russell] in reference to the squatters who had been piling in on the Mennonite Reserve. Kaiser Müller states that Mr. Russell says the Mennonites hold the fort for three years more and that the swarm of intruders who have been invading the Reservation with the view of having prior claims will have to step down and cut. Many of these so-called squatters are speculators... They claim they will hold their ground until dislodged at the point of a bayonet.*⁶

Obviously, Russell believed that there was a time limit of three years for Mennonites to occupy all lands in the West Reserve and that non-Mennonite squatters had no rights there. But by the summer of 1880 Stephens was in business, judging by the ads he ran in the Emerson paper. The ad in *The Emerson International* of 2 October 1880 was typical. It was to be known as the ‘Central Hotel’ with accommodation and bar for humans and stable for the draft animals. Within two months William Brown had purchased it for \$2,700 as the indenture indicates. Encapsulated in Homestead Files 5592-91 there is a statement made in 1887 by Mr. W Brown with reference to 11-1-3:

I settled on this land in December 1879 [1880]. I bought out a man named Stephens. I paid him \$3000. He said he had his claim registered in East St. Paul Reg. office. He gave me a quit claim [not deciphered] Made accommodation for travelers to settle southern Manitoba. I built on SE ¼. I value buildings at \$10,000. They should be in over \$15,000. The whole of this papers [sic] containing [illegible] are with Sir John at Ottawa. I have cultivated all NE and SW... Some 400 acres cultivated 175 of which is summer fallowed this year.

Nowhere else is there mention made of registering a claim in the East St. Paul Lands Office. Stephens may have said this in a later conversation in Emerson to deflect Brown’s ire. But in any case, confident and boastful Brown went to work cultivating the soil and attending to travelers with the help of his wife Phoebe, now sixty-one years of age and two daughters, Phoebe, twenty, and Elizabeth, twenty-one, who were still in the parental home.

In the years following his occupation of section 11-1-3 Brown would face numerous challenges in gaining title to the squatted school lands he had purchased from Stephens. A letter

containing the petition of eight Emerson businessmen including Thomas Carney, C. S. Douglas, and R. S. Chalmers (who was also Justice of the Peace), was sent directly to the office of Sir John A. Macdonald, the Prime Minister, on 4 January 1881, less than one month after Brown took possession of the land. The letter to Sir John A. provides insight into Brown’s motives:

The undersigned respectfully should [illegible] as follows:

- 1. There being a great need of a stopping place for accommodation of immigrants proceeding west from the town of Emerson to the Pembina Mountain, Rock lake and Souris District of North West and Manitoba, one James Stephens in the spring of 1880 settled upon section eleven (11), township one (1) and Range three (3) West being [illegible] to ascertain a school section and erected thereon a house and stable and has ever more kept the same open for the accommodation of the travelling public.*
- 2. In December last past your petitioner purchased the property of the said James Stephens and all his rights and occupation of the land aforesaid for three thousand Dollars (\$3000) and has since put up additions to the said buildings so as to have ample accommodation to the travelling public.*
- 3. Your petitioner thereupon prays that in as much as the hotel and [illegible] for a stopping place for travelling [illegible] grant in that place being about one days [sic] journey from the town of Emerson and the establishment aforesaid and having been well known as such and is now put in a condition to give comfortable accommodation to man and beast [illegible] he may be allowed to purchase from the Government of the Dominion of Canada the whole of the aforesaid at a reasonable price and your petitioners are in duty bound will ever pray*

(signed) William Brown.

For Brown to start his lobbying effort so soon after buying out the ‘squatter rights’ and improvements of Stephens, he must have felt that the Mennonites of the West Reserve would make a serious effort to dislodge him and perhaps indicates that he had reason to be concerned in what could be viewed as a rash business deal. Sir John A. passed the letter on to the Department of the Interior which responded to the letter of Brown’s advocate, R. S. Chalmers on 7 February 1881.⁷ The letter mentions that Isaac Müller had complained about Stevens [sic] squatting on 11-3-1. This letter is important because of the Department of Interior’s description therein of Stephens as “illegal” and the evidence it provides that Stephens had been asked to leave at once. William Brown (also described as a squatter) is told that he has to bid like everyone else at a Winnipeg auction for the lands in question, which may be held in August of 1881.

By February 17, 1881 Brown, through Chalmers, had replied to Colonel Denis, Deputy Minister of the Department of the Interior, asking him to include 11-1-3 on the sale of school lands in August, to which Dennis agreed. In the meantime, on 31 August 1881, seventeen businessmen in Emerson, including D. W. Matheson (of the Hudson’s Bay Company?), Adolph Coblentz and Harry Weixelbaum, saloon keepers who counted themselves as Müller’s friends, re-petitioned Sir John A. to allow William Brown to buy the section at the upset price [that is, the reserve bid] without competing bids:

We the undersigned would beg to represent without prejudice Mr. William Brown who settled on school section number eleven township one range three west and has made extensive improvements. He has opened an Hotel which has proved a Provincial necessity being the only place of accommodation between Emerson and Mountain City, a distance of some fifty miles. We would therefore respectfully beg that said section eleven be granted to the said Mr. William Brown at the upset price of school sections and that his improvements be taken into consideration.

Brown must have become alarmed that the Mennonites intended to outbid him for the school section. On the 6th of September, 1881 this alarmist mood is conveyed in an unprofessional letter to Colonel Denis from Brown's attorney, R. S. Chalmers:

I have just had the map and list of school lands to be sold on the 19th you sent to Wm Brown. I noticed there are just his sections and one or two sections in the whole Mennonite Reserve to be sold. It looks as though Brown was to be a victim. For Heavens [sic] sake don't ruin the poor man who has come up to this country to make a home for himself and helpless family he has spent his all on this place with the prospect of it all being taken from him. I have been led to understand that this is a determination on the part of Miller the Kaiser to bring it over his head and that communication has been had with the department to have it put to sale for that purpose. I cannot see how the Gov't would not be justified in either selling it to him at a fair valuation or withholding it from sale for the present. In pushing it on to sale just now looks strange to me. It will be an everlasting disgrace to the Gov't if they confiscate the hard earned savings [sic] of a lifetime and Compell [sic] Brown to seek shelter under the US flag when they are glad to deal liberally with British subjects. You say the Gov't are compeled [sic] to sell by public auction but I ask you if they are compelled to sell now. If it was withdrawn now there might be some way whereby the Gov't might be able to sell it to him without laying themselves open to criticism. You no doubt will think I write strong. I put strong. I have no interest to serve but to try if possible save this poor man from ruin.

A Mr. Russell of the Department of the Interior wrote to Chalmers that in view of the tone of his letter, henceforth the Department would only deal directly with William Brown. The Surveyor General, nevertheless, ordered the land withdrawn from sale. However, Chalmers persisted, claiming that Brown became aware that "the Mennonites were combining against him for the purpose of buying it over his head." Brown, it seems, did not want to face the uncertain vagaries and challenge of an open

auction. What, if anything, was being planned by the 'devious' Mennonites remains unknown.

An exasperated but sympathetic Colonel Denis summarized the situation in a letter to the Prime Minister (who was a friend). After reviewing the details and before seeking the Prime Minister's approval for removing Brown's land from the sale, Denis offers a reason for Brown's troubles:

It appears that the Mennonites looking with jealousy upon the number of English speaking people who were going through the country were rather ill disposed than otherwise to furnishing them shelter and food and the distance from Nelsonville on the one hand and Emerson on the other was such that it was impossible to get entertainment other than at this house upon the school land.

The letter is prejudicial against the Mennonites, implying that they were incapable and unwilling to supply adequate accommodation for English settlers. He obviously thought 'entertainment,' a euphemism for a bar at the time, was indispensable for travelers and that Mennonites, quite rightly, would not meet that aspect of the challenge. That William Brown dispensed liquor was obviously not a hidden fact. Meanwhile an F. A. Martin of the Dominion Lands Survey, writing from Emerson on 31 August 1881 took the trouble to verify certain claims of William Brown – that he had 275 acres ready for spring seeding, had built a two story 'Hotel,' the main part measuring 40' x 36', and an annex 40' x 22', a barn 56' x 32', another 60' x 25' and a granary 12' x 15'. Value was placed at \$7,400.

By 1883 the paper trail in the Homestead files turns dusty. In keeping with the adamant position of the Department of the Interior and supported by Sir John A., school lands would only be sold by auction from time to time to maximize sales value. With the Manitoba real estate bubble bursting in 1883, demand and thus sales and prices for all farmland, including school sections and HBC land, dropped precipitously.⁸ Brown, confident that he would obtain title to the property, continued to invest in his land and buildings throughout this period. The description of his buildings and property by C. S. Douglas, MLA in the July 16, 1885 issue of *The Emerson International* attests to the prosperous look of Brown's farm.⁹

It is easy to see why visitors would find it impressive. What is particularly noteworthy is that Brown built enclosed passageways connecting all the buildings to the main house for comfort in winter. In this he may have learned something from his Mennonite neighbours and their tradition of joining their houses and barns to create one structure, the housebarn. Once again what was apparent was Brown's pride of ownership, which underlines the tenacity with which he struggled and lobbied to obtain a title to 11-1-3. It was shortly after this visit

A MODEL FARM.

**Some Particulars About Wm. Brown's
Fine Place—Twelve Thousand Dol-
lars in Buildings—Over 350
Acres in Wheat.**

We referred last week to a visit to the fine farm owned by Wm. Brown, Esq., father-in-law of Deputy-Sheriff Williams of this place, and promised to give some particulars in regard to the place in this issue. Mr. Brown's farm comprises a section of fine prairie land, located in the Mennonite Reserve, ten miles west of Gretna. Mr. Brown settled upon the place five years ago, when it was a tract of wild prairie land, and during that time has transformed the place into an ideal model prairie farm, a thing of beauty and a source of profit. Few farms in Manitoba can boast of as many and as good buildings as Mr. Brown's contains. As one bowls along over the smooth prairie road that leads to the place, the collection of buildings presents the appearance of a small village. The house faces to the east, and is a substantial two-story building, painted white. The main portion is 36x20 feet in size with a two-story addition 40x27, the rear of which opens out

After visiting William Brown's farm and hotel in 1885, the publisher of The Emerson International and local MLA, C. S. Douglas wrote this glowing report of William Brown's farm and hotel. Image Credit: Albert Siemens.



Charles Stanford Douglas (1852-1917) established The Emerson International in 1878 and was its editor until 1889. He was also active in Manitoba politics, becoming a member of the Emerson town council in 1881, mayor of the town in 1888, and a Member of Legislative Assembly for Emerson from 1883-1889. He went on to become the Mayor of Vancouver. He is pictured here (back seat, left) in front of the Hollow Tree in Stanley Park, Vancouver, May 31, 1909. Image Credit: City of Vancouver Archives, AM54-S4-: Port P1204

in 1885 that Douglas paid a visit to Premier Norquay in an attempt to assist Brown.

By 1885 the Department of the Interior was becoming weary of Brown's persistence. A September 12, 1885 letter from the Department in Ottawa on behalf of Minister to the Dominion Lands Office in Winnipeg stated that the Minister, increasingly frustrated, wanted the file closed and directed the office to put Brown's land up for sale. The office replied that an upset price of \$5 an acre would be fair and the sooner a sale occurred, the better. It is obvious that the officials were also growing weary of the file. The Department then wrote to Brown's lawyer in Emerson outlining the terms under which they were prepared to proceed, which significantly included holding the sale "at his stopping place." Presumably all this plus the Mennonite viewpoint was discussed when the Minister of the Interior in a face-to-face meeting tried to arbitrate between Brown and the Mennonites in Morden in early November 1885, although a further meeting with Brown was planned in Winnipeg in which the Mennonites did not participate.¹⁰

Another crack in the Dominion government's position appeared in 1886 when Thomas White of the Department of the Interior, writing for Sir John A., wrote to Premier Norquay that Brown would be compensated by the successful bidder for any improvements on the property if Brown was not the highest bidder.¹¹ This change of stance was to open a whole new series of correspondence but White makes it clear that it did not represent a change of policy with regard to all squatters. On May 31, 1886 Brown's lawyer, Macauley, wrote Thomas White in the Department Minister's office, noting that William Brown concurred in the matter of the auction sale and compensation of 'full value' of improvements. He suggested the same rule should be applied to all school land squatters. At this stage, Macdonald, Norquay, and the Dominion Lands Office in Winnipeg all concurred and orders were issued for the sale to take place. The Department also agreed to compensation for all squatters on other school lands, which would occur at each

time of sale. A change of policy occurred because of Brown's dogged determination in pursuing his claim.

Orders went out on 17 July 1886 that a sale would be held at William Brown's 'stopping place' on 21 August 1886 on a quarter-by-quarter basis. The terms were to be one fifth cash at time of sale, balance at six percent interest in an auctioneer note. The Department indicated that William Brown had been informed on the 29th of July 1886 that 11-1-3 was to be advertised for sale. William Brown was informed that, in accordance with regulations, the sale would be announced in the local papers, the *Morden Manitoba News* and the *Winnipeg Manitoban*. D. Hall, now Deputy Minister, also instructed the Queen's Printer to print the posters. Hall further mentioned to Brown that the sale date had been changed to the 21st of August 1886 and that the Minister thought the improvements should be paid for at time of sale or as soon as 'valuation is made.' Given this last provision it was unlikely that anyone else would bid. To pay full price for improvements on the day of the sale or shortly thereafter at 'valuation,' if he stuck to the figures of an excess of \$10,000, would virtually eliminate all Mennonites as well as Ontario Anglo-Saxons, who probably discounted the land value for its location in the heart of the Mennonite reserve.

Although there appeared to be a way forward with the proposals of 1886, Brown was not so easily persuaded. Using his connections to Premier Norquay, he objected to the possibility of losing the quarters of land that had no buildings on them. The Department responded by offering yet another option. Deputy Minister Burgess, in a new proposal dated 2 January 1888, advanced the idea of placing an upset price of \$7 per acre on the quarters not occupied by buildings in order to address Brown's concerns but he also mentioned that the change would require an Order-in-Council of the local government (Province of Manitoba). But on 9 January 1888 the government of Manitoba answered with a recommendation that the whole section be offered at auction at \$5 acre in one parcel, but also questioned if school lands were to be auctioned off under law by quarter sections only, as other non-school lands under the crown were to be sold. A telegram from Ottawa stated that school sections could be sold as one parcel. Within a few days the Deputy Minister of the Interior wrote Smith at the Dominion Lands Office in Winnipeg ordering to offer the whole section of 11-1-3 as one parcel with the upset price of \$5 an acre, since sub-clause 2, clause 29 of the Dominion Lands Act (which required the individual sale of each quarter section) did not apply to school lands. Therefore, the entire 640 acres could be sold in one block, not as individual parcels of 160 acres sold separately. The Federal government blinked and Brown won on all points in the negotiation when the land agent at Manitou was ordered on 13 January 1888 to proceed with a block sale of 640 acres on 11-1-3 at the upset price of \$5 an acre. The government of Manitoba then rescinded the Order-in-Council regarding the sale price of \$7 an acre. In contrast to the normal practice in which such sales were conducted in the month of August, the sale was held in the dead of winter (January 1888 has been noted for the severity of that month's blizzards and the subsequent loss of livestock and blockage of railways) with almost no public notice. Newspapers of Morden and Emerson are devoid of any information and the file is amazingly bare at this point, going straight to a recording of the five years of payment. The yearly anniversary of the payment due is the 10th of January indicating the ink was barely dry on the

orders when the sale took place. This was in contravention of procedures and was very suspicious.

Brown won on all points but it was the result of constant and effective lobbying where politicians, especially at the provincial level, and bureaucrats were sympathetic to a fellow Anglo-Saxon whose actions were perceived to benefit the new nation. In the end the wish to terminate the matter meant it took only a matter of days to effect a rapid conclusion. Long gone was any discussion of any rights Mennonites had, or were perceived to have had, with exclusive right to the lands of the West Reserve. As of the fall of 1886, Isaac Müller was no longer the activist *Obervorsteher*. His successor, Frank Froese's concerns were shifting to the conflict between the newly formed municipalities and the Mennonite *Gebietsamt*, among other matters.

All that remained for Brown was to make his payments on \$3,200 (\$5 x 640), being \$640 a year plus any accrued interest. In January 1892 Brown made a final payment of \$678 at which time he requested that the Department send him a receipt for full payment to William Brown, Post Office, Gretna, Manitoba. On February 9, 1892 John R. Hall of the Department of the Interior issued a title deed where its nature as a sale of school lands is indicated. One senses that Ottawa was very glad to have closed the file.

In the spring of 1894 a consortium of fifteen Neuhorst farmers collectively took possession of the section that was formerly Brown's. All quarters are listed as having owner/residents (but not occupiers of this particular parcel of land). A Peter Klassen, who appears to have bought it, may have simply been a *Dorfschultz* (village mayor) representing the community of Neuhorst or those who paid for the land. The price paid was \$8,000 with William Brown providing a 'vendor take back' mortgage of \$7,000¹² which was to be paid out over seven years at the rate of \$1,000 per year with interest accruing at six per cent.

When the villagers, led by Peter Klassen, bought the land it was divided among them into twenty-acre strips at the deemed cost of \$250 per strip. Every forty acres was priced at \$500. The debt to William Brown was a collective one so that the payment of principal would have been \$62.50 per year per 40 acres. As for the buildings (minus the barn) they were moved or dismantled and no value was ascribed to them for the holder of the strip in which they were located.

Subsequent to the sale of the land in 1895 the land was

<i>Peter Klassen, Junior</i>	<i>2 x 20 acres</i>
<i>Jacob Friesen</i>	<i>4 x 20</i>
<i>Jacob Boschmann</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Jacob Wall, Senior</i>	
<i>(my great- great- great-grandfather)</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Heinrich Wiebe</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Bernhard Wieb, Junior</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Jakob Knelson, Junior</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Julius Wieb</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Jacob Giesbrecht</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Johann Wall, Junior</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Franz Wall</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Wilhelm Berg</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Peter Wieb</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Berhard Wieb</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>
<i>Peter Klassen himself retained</i>	<i>2 x 20</i>



This barn continued to be a reminder of the farm and hotel that once had a prominent place along the Post Road. In 1974 it too disappeared. Image Credit: Red River Valley Echo 1970 Commemorative Edition, Mennonite Heritage Centre.

assessed at \$4 per acre (as most land was in the Rural Municipality of Rhineland) and the buildings at a value of \$1,340. By 1896 the personal assessment (that is, buildings) was down to \$205 from which there were only slight variations in following years, indicating that the house, granaries and other buildings had been removed; only the barn remained until 1974 as a testament to the saga which surrounded 11-1-3.

Because the government made many exceptions to the law for the sale of section 11 to William Brown, he, with deed already in hand, did not feel pressure to sell out in 1892, a year after a decision was rendered by the Court of Queen's Bench that the government would neither compensate squatters for improvements upon an order to vacate, nor would the squatters receive preference in the bidding process.¹³ Selling to a Mennonite at a time when it remained an exclusive Mennonite reserve (in terms of receiving homesteads), for three more years, until 1897, seemed the logical answer as a non-Mennonite family was not likely to assume the social risk of residing in an area where most of its neighbours would have been Old Colony Mennonites. In 1894, it may only have been his English persistence that allowed him to recover more than the supply-demand equation would have dictated.

After the sale William Brown may have intended to return to Sarnia. Whether he died there or in Gretna shortly thereafter on 18 May 1894 at the age of seventy-three was initially unclear. In a dispatch from Emerson, however, in the 25 May 1894 issue of the Morden *Herald* implied that he died in Gretna, although no record of this exists in Manitoba Vital Statistics. The *Free Press* noted that Brown had been the biggest farmer in the West Reserve. Long before this, William Brown announced his wish to 'become a citizen,' a term of the time meaning to retire, and by 1888 he seems to have spent part of the winters in the milder climate of Sarnia.¹⁴ Long before that, as early as 1882, a Harry Johnson had been the farmhand who resided there year around. In the end it may have been Brown's ill health and lack of heirs who were interested in the farm that led to the sale of his farm section, not any pressure from the Mennonite *Gebietsamt*. His death also marked a definitive end to the saga of unlicensed establishments serving alcohol on the Post Road but certainly not the end of liquor consumption and sales among Mennonites of the area. It is certainly noteworthy and perplexing, given his sparring with Mennonite neighbours,

that he began construction of another hotel in Gretna in 1893-94. This would also seem to indicate that his death was unexpected and sudden. His son-in-law, William Williams of Deloraine, examined the project in spring of 1895 with a view to finishing it. He chose, instead, to sell it to Martin Salzwedel who used it as a well-known boarding house.¹⁵

Newspapers, including the *Chronicle* and the *Emerson Journal*, also took note of the death of Brown's wife, Phoebe: "Mrs. Wm Brown who with her husband kept the half-way house between here and Emerson before the railways were built died at Sarnia, Ontario on January 18 aged 78 years." In the probate files of Phoebe Brown, located in the Manitoba Archives, the two assets listed were the final, as yet unpaid, \$1,000 installment by Peter Klassen and a lot in the County of Manchester, presumably the site of the planned hotel in Gretna, valued at \$450. Her executors were William Williams and Charles Stevens, her sons-in-law who were both residents of Deloraine. It also makes clear that her husband had died in Gretna. At the time of her death, offspring Phoebe and Hannah lived in Deloraine with their spouses; Mary and her husband, Carleton Higbie, a retired Methodist, lived in Sarnia (presumably where Phoebe lived out her final days); Lizzie, who also lived in Sarnia, was awaiting her husband's return from the goldfields of the Yukon; son William was a miller in nearby Mooretown; and son John had a saloon in Minneapolis. She must have been a hard working mate for William; it was to her and her daughters whom credit must be given for the day-to-day operation of the lodging though credit is invariably given to the patriarch, William Brown.

While Mennonites were clearly not pleased with having their understanding of being able to keep non-Mennonites from settling in the West Reserve challenged by a liquor-dispensing

hotel, William Brown's problems stemmed more from the fact that he had purchased squatted land than from challenges from his Mennonite neighbours. The land on which he built his hotel and what appears to have become a thriving farm was one of the designated sections of school lands, intended to be sold to fund education. While some Mennonites may have used Brown's facilities, it is clear that the purpose and main clientele were settlers moving through the Reserve to take up lands further West.

Endnotes

- 1 Petrolia, less than 20 kilometers south of Sarnia, for example, was the parental home of Harry Brown (no relative), who not only drove the stage in the early 1880's from Emerson to Mountain City and onto Nelsonville, but became a noted hotelier in Morden in the 1890's.
- 2 *Lambton Gazetteer* 1864-65, page 39.
- 3 For an overview of the first decade from 1869-79 see Alex Begg, *History of Winnipeg*. See also "First 50 years of Hotels in Winnipeg" winnipegrealstatenews.com, June 10, 2005.
- 4 The laws and sales practices surrounding school sections are best discussed in John Tyman, *By Section, Township and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement* (Brandon: Assiniboine Historical Society, 1972), 190-195.
- 5 Mennonite Heritage Centre 643 digital images 5734 to 5558 in the digitized homestead files are the source of most of the documentation herein cited. All others will be footnoted.
- 6 *The Emerson International*, June 24, 1800. Text in square brackets are comments by the author.
- 7 MHC, 643 image 5722-5721.
- 8 Tyman, 49-55.
- 9 *The Emerson International*, July 16, 1885, 11-13.
- 10 Morden Manitoba News, 6 November 1885.
- 11 MHC 643 image 5640-39
- 12 The abstracts and mortgages are available for perusal in Morden Land Titles.
- 13 *Morden Monitor* 20 August 1891.
- 14 *Morden Monitor* 4 November 1888.
- 15 F. G. Enns, *Gretna: Window on the Northwest* (Gretna: Village of Gretna History Committee, 1987), 111.

Creating a Centre for Studying Mennonites across Borders

by Hans Werner, Winnipeg, Manitoba

The University of Winnipeg has been a centre for the study of Mennonite history, literature and culture for almost 40 years. The Chair in Mennonite Studies has been part of the Department of History and the current Chair, Dr. Royden Loewen offers courses in Mennonite Studies, conducts a program of research in Mennonite history and organizes conferences to further the study of Mennonite culture, ethnicity and religion. In 2004, Steinbach lawyer Delbert Plett passed away leaving a legacy in the form of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. Since 2006 the Foundation has been located at the University of Winnipeg from where *Preservings* has been published, and a grant program and other projects have emanated. The Executive Director, Dr. Hans Werner has taught courses in the Mennonite Studies program at the University and, in exchange for a grant from the Foundation, has time allocated to manage the affairs of the Foundation. The partnership between the University through the Chair in Mennonite Studies, and the Foundation has been productive.

Over the past year the Chair and the Foundation have worked to broaden the focus of the Mennonite Studies at the University to better address the sense that Mennonites have

been a clear example of a people that lived 'transnationally'. The frame of reference of the nation—Canada, the United States, Bolivia—has served us well and been the basis for the way we have traditionally categorized our thinking about Mennonite identity, even though Mennonites have often been a people without, or across, states. To better address this 'living across borders', or as Royden Loewen's puts it in his book title, being 'among the nations', the Foundation and the Chair have created the Center for Transnational Mennonite Studies. The Centre's name seeks to capture the aim of this new thrust for Mennonite Studies—namely to recognize that Mennonites are not only European, have often sought to have identities separate from the nation in which they found themselves, and have migrated extensively. Even though Mennonites have often wanted to live separately, they have always had neighbours with whom they had relations of various kinds. The Center will seek to tell these stories through a transnational lens.

There was considerable consultation with informally organized community members, the Chair's Advisory Committee and the Plett Foundation Board to develop the proposal that ultimately resulted in the Centre's creation. The Centre for

Transnational Mennonite Studies (CTMS) is a partnership between the Chair and the Foundation and is created as part of the University's policy governing the creation of research institutes, centres and colleges. The structure is flexible, allowing for additional partners. The Center seeks to become a focal point for a global approach to studying the experience of Mennonites in many different contexts. The programs of the Center will continue to evolve, but you will notice a gradual shift in the way we do *Preservings*, in the types of courses offered at the University, and the new projects that result. Currently CTMS has embarked on raising a substantial endowment to fund a Professorship in Russian Mennonite Studies that will become part of the Center. The person holding this Professorship will focus particularly on the experience of Mennonites in the Russian Empire, during the Communist period and in the post Soviet period.

On May 5th 2016 the Center was formally launched at the University of Winnipeg with presentations by University's



Aileen Friesen delivering the inaugural CTMS lecture at the University of Winnipeg on May 5, 2016. Photo Credit: Andrea Dyck.

Vice President Academic, Dr. Neil Besner, Chair in Mennonite Studies, Dr. Royden Loewen, and the Executive Director of the Plett Foundation, Dr. Hans Werner. The evening also featured the inaugural CTMS lecture by the 2016 Plett Fellowship recipient, Dr. Aileen Friesen. Dr. Friesen delivered a lecture entitled, "Indigenous-Mennonite Relations in the Russian Empire: A History of Conflict and Accommodation." Dr. Friesen's research in Russia formed the basis for her looking at Mennonite relations with their Russian neighbours and nomadic indigenous peoples such as the Kazahks and the Nogai. A revised version of her lecture is published in this issue of *Preservings*. The May evening was one of the warmest in memory, but was well attended by an engaged audience.

The hope for the new Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies is that it can serve as vehicle for a new generation of scholars to continue to tell the story of the Anabaptist-Mennonite experience. Mennonites also need a story that we tell ourselves about who we are and where we have come from. That story is not a static narrative, but rather one that reflects new realities.



At the launch of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies. l. to r. Dr. Royden Loewen, Dr. Neil Besner, Dr. Aileen Friesen, and Dr. Hans Werner. Photo Credit: Andrea Dyck.

Family History

The Fehrs on the Move Again: From Old Order Mennonite to New Order Amish

Arlette Kouwenhoven, Leiden, Netherlands

Five years ago I wrote *The Fehrs. Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*, where I described the history of fifteen generations of the originally Dutch De Veer/Fehr/DeFehr family. Their story is representative of the history of a major part of the Old Colony Mennonites who currently live in Canada and Latin America. It is a history characterized by persecution, exclusion, humiliation, and despair alternated with periods of hope, progress, and new possibilities. At the end of the story, the Fehrs seemed to have become stranded in their water-deprived colony of Sabinal, in the desert of Northern Mexico. That is how the book ended. But with the passing of time, there

have been changes. For David and Anton, the two sons of the implacable leader of the colony, enough was enough and they left. David went to Argentina, Anton to the Amish in Michigan. This typically Mennonite mix of self-reliance, inventiveness, thoroughness and courage led them again to choose emigration. I have not yet visited David in Argentina, but I did make two short visits to Anton in Michigan. In this article, I want to relate my experiences with him and his family.

It is Friday, April 25, 2015. Teenager Justina Fehr, energetically lifting her baseball bat, is searching for the eyes of the pitcher. After just a few seconds and an energetic hit, the ball



Anton Fehr reading a book with one of his daughters. All photos in this article credit: Arlette Kouwenhoven

sails off into the field. Despite her long dress, she easily makes it to second base. At the same time, her brother David slides spectacularly into home base. His streamlined spectacles with yellow reflective glasses miraculously remain firmly on his nose. There is cheering all around.

It is the last day before the summer break at the Highland Meadows School in a small village in the South of Michigan. Traditionally, the children in this Amish community of twenty-five households get a summer break of four months to enable them to help their parents with chores on the land and

in or around the house. This last semester is closed off with a special festive morning of declamations, singing, and the handing out of certificates to the two fourteen-year-olds who have completed their schooling and will start their working life in the community. The two girls will now join their elder sisters and mother in the house and will add chores to the ones already taken on a few years earlier. Had they been boys, they would have joined their father on the farm, in the sawmill, or wherever needed within the community. A joint meal prepared by a number of families concludes the morning's activities, and the whole afternoon is set aside for numerous games of baseball and volleyball. This is not just for the kids, but all the parents of pupils join in, and the rest of the community – including those without children – watch. Yes, the whole community takes the day off, because everyone should be together. That is what the Amish do.

This sense of community is precisely what attracted Anton to the point of leaving his family in Sabinal and entering the Amish community in Michigan. Sabinal is the very last genuinely conservative Mennonite colony in Mexico where any hint of getting connected to the electricity grid or using rubber tires, not to mention driving cars, is fiercely resisted. Anton's father, David Fehr, Bishop and leader of Sabinal Colony, is nearing his eighties and is no longer able to cope with the necessary changes. He does not want to change. His hopes have long been centred on acquiring land in Quintana Roo to establish a new conservative colony, but his sons David and Anton got tired of waiting for the necessary permits. Following Anton, David, too, has left the colony. In the last chapter of *The Fehrs*,



Anton Fehr with daughter Justina at the school baseball game.

you get to know David as an intelligent businessman who was able to earn quite a fortune by drilling water holes for Mexican farmers just outside the colony and by acquiring and selling land around these wells. David would have preferred to follow his brother Anton and to join the Amish. But for the sake of his eldest son and his family, who could not acquire the necessary immigration papers due to insufficient capital, David chose Argentina, where there is still an open door for hardworking immigrants. There he bought a big farm and is now looking for ways to establish a new colony, but one based on Amish principles.

Why the Amish?

Why the Amish and how did it all come about? It all started quite some years ago, when Amish from different American states joined together to visit their brothers and sisters in faith in a diversity of colonies in South America to meet and see how they lived their lives. As a result of this tour, Anton and David and their families became interested in visiting their new friends in their homes and soon rented a driver and a bus to visit various Amish communities in the United States, including the ones in Michigan. And yes, what Bishop Fehr had feared did happen: both sons were highly taken with the lovely landscape, with the fertility of the land, but foremost with the sense of community they observed among the Amish. Anton says, "Here one can live one's faith as it is meant to be lived. People take care of each other and no one needs to be on his own." Bitterness has crept into the community of Sabinal; the harsh life of coping with this arid climate without irrigation has resulted in frustration and jealousy, leading to friction.

Any development of the community is held back by the rigid and unrealistic principles of the leaders.

But then, in November 2015, *Kurze Nachrichten*, the monthly newsletter that is sent to the Mennonite diaspora in South America and beyond – and which even reaches the home of the author in Leiden, Netherlands via internet – reports that "the Sabinal Colony will very likely take a big leap – which they have constantly been postponing and which could have saved them millions of dollars – namely, to join the grid. It seems the leaders have reluctantly agreed to succumb to the intolerable." If the purchase of 26,000 hectares of forest in Quintana Roo had worked out well, Bishop Fehr, with a small group of followers, could have continued his conservative lifestyle on this new land on the peninsula of Yucatan. But after years of haggling with the local authorities, who did not provide the necessary permits to cut the trees, it has become evident that this purchase is really a fool's bargain. The many years of needless waiting and the use of expensive fuel for the aggregates to pump water into the desert lands of Sabinal have been a waste. There is not much good rainy land to be purchased elsewhere in Mexico. In the end, it is clear that there is no other option but to give way to modernity.

For Anton and David, this change has come too late. They already left some years ago and now embrace the new opportunities that the lifestyle of the Amish gives them. Anton – now with a beard and the typical Amish haircut – and his family feel fully at home in the New Order community. Anton's oldest daughter Sara (21) has married Elam Yoder (24), son of Daniel Yoder, one of the bishops and hence a leading man in the congregation. Daniel Yoder is a charismatic man with an



Three generations of Fehr women, on their way to a "busy bee" in their community.

impressively full head of grey hair, a huge beard, and a sympathetic smile that no doubt enhance his leadership qualities. He is a well-read man, with a bookcase full of church history and a wide interest in the world. He owns a company that imports work gloves and related necessities that make working in the countryside of cold and muddy Michigan a lot easier and more efficient. I regularly step into his office, where he sits behind his desk, a headphone at his ears and very much involved in busy conversations. Later that evening, when I join his family for dinner, he apologizes for not having had time to talk to me. “You know, it is becoming more and more difficult with these banks. Before, I could easily make transfers with a call, but now they want you to use a computer and if you don’t have one, it takes time. It gives me stress.” Mr Yoder imports part of his stock from China, but through an agent in California. He receives paper catalogues from which he can choose his products, and he then puts his orders in by telephone or by fax through his agent. Sometimes, when it really matters, he asks a friend outside the Amish community to send an e-mail for him – but only if there are no other options.

The same applies to Anton Fehr. He works as maintenance man in an Amish sawmill. But because he would prefer to open his own workshop, he is gradually rebuilding his own shed and investing in the purchase of equipment. There is plenty for sale – furniture left over from bankrupt companies, for instance – but always via auctions on the internet. He therefore asks his American neighbour to help him by searching the internet and making a reasonable bid on a workbench or electric sawing machine. He then rents a bus and a driver to pick it up. Such tools and equipment can be plugged into a self-made

mega-aggregate on which a whole range of batteries is charged. Hence, there is light and electricity in the workplace, but not coming from outside the community.

The Riddle of Amish Culture

For people from the outside world – ‘the English,’ as the Amish call them – this might be confusing behaviour. Some call it hypocritical, others just hilarious or plain inefficient. But things are never that simple. It is what Donald Kraybill calls “the riddle of Amish culture.”¹ It is all about being selective in one’s choice of technology. The Amish do see the effects of modern life around them constantly. They see the many possibilities of technological advancement but also the negative side of it: the alienation and the individualistic and sometimes egocentric lifestyle that go with it. For them it is important to stay in tune with their direct environment. This not only means feeding and butchering one’s own pig and knowing where the meat goes, but it is primarily about consciously being part of a community where no one can fade away into anonymity and loneliness and no one is without employment, where medical costs are shared by the whole community and everyone can count on being helped.

An example is the thirtieth birthday gift for Heather, a single woman who rents a moderately-maintained house in the village; every weekend for a whole year, alternating groups of men and women spend two days repairing the house, building a shed, and doing all kinds of chores that the many other members of a large family would normally do.

More of the same is seen in the so-called “busy bees.” The congregation of twenty-five families is divided into eight



Women participating in a “busy bee,” preserving fruit in the home of a family from the congregation.



Ready for winter. One of the Fehr daughters stands next to the year's supply of preserves, stocked in the family's basement. No doubt this preparation was assisted by women from the community during many "busy bees"!

groups of three to four families who will work together for a family once a month. Every family in the community will be the receiving party at least once. The helpers do everything that needs doing: overdue maintenance, the building of a fence or a shed, quilting, sewing, cooking, or conserving fruits and vegetables. All other work comes to a standstill. The whole community participates in these specific days, which are all planned a year ahead. Apart from working, there is talking, laughing, eating, and praying. This is the solidarity and sense of belonging that is lost when people buy cars, computers, and related equipment that make life efficient and faster but also make people self-sufficient. No one needs another anymore then, and the basis, the essence of the Amish way of life – being part of a community – is gone.

Technology is therefore not taboo but can be used as long as it does not nibble at the boundaries of the community. It is a matter of constantly weighing what can be done and what not and which exceptions are tolerated in what circumstances. The house Heather is renting from an American landlord, for example, has electricity. She is allowed to maintain this situation because the landlord does not want gas pipes entering his house.

Amish are Thriving in Michigan

The Amish are therefore constantly weighing modernity against the basic values of their beliefs and lifestyle. This is especially the case when the communities keep growing in number year by year, to the point where they need to look for



Women sewing and visiting together at a "busy bee" in a basement lit with gas lamps.

new land and farms far away from the original Amish states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. Michigan, where the Amish first settled in 1895, is seeing a rapid increase in the size of the Amish population. It is basically a result of the decreasing population of the state due to the collapse of the automobile industry. Much land and many houses are for sale, and there is a flexible state authority, which is liberal in opportunities



Youth and even children participate in community life. Here, young women preserve beans at a “busy bee,” while a youngster looks on with curiosity.

for special schooling and flexible in its Cottage Food Laws allowing small supplies of vegetables, meat, and dairy to be sold locally. This means that ‘English’ houses and villages are gradually being incorporated into new Amish communities. These houses all have electricity. Amish couples can take one year to take out the jacks and replace the light bulbs with gas lanterns.

The first Amish families came to this southern Michigan village in 1994; since then, the maximum number of twenty-five families has been reached. “When the congregation becomes larger in number, things get out of hand,” says one of the neighbours who was invited for dinner at the Fehr house. “This is what you see happening in the Counties of Lancaster and Holmes where the Old Order Amish are living. The congregations are so large that the younger people need to be split up in multiple groups. Parents lose control over them and often things get out of hand. We do not have this *rumpspringa* anymore. It is not necessary. Our youth group is small and close and the youngsters feel completely fine with their local activities.” But why don’t they forbid the *rumpspringa* in Lancaster, when it causes so much trouble? “Because they are Old Order and do not want to change the rules.” It is evident that, like the Mennonites, the Amish cannot be reduced to a common denominator. There are many groups, just like that of Bishop Fehr and his followers in Sabinal, who would rather break than bend.

Eight families, some with young children, some with older ones, are selected through the drawing of lots; they will be helped to find and purchase new land and houses in the neighbourhood, preferably at a reasonable price to avoid getting into trouble by asking for loans with banks and other financiers who are related to the outside world.

Anton and his family will no doubt remain. Anton says, “God has a plan for us. He makes room for us by having other people move away from here.” His children are happy here. They love going to a school where subjects such as geography and history, in contrast to Sabinal, are seen as interesting and necessary for a certain basic education and where exercise books, pencils, atlases, and an encyclopaedia are available. In



Three of Anton Fehr’s daughters at home.



A Fehr daughter hard at work with coloured pencils and a colouring book.

this school they are allowed to play a number of sports, and the youth spend Sunday afternoon singing and playing games instead of snorting coke somewhere in an abandoned farmhouse at the edges of the colony. Anton says, “That is what I found the hardest in Sabinal. Parents saw their children using drugs and alcohol but did not take any action.” “Can things ever go right in Sabinal?” I asked him. “First, people have to find the right track spiritually again, then the rest will come. Ultimately, I chose to follow God’s word, and that is why I am here now.”

Seeing Anton and his family flourishing in their new community in Michigan is proof again of the tremendous flexibility and ability to adapt that has been a remarkable quality among Mennonites for over four centuries since the Reformation. No doubt the people of Sabinal will now also make new steps in a changing world and find a way to accommodate according to their principles.

Endnotes

1 Donald Kraybill, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, John Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Maria Dueck Reimer Loewen: “Ab Dueck’s Mitchji”

By Ralph Friesen, Nelson, British Columbia

Introduction

Mrs. Cornelius B. Loewen, nee Maria Dueck, was 75 when, in 1949, she sat down to write her life story. Mennonite women of her generation by and large did not leave much of a written account of their lives and activities, and the very fact that she took pains to write her story indicates a more assertive personality than would have been the norm. She seemed especially aware of the value of the unique story of the pioneer experience, and this is where she puts the emphasis in her account. She even wrote a commemorative poem about pioneer days addressed to the new generation, as a reminder of the hardships and sacrifices their ancestors went through: “You who are young, mark my words / It is for you that this was done.”

Maria was a very capable young girl in her village of Gruenfeld, later Kleefeld, on Manitoba’s East Reserve. She was one of thirteen children of Abraham L. Dueck (1841-1899) and Elisabeth Rempel (1841-1901), of whom five died in infancy or early childhood. As a child she kneaded clay with her feet to make plaster, delivered messages to the neighbours of mayoral meetings, loaded hay, tied wheat into sheaves, milked cows and cared for younger siblings. By the time she was fourteen she could sew clothing for adults. In the little leisure time she would have had, she loved to sing, along with other school children.

At nineteen, she married twenty-one year-old Johann, the son of Abraham R. (1841-1891) and Maria (1847-1916) Reimer of Blumenort, and a grandson of patriarch Abraham F. Reimer. She was married to “my Reimer,” as she affectionately calls him, for only eight years before his premature death in 1902 at the age of thirty. Relatively soon, after nine months, she married thirty-nine year-old widower Cornelius B. Loewen, a thresher and sawmill operator from Steinbach. Maria had one child, a little girl also called Maria, from her first marriage. C. B. Loewen brought seven children into the second marriage, with another one, Elisabeth, having married in the same year, 1903. Five of the seven were boys, with a reputation for being wild and rambunctious. Of these, the eldest, aged, twenty, was Cornelius Junior, or “C. T.” as he would later come to be known, and the youngest was Katharina, age three. Being a second mother to these boisterous children was not easy; her daughter Maria later commented: “I being a young child then, remember often seeing Mother weep.”¹

It should be acknowledged that, in later years, the adult Loewen siblings showed kindness and support to their stepmother.

Two years after their marriage, a son was born to Maria and Cornelius, who was named Johann. Another son, Heinrich, came along but died before reaching one-and-a-half. Three more children followed—the last, Bernhard, born in late 1915, when Maria was forty-one.

After C. B. Loewen’s death in 1928, Maria was a widow again, and remained single until her death. Her last years were spent at the Invalid Home in Steinbach, and with her children. Her writings evince a strong faith in God and a kind of humble pride in her accomplishments mixed with a somewhat dry or even sly sense of humour.

The autobiography that follows has been transcribed and translated from the original German by Maria’s grandson



A four generation picture with Mary (Mrs. Peter R. Reimer, her mother Marie (Mrs. John C. Reimer (back l. to r.). In the foreground Maria Dueck Loewen is holding Mary’s daughter Penny. Photo Credit: Steinbach Post, August 1, 1956, provided by Mary Reimer.

Almon Reimer, who still lives in Steinbach and as of this writing, aged 93.

Biography of Mrs. C. B. Loewen [April 29, 1874- December 22, 1960]

This is a translation of a writing done by grandmother Maria Dueck, 1st Reimer then Loewen in 1950. From German to English by Almon Reimer. September 13, 1999.

A narration of my childhood, youth and older

As a child my name was Ab Duecks’ Mitchji. My name now is Mrs. or Widow Cor. B. Loewen, and I was born in Russia in the village of Annafeld in 1874.² As a young child of three months my parents took me along to America.³ We arrived here in September, close to the village of Niverville. Quickly a home had to be built. This house was a “Syrie” made of hay, and this was, as you could imagine, not very warm.⁴ Therefore a lot of heating had to be done, so much so that one time the hay roof started to burn. That resulted in my Uncle Peter Dueck

burning his hands badly. My parents and Peter Duecks lived together this first winter. Also they had to make hay for the one cow they had. This cow got so cold that her ears and tail froze and fell off. So by her everything was shorter thereafter.

The first house my parents built was made of logs and had to be replastered every fall. This clay I often had to knead through with my feet to make it workable. On the west end of the house was the barn. The roof was made of thin logs. In one corner the chickens sat for night.

We were very short of foodstuffs. Some people made loans by the good government, which was then slowly paid off. This was called a bread loan.⁵ The flour made of frozen wheat was quite dark. When we baked bread with it, it would sometimes form a doughy ring in the bottom crust. Cake and pie were not made by the Mennonites. Bananas, oranges and grapefruit I have not eaten in my childhood, also not seen many times. I delighted myself instead on garden vegetables and the sour gooseberries and sorrel. Cutlery to wash there wasn't much because we ate the soup altogether out of a big pot in the centre. Table knives and small dishes to eat out of, there were none. The spoons were round and made out of lead (pewter) or wood. Some people had brought wooden dishes from Russia. The potatoes were cut up with the fork at the table and each piece dipped in gravy or fat. Mashed potatoes a hole was made in the centre and filled with cream gravy. This was always a real treat for everyone.

Most people brought a big chest from Russia. In this then all kind of things were stored, dried apple pieces, dried plums, dried raisins, etc., and when the mother would open the chest the children came running begging for a treat. That was better than ice cream, which we didn't even know about. Candy we got only at Christmas.

The first years it was customary that the parents and only the smallest children would eat in the "big" room. The bigger children would eat in the smaller room. Rooms we had but two. During winter the single windowpanes froze over about an inch, causing the rooms to be always half dark. And like today, in 1949, just to press a button to make light was unheard of. Then we didn't even have oil lamps, only candles and bottles with a soft string, which soaked up the oil like a wick to make a light.

In the school the children learned writing, arithmetic, Bible stories, the multiplication tables and some geography and 'steelarbeit' [i.e., *Steilschrift*, vertical writing], many scripture verses and song verses. The beginners learned to read out of a 'Fiebel' reader. The beginners started school in spring after the school 'prüfung' spring exams. My first teacher was neighbour Uncle Peter L. Dueck.⁶ He was very fat and weighed 300 lbs. When he died they had to put him into the coffin in the barn because the doors of the house were not big enough to get the coffin through.

When Mr. Dueck was teacher we had the school at their place in the barn in a special room. My second teacher was Uncle Cor. Toews, who was sent to America to scout out the land here. My third teacher was Uncle Abr. Isaak⁷ who was my teacher two years. Then the school was three or four 'feuerstellen' fireplaces from our place. The last two years or winters a Mrs. Radinzel was my teacher.⁸ The children did not have much comfort sitting in school like today. We sat 8 children on one bench without a lean or back. We have, however, not all got a crooked back from it.

When the 'Grünfelder' Kleefelder had their first church I do not know,⁹ but for a long time it was by Jacob L. Duecks in both of their rooms we sat on planks how we could stand it I do not know. We did not know of anything better. We get tired even now in 1949 sitting on the very best of benches.

At that time there was only one preacher for one Sunday, and this was a read message and took about an hour. It gave quite a stir when the services changed from reading sermons to speaking them off by heart. The weddings as well at that time were much less complicated. At that time the couple was married during the regular morning service. They said the marriage vows and then it was done. Silver or golden anniversaries were not known. The first I can remember about golden anniversary was at Peter Klassens in 'Neuanlage,' now Twin Creek.¹⁰

My work as a nine-year-old girl was varied. Often I had to go along to get feed hay or grain. I would have to form the load so it would stay on when travelling. One year I can remember we had made a hundred loads of hay. It was hard for my father to set all those haystacks. When I was eleven years old I had to learn to milk the cows. It was just on time because the next year my sister Elizabeth got married to a Mr. Isaak Plett and moved to Steinbach.

When I was twelve my mother¹¹ lay sick for six weeks. That was a hard time for me. Before my mother fully recovered, my youngest sister died. Tina was a wonderful child. She reached the age of one year.¹² The same year my uncle and aunt the Henry Rempels with five children came here from Russia. The first year they were here he became school teacher in Grünfeld. I was already too old to go to school by then.¹³

I think it was in the year 1885 when a great storm came one evening. The storm was so bad that the floor door lifted up, and it blew out a small window frame. My two older brothers and my sister Lienchen [Helena] were not back from the field. They had a very hard time to come home along the street against the wind.

Our grain we cut with a reaper. My brother Abraham and I had to tie this grain into sheaves. The younger children had to carry sheaves in rows and father would set the stooks in nice straight rows.

In our village we had fourteen families and one bachelor. On the north end lived Peter Bergs the first then Abr. Loewens, then Cornelius Toewses, next Bishop Peter Toews, then Johann Toews. Then five pair of Duecks in a row: Jacob, Johann and his son Johann Dueck, then Peter and Abraham; Johann Hieberts, John Toewses, Abr. Schellenberg, then the bachelor, a John Esau, Abr. Isaak and Abe Toews.¹⁴ My father was 'Schulte' mayor.¹⁵ When 'Schultebot' public meeting was supposed to be we children had to go to the neighbours and say come to the meeting and tell it to your neighbours. Sometimes a paper note was sent around.

The Grünfelders had a neighbours' path and each had a boundary fence so a lot of gates had to be opened and closed. We children were not allowed to be on the street unless if we had to bring the cattle. The cattle went from one end of the village to the other every day. The first years we had a herdsman because we did not have a fence as yet.

Maybe it was the year 1881 or 1888¹⁶ on August 1 when a heavy hail storm flattened the grain. Neighbour Peter Reimers had a nice field of wheat ready to cut and in the evening it was gone. Oh that was a loud noise. The window panes together with hail and water flew into the rooms. Father, and I think it

was Abraham and I, held blankets against the windows to save the last one. The next morning we went to see the wheat. O weh! All the wheat was hammered into the ground. Nobody could get anything from the wheat except the chickens, birds and mice could eat it.

When I was fourteen I started to sew with the sewing machine. Then I made anything I met up with, boys' clothing and overcoats, etc. I think in those days it was still too high up to wear factory made clothing. When I got married a man's fur coat was bought for me. A ladies' coat was not humble enough. This was clothing humility. That's how things were. Then we needed not to be ashamed.

In my youth we were not to sing out of the *Evangeliums Lieder, Frohe Botschaft* and other song books in the service. When I went to school we sang only 'Choral Buch' melodies. In school we sang only out of the big 'Gesangbuch'.¹⁷

When Uncle [Heinrich] Rempel became schoolteacher we learned many other melodies. Then we youth did a lot of singing when we got together. We enjoyed this. We did not sing the four voices [four-part harmony] though.

I got married the first time with Johann R. Reimer. When he came to visit me the first time he came on a cutter sleigh, and it was snowing hard. At that time I was very naïve and inexperienced but everything worked out. We were married by uncle Peter Reimer on February 4, 1894 in Steinbach. We were married at the same time as Frank Goertzens. We moved in with mother Reimer in the summer kitchen and started to farm in a small way. We milked several cows and made butter to sell. The milk we had in shallow bowls for the cream to separate, sitting on long boards. Because my Reimer was a weaker person, he undertook to be the village herdsman for a few years. He also was schoolteacher for a few years. We also had a small store, so together with the cattle and a little farmland we made our living. So it went until he died in 1902, August 10. Our Marie was almost five years old at that time.

Marie was born Dec. 3, 1897 in Blumenort at 12 o'clock noon.¹⁸ With more children we did not have luck, because it often came to nothing (miscarriages). Therefore I was so weak then.

In 1902 my John got very ill. The cattle doctor Harrison called the sickness "retch fever." He lay very sick for three months. Then he got so much better that we could go to Ste. Anne to have the doctor to look at him. But the doctor was not at home. Then in August he was very sick for two days and nights and died Sunday, August 10, 1902, 5 p.m. The funeral was August 12th. His age reached 30 years, 11 months, 6 days.

The time I was a widow my sister Elizabeth lived with me. (Isaak Plett the inventor's mother.)¹⁹

In nine months I married widower Cornelius B. Loewen. He had seven unmarried children. Elizabeth, his daughter, was already married to Gerhard Giesbrecht (Ernest Giesbrecht's father). We lived on a farm one mile north of Steinbach. There were four children born to us: John, 1 June, 1905; Henry, 19 October, 1907; Helena, 15 January, 1909; Margaret 23 September, 1910; Henry, 31 January, 1914. The first Henry died 1909, February 5. Bernhard, November 2, 1915.²⁰

Excerpt from Maria's diary:

Where I have lived: from Russia to America, in a tent for the first winter, together with Peter L. Duecks. From there to a new house with two rooms, with a barn on one end. From there to

Blumenort, in a summer kitchen. From there with my Reimer to our own house. From there with C. B. Loewen in their old house on the farm. From there into our big new house. From there to north Steinbach to Hein. Neufelds on the farm. From there south, closer to Steinbach, to a new chicken barn. From there to Kl. I. Friesen's house, renting, then to Peter Barkmans' house. From there to Morris, to a store. From there another rental house. Then back to C. T. Loewen's shed. From there, one winter in the bush with Ben & Lena and Geter [?] From there back again to the shed. When he died I could move into the house and lived there until on October 3 I moved to the Invalid Home in 1951, where I am now in 1958.

"Testimony" of Maria, from the Mennonite Invalid Home Yearbook, 1958:

Since I have been asked to write something for the Invalid Home book, I cannot miss the opportunity to write of the best of this place. First, the building is not good for the residents because there are too many stairs to climb. From the cellar up to the third floor are thirty-four steps; twenty-eight of which are walked by the nurses every day.

But what I treasure here is that, every Sunday, and on holidays, we can hear the Gospel in German. We have Bible study each morning from ten to eleven and then on Thursday evenings from 7:30 to 8:30. On weekdays we meet each morning for a service, and the minister reads to us from the daily devotion [*Kalenderblatt*] and the Bible. We close with a song and prayer.

But there is also much misery and sickness of different kinds in this home. Many cannot walk by themselves; they are lame or weak, so that they cannot even eat by themselves. And many are also very deaf, which is also a great hardship, though it is good for sleeping. Others cannot see well, or are altogether blind, so that they cannot read or do handwork to pass the time. So we do not live here delightfully or joyfully every day like the rich man, rather much more like the poor Lazarus, in hardship and pain. Dogs do not come to lighten the burden,²¹ rather the nurses apply ointments, bring pills, warm us, wash and fix things as well as possible.

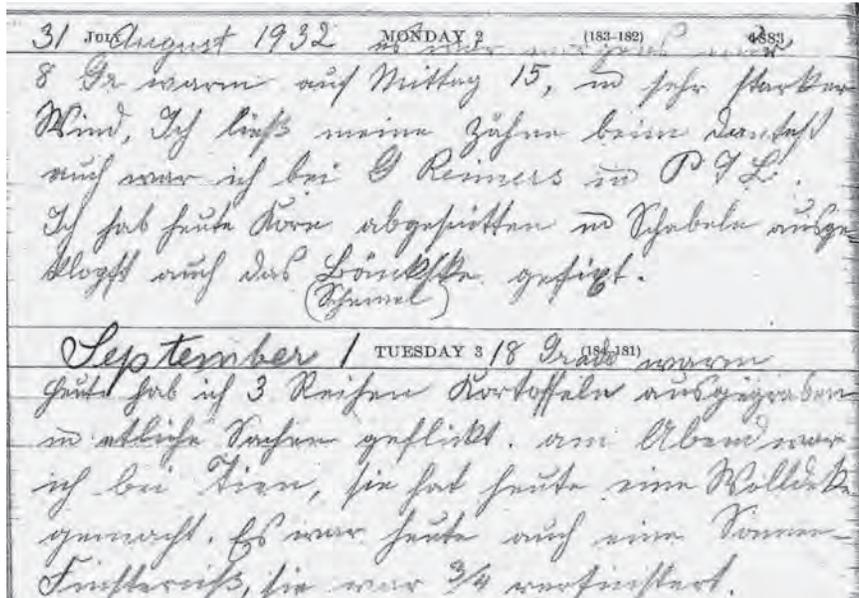
Yes, thanks be to God that people will undertake even this kind of work. God bless them, if they do it out of love. And since there is so much pain and hardship, we patients also share our pain with each other. As the proverb says: shared pain is half the pain, and shared joy is double the joy.

*A certain peace is present
Arise, weary heart, and become light!
You sigh here in your bonds
And your sun does not shine.
Look unto the Lamb, so that, with joy
You can rejoice before his throne
Throw down your burden and go there with speed
Soon the heated struggle is finished
Soon the bitter journey comes to an end
And then you enter into your rest.*

I would gladly be a little light in this world.

In Memory of the 1874 Immigration

(Composed by Widow Corn. B. Loewen for "Dueck Day," July 16, 1933.)



Maria Dueck's August 31 and September 1, 1932 diary entries.



Marie Dueck Loewen in her garden. Photo Credit: Phil Klassen.

Translated from the German by Ralph Friesen. No attempt has been made to retain the original rhyme or meter. The original poem is printed in the Dueck family book cited earlier.

Time passes by, hardly noticed
 Running like streams of water
 And days and years, as in a dream
 Have gone, never to return.
 So I will tell you now
 Of my parents
 Who now are resting, waiting silently
 To enter into their joy

It was 59 years ago
 That they both came
 From a distant land
 Called Russia
 Moved to take this step
 By issues of sincere belief
 Concerning the yoke of government
 Which I dare to describe here

Every young man was supposed
 To go into military service
 Rather than this, they wanted
 To move away from that land
 But they did not come alone
 No, hundreds came with them
 All agreed that, in this way
 They would serve the Lord.

You who are young, mark my words
 It is for you that this was done
 That they left that country
 In the interest of your well-being
 They did not shy from this long journey
 With their dear little ones
 Though many a parent, and many an old person
 Wept tears of homesickness.

They came in the summer
 To the open prairie
 And built their little shelter
 With a thatched roof and sticks
 They spent one winter there
 Together with the Peter Duecks
 And in this place they shared
 Joy and sorrow together.

With a hand sickle they mowed
 The grass and cut their grain
 They had a tallow lamp for light
 Each day the cow was driven to pasture
 By the herdsman
 Shared by the whole village
 Dried dung served as fuel for the fire
 We wore wooden sandals on our feet.

Would you also like to know
 How they got to church?
 Oxen were hitched
 To a small cart
 And some would go on foot
 As far as ten or thirty miles
 While now, as we can see
 Cars smash rapidly along.

How much has changed with time
 One can hardly believe
 Tractors drive here and there
 Threshing machines snort loudly
 Electric light shines
 Machines help chickens hatch
 Drills are used for sowing.

*It is a wonder to me that, after all this time
I am still alive
The beginning was so poor and hard
We lived in such need
Yet we give thanks to God, who has led us
Through troubles on this earth
And stays with us, always staying close
Through every care and complaint.*

*Therefore we pledge
Always to trust in Jesus
Serving him from year to year
Until we shall see him
In that great glory
With all of our loved ones
So Christians, struggle on, we shall know joy
If only we stay faithful to him.*

Excerpts from the biography of Maria R. Dueck in Abraham L. and Elisabeth Dueck and Their Descendants: 1841-1965, compiled by Peter H. Dueck, no date. [The biography was written by her daughter Maria (1897-1986—Mrs. John C. Reimer.)]

Father Loewen, after some years, left the Evangelical Menonite Church (then Kleine Gemeinde) and later joined the Church of God (not Holdeman). Mother stayed eleven years longer with the Kleine Gemeinde; then in 1925 she too joined the Church of God and was baptized again.²²

Her second matrimony lasted 25 years. In this period they farmed near Steinbach except for the last years, when in 1925 and 1926 they had a store in the town of Morris and in the winter of 1927-28 when they lived in the bush where they cooked for the gang at C. T. Loewen's sawmill.

In the year 1928 father Loewen died after five days of illness from stroke while they were in Kansas helping with the harvest. He was buried in Steinbach. Mother was left with three unmarried children at the ages of eleven, thirteen and eighteen years. She now bought a lot in Steinbach and had a house moved onto it, which she bought in Giroux. She resided in that house for twenty years. They made their living and paid the debts by working out, keeping boarders and renting rooms. The last five years her daughter Helen with two children lived with her.

In the fall of 1951 Mother took residence in the Invalid Home (for the aged) where she lived for seven years. In August 1958 she was seriously ill in the hospital for some days. From there she came to us (her daughter Maria) instead of going back into the home, because she wanted more rest.

In those two years with us she was in bed almost invariably. The last week she suffered heavily from asthma and had to be given oxygen. She died in our house at the age of eighty-six years.

She had been a widow for a total of thirty-three years and had also been married for thirty-three years.

Mother had a strong faith in God which she proved in the different circumstances she experienced in her life. She was thrifty and had good order in the management of her affairs.

She was small of stature²³ and bodily she never was strong. Since the age of thirty-six she had a chronic cough which slowly grew worse until her last years when she suffered from it considerably.

We are remembering her as a wise, loving mother.

Grandchildren's memories

One of Maria's grandchildren, Arnold Reimer, now a retired schoolteacher living in Winnipeg, recalls that his mother cared for Maria during her last days:

The 'altenheim' where Mrs. C. B. Loewen had been placed was too busy and too noisy for her frail condition, so my mother [Mrs. John C. Reimer] offered to take care of her in their quiet "Bush Farm" farmhouse. I was attending Manitoba Teacher's College that year (1960-1961), living in residence from Sunday night through Friday classes, and then coming home for weekends. When some of my friends gathered in my upstairs bedroom for a rambunctious Sunday afternoon visit, Mrs. Loewen banged on the downstairs ceiling with a broom handle, sending a strong message upward that we should be quiet or go outside. We did, of course.

Maria seemed especially sensitive to noise; her daughter even washed the cutlery one fork and one spoon at a time so as to avoid the clatter. "I respect my mother for her devotion and care for her mother during her mother's last days," says Arnold now.

Mrs. Loewen may have been small and frail, but she was also tough. Arnold Reimer recalls that, in 1952 or 1953, when he was around twelve or thirteen, his grandmother, almost eighty years old, cut down a giant elm tree in the back yard of her little house on Reimer Avenue—with a buck saw. (Arnold admits that he's not entirely sure that his grandmother really had such Paul Bunyan abilities, but that was how he saw her then.) Then she cut the branches into firewood-length pieces and enlisted her grandson to help her stack the wood in her shed. She rewarded him with twenty-five cents—"a huge amount in those days."²⁴

Another grandchild, Mary Reimer, also retired and living in Winnipeg, remembers that her parents moved to Steinbach from Blumenort in 1943, when Mary was a child in grade school. Sometimes she would go to Grandmother's for lunch, and on these occasions would take care to be on her best behaviour. One day Mary finished eating and was going to leave the table when her grandmother said: "You haven't finished your meal." Somewhat surprised and concerned, Mary protested that she had. "You still haven't eaten your cherries," said Grandmother, indicating the large red, round buttons on the front of the child's dress. Mary thinks of this now as an example of "Dueck" humour—indirect and teasing a little.²⁵



*C. B. Loewen, Maria Dueck's second husband.
Photo Credit: Abe Warkentin, Reflections of our Heritage, 46.*

Endnotes

- 1 *Abraham L. and Elisabeth Dueck and Their Descendants: 1841-1965*, compiled by Peter H. Dueck, no date, p. 41.
- 2 Her birthday was May 11 on the old style Julian calendar. Annafeld was a Kleine Gemeinde village in Borosenko Colony.
- 3 They are on the passenger list of the *S. S. Austrian*, arriving at Quebec City, August 31, 1874. Maria's name does not appear; she is designated only as "infant." http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/canada/quebec/austrian_65.html
- 4 They actually first lived in a tent, according to the biography of her father Abraham L. Dueck. See *Abraham L. and Elisabeth Dueck and Their Descendants: 1841-1965*, compiled by Peter H. Dueck, no date, p. 18. A *Sarai* (apparently the root word is Russian, is described by geographer John Warkentin as "consisting essentially of a steeply pitched thatched roof, whose lower end rested directly on the ground. This roof, measuring about twenty-five feet square, was set up on poles so that the upper end was about eighteen feet above the ground. The spaces between the supporting poles were filled in a number of ways. If the family had sufficient money, ship-lap was used to line the part to be occupied by the family, but if they could not afford this, the lower part was filled in with logs, and the upper part with thatch. As in the *Semlin* [sod hut], part of the *Sarai* was used for sheltering stock. The *Sarai* was much colder than the *Semlin*, especially in the parts reserved for stock, and considerable hardship was endured by the unfortunate few who built this type of shelter." John H. Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Manitoba* (Steinbach: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 2000), p. 49. Originally published as a PhD thesis in 1960.
- 5 Abraham L. Dueck finished paying his debt, with interest, in 1893. Henry Fast, *Gruenfeld: 1874-1910* (2006), p. 15.
- 6 Younger brother to Maria's father, Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887) had also been a teacher in South Russia before coming to Canada.
- 7 Abraham P. Isaac (1852-1938) taught in Grünfeld village school in the years 1881-82. He gave up teaching when he joined the Holdeman Gemeinde. Henry Fast, *Gruenfeld*, p. 76.
- 8 Mrs. Maria Radinzel, nee Friesen, taught in Grünfeld during the years 1884-86. Maria was the first woman teacher in the East Reserve. Henry Fast, *Gruenfeld*, p. 183.
- 9 Apparently construction on a church building was begun in 1879, but the building may never have been used for its originally intended purpose. See Henry Fast, *Gruenfeld*, p. 154.
- 10 Peter B. Klassen (1852-1930) married Katharina Koop (1857-1947) on December 26, 1874; they helped establish the village of Neuanlage two miles south of Blumenort. Their golden anniversary took place in 1924. See Delbert Plett, *Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde* (Steinbach: Crossway Publications, 2000), pp. 268-69.
- 11 See Elisabeth Rempel (1841-1901).

- 12 Katherina was born June 5, 1886 and died June 3, 1887.
- 13 Heinrich Rempel (1855-1926), brother to Maria's mother, was a school teacher who contributed frequently to newspapers like the *Memnonitische Rundschau* and the *Steinbach Post*; he was a revivalist and a founder of the Bruderthaler or Evangelical Mennonite Brethren church in Steinbach. He requested assistance from the Dueck family to immigrate in 1886, and by 1887 was resident in Kleefeld.
- 14 This listing is largely consistent with the "Gruenfeld Village Street, 1874-1877" list in Henry Fast's excellent history, *Gruenfeld*, p. 6.
- 15 He was also the Ältester or bishop of the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba from 1895 until his death in 1899.
- 16 The latter date is more likely, as in 1881 Maria would have been only seven, and probably not called upon to help in a hail storm—though it is possible.
- 17 The conservative Kleine Gemeinde feared that the evangelical lyrics and more sentimental melodies of the books mentioned would lead their youth away from established tradition.
- 18 She married Johann C. Reimer, teacher and historian and founder of the Village Museum in Steinbach. Almon Reimer, who translated this document, is her son.
- 19 Elisabeth's husband Isaac Plett (1867-1933), lived away from his family for periods of time, in Winnipeg and Giroux. The "Isaac Plett inventor" referred to here is his son (1895-1975). Elisabeth had two children who also lived with Maria.
- 20 Cornelius B. Loewen (1863-1928) first married Anna, daughter of Steinbach pioneers Peter and Elisabeth Reimer Toews. Like Maria's husband John Reimer, she died in 1902, by which time she and her husband were living in Steinbach, where Cornelius was a successful sawmill operator. Their sons became prominent businessmen in Steinbach, particularly Cornelius, or "C. T." as he was popularly known, who ran a lumber business like his father. The children of Cornelius B. Loewen and Maria Dueck Reimer did well enough for themselves but did not attain the financial status of their half-siblings.
- 21 The reference is to Jesus' story of a beggar named Lazarus who waited at a rich man's gate, hoping for crumbs from his table. The dogs came to lick Lazarus' sores. Luke 16: 19-21.
- 22 The members of the Church of God were known, in German, as *Abendlichter*—literally, carriers of the evening light. They were emotional in their religious expression, similar to Pentecostals at the time. Apparently Maria never returned to the Kleine Gemeinde even after her husband's death, but attended the Bruderthaler or Evangelical Mennonite Brethren church across from where she lived on Reimer Avenue. *Mary Reimer, telephone conversation, April 13, 2016*.
- 23 Apparently a characteristic of the Duecks, who were sometimes known, in Low German, as *dee kjeene Dijtje*.
- 24 Arnold Reimer, email, April 8, 2016.
- 25 Mary Reimer, telephone conversation, April 13, 2016.

Autobiography of David Mantler 1757 – 1837

Translated by Ed Enns
Digitized, Edited and Annotated by Glenn Penner

This short biography provides us with a first-hand view of the life of an ordinary Mennonite of this time period. Very few diaries or autobiographies are available for West Prussian Mennonites for the period prior to the last big migration to Russia (1801--1820).

The childhood experiences described by Mantler may seem frightening by contemporary standards – sent away by his parents to live with his uncle at the age of three and hired out as a farm hand in another village at the age of twelve—but this was typical for children of poorer families and for families who could not afford to feed and clothe all of their children. The practice of handing over the care of children continued well into the Russian period. In addition, the economic uncertainties experienced by young landless men are illustrated by Mantler's description of his time as a young adult. This involved working as a journeyman, then a master tailor, and eventually marrying, not out of love, but in order to obtain the ultimate earthly goal, a *Wirtschaft* (farm).

It is unfortunate that Mantler does not spend more time describing the eight years he and the rest of the West Prussian Mennonites lived through under French occupation. From his brief comments these times were very stressful for all.

David Mantler's autobiography was preserved by his descendants and eventually published by Gustav Reimer under the auspices of the Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein in 1940.

Terms and Units used in Mantler's autobiography:

Hube (or Hufe) – unit of land measurement equal to 16.8 hectares or 41.5 acres. Plural is *Huben*.

Morgen – there were 30 Morgen per Hufen. One Morgen is equal to 1.38 acres

Sg. Danz. – Danzig, as a free city, often had its own currency. This probably refers to a Silber groschen.

s. – this could refer to either a Silber groschen or possibly a Schilling. A Reichsthaler was 30 silbergroschen.

f. – Florin, equal to a Gulden. Equal to one-third of a



A quote from Thomas Hobbes that life is “poor, nasty, brutish, and short” is often used to describe the life of peasants. In this 19th century painting by Robert Warthmüller, Frederick the Great (1712-1786) inspects how his orders to plant more potatoes are being followed. Frederick II was the reigning monarch of West Prussia after the First Partition of Poland in 1772 when David Mantler was 20. Robert Warthmüller, “Der König Überall”, 1886 Deutsches Historisches Museum. Image Source: Wikipedia Commons.

Reichsthaler or Thaler.

Originally published by Gustav Reimer with the gracious permission of the descendants in:

Ansiedlung mennonitischer Niederländer im Weichselmündungsgebiet : von der Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts bis zum Beginn der preussischen Zeit / von Horst Penner. Die Familiennamen der westpreussischen Mennoniten / von Gustav E. Reimer. 1940. Weierhof: Verlag Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1940. Druck von Heinrich Schneider, Karlsruhe, i.B., Karlstrasse 28

Square brackets indicate comments by the editor.

Firstly I shall describe as much as I know of my parents and ancestors. My great-grandfather on my father’s side was Peter Mandtler, a resident of Pletzendorf and Lutheran by religion. My grandfather on my father’s side was Peter Mandtler of Weiszhof, Lutheran by birth but changed to Mennonite in his youth. My grandmother on my father’s side was Susanna Dueck, daughter of Gerhard Dueck of Krebsfelde.

Secondly, my great-grandfather on my mother’s side was David Penner, resident of Neunhuben. My grandfather on my mother’s side was Julius Penner, resident of Gnojau. My grandmother on my Mother’s side was Maria Esau of Petershagen, owner at the time of the place where Martin Hamm now resides.

My father was Peter Mandtler of Weiszhof and my Mother was Anna Penner of Gnojau. The parents first lived at Marienwerder and later in 1749 settled at Blumenort in the Elbing Niederung where they lived for twenty years in the watermill cottage [Wassermuehlen-Kate]. I, David Mandtler, was born

on September 26, 1757. At the age of six months I contracted fever lasting for six months, as a result of which I became so weak that my parents believed I would have to die. My Mother’s brother, David Penner of Tiegenhof, who had no children and, because I was named after him, had clothed me from my birth, took me to himself when I was three years of age. I still remember when my stepmother came to get me. My siblings, of whom there were five at home said: “see David, there comes your Mother” something I did not believe and replied: “My Mother is here in this room!” When my stepmother took me away my mother wept and I too wept bitterly. I do remember that my stepmother first went to Goldberg where we stopped for a rest at her cousin David Loewen. She carried me a distance and then I had to walk again. We ate lettuce and sour cream soup [Schmauntsuppe]. Then my stepfather, my benefactor, came to meet us. He took me on his arm, kissed me and carried me a long distance to his home. Shortly my benefactor had new green clothes sewn for me since they loved me very much. After a time two of my siblings came to visit me and I was very happy to see them. When they left I wanted to go with them back to my parents. They tried to talk me out of it but I began to weep loudly. So they got out my old ragged coat, which I had worn when I came and wanted to put it on me again. If I wept earlier, I now wept much louder, rather than lose those new clothes, I would stay there.

Eventually my benefactors bought a primer for me so that I could learn to read. On the first morning while I was still in bed they had me repeat the ABC’s after them. After I had heard it a few times I could repeat them quickly. But when I was to say any letter by itself, I could not do it. When I was

five I had to attend school. When I was eight the businessman Franz Claassen of Tiegenhof, who had no children, wanted to adopt me as his own child. However, when my foster parents demanded that he sign a surety for 1000 f., he gave up. My foster father who also had no children had decided to adopt me as his heir, something he announced to my mother at one time in my presence. But he did not succeed in this for he suddenly became ill at New Year's in 1770 and could hardly speak a word anymore. His brother Peter Penner of Bärwalde, who was with him when he died, said later that he had told his wife once more, "Mother, keep secret what I have told you." He died on January 6, 1770. I was twelve at the time and very sad and wept when my benefactor died. I soon realized that my stepmother did not love me as she had earlier. Thus I felt abandoned as to my care.

I didn't really want to go back to my parents who had during the winter moved from Blumenort to Fürstenwerder. My brother who had worked for several years already said to me, "Now you will also have to work. I only hope you get to such people where you will not be treated too badly." This came to pass shortly. As soon as my benefactor was buried and the friends began to leave, my stepmother began to complain about me. She said I wasn't obeying her anymore and they should take me away from her. Bernhard Driedger of Schönsee, also a friend, answered her by saying, "I'll take that David along. There'll be something for him." After I had already been in Schönsee in the company of his children, this good Driedger took me on his sleigh and took me to my parents, a place I didn't want to go and where I was quite unknown by now. That's how it happens with us from youth on. One doesn't want to go a certain way or do a certain thing, but that's not always possible.

On the second day at my parents' place, my mother's brother Peter Penner came while my mother was sitting and weeping. Speaking to her he asked, "Why are you weeping?" Her answer, "When we lived in the 'Muehlenkatte' [mill cottage] and ate our own bread and could feed many children, but now that we are here in the church we are being supported by the church. And now that we have our son David from Tiegenhof, he doesn't want to eat with us and I am not to grieve about that?" "Be satisfied and don't worry!" he replied. "Maybe he will become a happy person and you will be satisfied with him." And to me he said, "Come to my place tomorrow. I will give you food and drink and you can accompany my children to school. I will pay the school fees. Do you want to?" "Oh yes, very much!" I replied and thanked him for his good will.

Eight days before Easter the old David Klassen came from Fürstenwerder to my parents (he was a friend of my mother) and said to them: "When I was at Tiegerfeld at a funeral, Heinrich Baergen told me that you had received your son back from Tiegenhof, and that I was to hire him since it would be too bad if he ended up among bad people. He then added that your son has been raised well by his uncle and has gone to school and that I was to take pity on him. "Would you want to hire him out?" "Oh yes," my Father responded. "That's good!" he said. "Bring him to us right after Easter and we will come to terms as to wages." I served at that good man's place for two years. That is the way God takes care of people from their youth on. When a good friend dies, He leads us to another benefactor. I was happy to earn my bread and to have a good time doing it. These people did not keep me as a servant but as a friend.

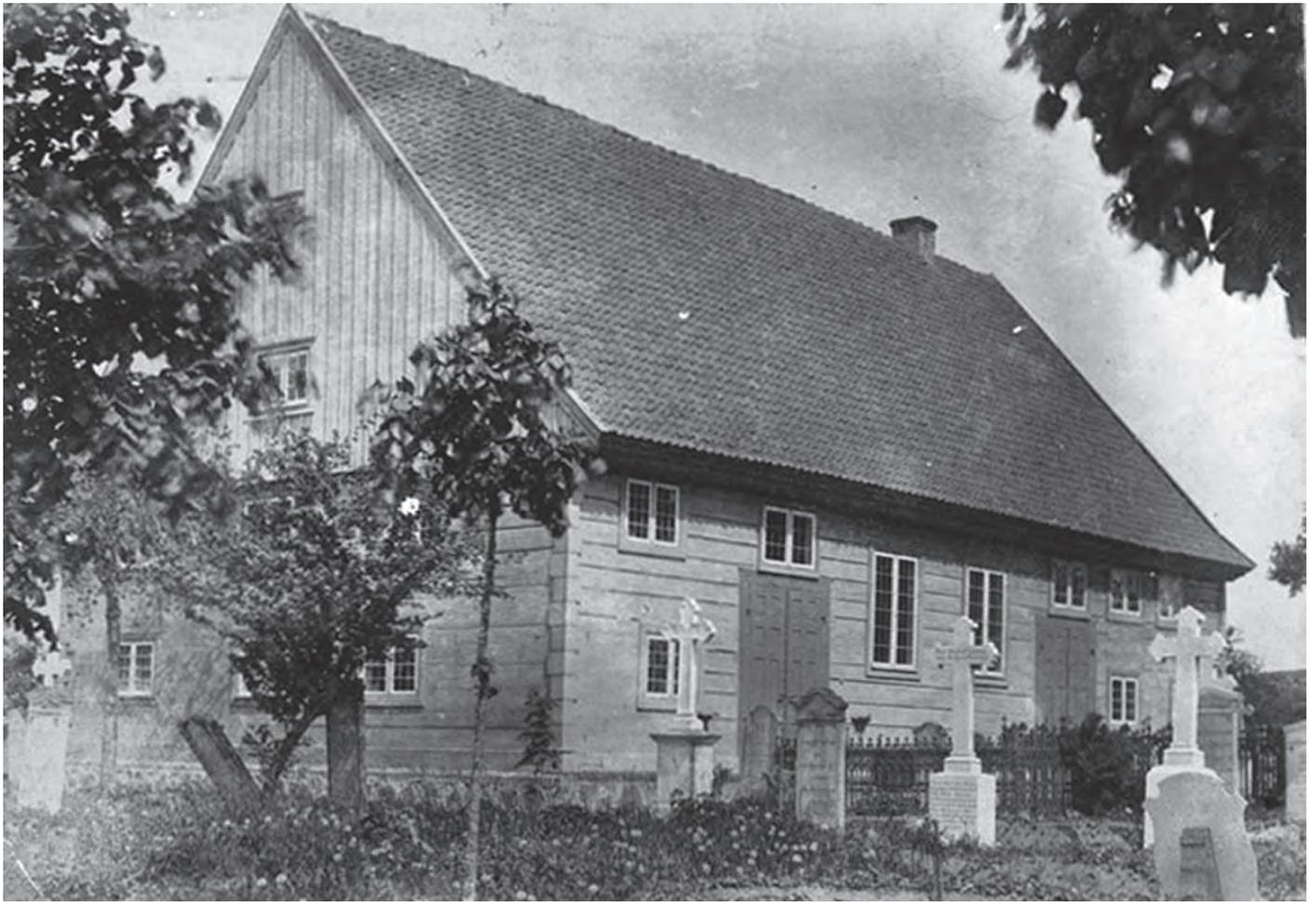
I still remember herding the hogs on the sand piece. There I had to eat with two servants who were digging a ditch. One of them, Christian, said to me, "When you grow up you will also have to do hard work." The other one, the old Anton, added, having already worked for this old man for ten years, "He won't have to do that." "Why not?" responded the first one. While they were talking, the old David Klassen, who was already seventy, came by. They repeated their discussion to him and asked who was right. He answered, "Children", as he always called his people and we called him "Father", "You can always see in a young person what he is good at. Those who take on large tasks always want to be strong and to wrestle with others. This one here is preparing for farming. Among his playthings he has horses, a plow for which I have had a share and coulter [Sech und Schar] made, as well as two harrows, two wagons, all of which belong to farming. If I live long enough I want to do something for him." He didn't live that long, dying ten years later.

After I had worked for him for two years, he paid me and said, "David, I wanted to keep you to feed the cows. But since your Uncle ordered that you should learn a trade, i.e., tailoring, do that, but always come to our place on Sunday." I did go there most of the time. Thus with tears in my eyes, I left my brotherhood on the 15th of November 1771.

Eight days later I arrived at the Master Tailor, Peter Lietz in Bärwalde, where I was to study for two years for sixty f. and fifty f. for tuition. My friends gave money for this and ten f. I had to earn after I had finished the training. This master was a good man but he did not have much work. His wife was very angry and troubled me greatly. But I must say to her credit that, behind my back, she always praised me before other people. After a year I contracted a fever which plagued me most of the time over a period of almost three years. For that reason I had to study an extra half year.

After I had finished my training in April 1774, I came as a journeyman to a different master by the name of Michael Goslowsky. Since my friends wanted him to take me on, he gave me only a small weekly wage of eighteen sg. Danz. with which I had to clothe myself. That my clothes were very worn by that time is self-evident. I did not really know where or how to clothe myself, but I did know that being entrusted with five or fewer pounds, one must somehow make do. So I made myself a plan for clothing myself: 1) f. 1.18 for shoes; 2) s. 1 for stockings; 3) f. 3 for leather trousers; 4) f. 1.6 for a colored canvas coat [?] [Leinwand-Wenning]; 5) f. 4 for shawl, towel, buttons and bib; 6) f. 1 for a hat. Thus in twenty weeks I had fully clothed myself and people were surprised. From then on I saved my weekly wages. After I had worked another twenty weeks, my master died. My patrons said to the heir that I had been paid too little and that they were to pay me for ten weeks as much as I would receive at my next boss, Johann Rausch, i.e., f. twenty-nine per week and something also for the other ten weeks. Thus I received another f. twenty-eight. With that money I bought tailoring equipment at an auction and the best hat and with the rest I bought linen for shirts. All of a sudden I had so much that I could hardly settle down day or night. That is how it is with us people and possessions earned bring more joy than those inherited, and they mean more too.

My dear mother with whom I had had so many good times, died on January 31, 1776 and was buried on February 5. She reached the age of forty-nine. After I had now worked as a



The Fürstenwerder Church, built in 1768 and with minor alterations still there in 1990 when it burned down. The church was built a few years before David Mantler's parents moved there from Blumenort. David would have been 11 years old when it was built. Image Credit: Bethel Library and Archives, 2003-0144, GAMEO.

journeyman for four years, I worked with a Master Tailor, Cornelius Neufeld, who paid me f. three per week. Since I was known to many people as Journeyman, they wanted me as Master in the work. Thus in the fall of 1778 I began as Master Craftsman, although at first with a Journeyman. A while later I took on another Journeyman. As Journeyman with the Master Craftsman, I made shirts as well as Sunday clothes. While a journeyman, still with the Master, I acquired another sixteen shirts and a clothes locker. At the end of the year I still had f. fifty cash. I was very satisfied with myself. I went to Schönsee to my friends. Over there my Uncle again asked me how much I had gained. I answered 50 Taler. He responded by saying, "I thought it should have been more." I was very humbled and dissatisfied with myself. The next year he asked me again how much I had earned. I answered, "50 Taler." He gave me the same answer again: "I thought it should have been more." In the other four years when I was still single, I saved another f. 850, i.e., f. 1100 in six years. In the meantime we had two floods, one in 1780 and another one in 1783. I had to get a boat in order to travel.

After I had now carried on my trade for six years, people in various settings made fun of me, suggesting I would need to marry the widow Arendt Claassen of Fürstenwerder, something I had no interest in, but eventually did. That is how it is with us people. What others think would be good for us, our nature does not agree to at that time, and what we consider important

for ourselves, others try to talk us out of. Oftentimes that's for our best and it was that in my case.

In the years when I carried out my trade as Master Craftsman I stayed with Peter Harder at Polnischehube, where I also kept all my tools, etc. These people treated me as a friend. When I came to their place on Saturday or Sunday, they teased me and wanted to know whether I didn't want to marry the widow Arendt Claassen. They maintained that other people were asking them about it and since they didn't know, I was to enlighten them. I didn't know what to say. If I were to tell the truth, it would be that I had no interest in that woman. But I didn't want to say that and so I replied that I didn't want to marry as yet. I wanted first to earn as much money as I already had and then I would consider it. However, I did not know that these good people had been assigned to persuade me in this matter and that became evident shortly thereafter. The widow Arendt Claassen was a young widow of thirty-three, but she was always sick and generally weak and had three children. The first Monday after that, when I was about to go to work with my comrades, that good Peter Harder said to me, "Let your partners go to work by themselves and you come and help me spread out the flax." And while we were busy at that, he said, "On Sunday we drove to Peter Claassen's and the Heinrich Wiebe's were also there. We talked much about the widow Arendt Claassen, wondering whom of the suitors she might



Wounded and defeated Prussian troops leaving the battle of Jena. A painting by Richard Knötel (1857-1914). Image Credit: Wikipedia.

her place on his way home and tell her that I was coming to propose on Thursday. When I did arrive at the widow Arendt Claassen on Thursday, they had talked to her so much that she immediately responded positively to my request and said I could become a bridegroom on the following Thursday. And that is what happened. We were married on October 27, 1784. A good while after the wedding the two guardians, Heinrich Wiebe and Peter Claassen came to me and asked whether I didn't want to provide an extra allowance of s. 1500 for my three stepchildren. I resisted and said that half of my wife's assets only amounted to f. 2500. If I gave the children an additional 1500. f my wife would only keep s.1000. They really spoke positively and promised their help if I would do this. I had no friend to advise me and if I offended the guardians I would have no one to lean on. I was careless enough to add the f.1500.

After that event I realized immediately why Peter Klassen had encouraged me so much to get married. He wanted to buy the half Hube from me. He took me by the hand, saying: "Brother-in-law, come with me into the barn." Here he told me that he had discussed it with several others and they all agreed that it would be good if I sold the half Hube of land. "I'll take it off your hands for s. 4000." I told him that when Arendt Claassen bought the half Hube, he paid s.6000 for it. "Yes, but you cannot think about those days... they don't come again what do you think?" I said I would consult with my wife and if she were willing, we could talk about it again. I also talked to my friends and good acquaintances, but they did not encourage

me to do this, saying, if I keep the half Hube of land then I can move the four Morgen of sand and repair the buildings. When I then said that I did not want to sell the half Hube, Peter Claassen came with two more creditors and raised the amount of money involved and also the interest Then I travelled to one of the creditors, a Johann Claassen of Neuteicherhinterfeld and told him the whole story. He said he would not call for payment on his part of the loan. I had already gained assets and should be lent money rather than having my loan called. That was a great comfort to me. 1785 was a wet year and I could not repay anything and actually had to add money. 1786 was the year of the Montau [dike] break and two cows drowned in the sunken barn. I harvested only twenty bushels [Sheffel—shovels?] of grain. I had to add a large amount once more but how? Or with what? I had to borrow from one and pay off the other and was constantly reminded of my debts. I lost my good name and gained a bad one. In that breaking year I received a small payment with which I resumed my tailoring trade, carrying on day and night so that I was able to pay all accounts and interest, as well as purchase some lumber.

In 1787 I raised the granary out of the earth to 2 ½ feet above the ground. I also raised the orchard two to three feet and planted new trees. The trees for this I had planted earlier in a tree nursery, grafted them and could sell them to many others. Now an offer came to buy the yard of my uncle Jakob Mandtler for s.10,000. I planned to sell my property at a high price so that my debts would be less. I advertised our property

in three of our churches, but no one came to buy because the buildings were so bad and small. I grieved and worried myself so that I became ill for years. However, since I could not sell, I decided to abandon it and leave. I thought my creditors would compensate me somewhat and I would go back to tailoring.

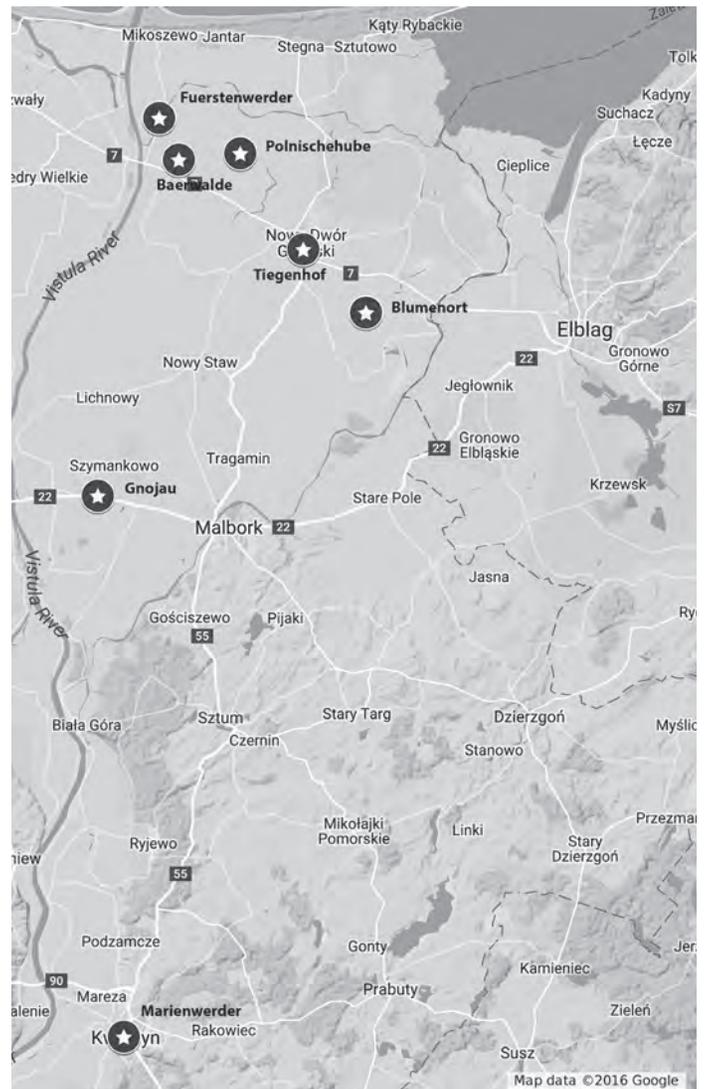
But before I pursued this plan, I did go to my cousin Johann Driedger at Gr. Lichtenau and described to him my whole situation and that I was planning to give it up. This good friend looked at me silently for a long while and after thinking, said, "You won't leave that. You are known as a diligent man among people who will lend you the money to pay off all creditors." "That would be ideal!" I replied, but who will lend me money? "That good man replied, "Cousin, you are too fainthearted. Tomorrow I will go to Schönsee on your behalf to that old Jakob Wilke [Woelke]. He knows you well and will lend you the money and you can pay back everyone." "He won't do that!" I replied. "He will do that!" he said, "and the day after tomorrow I will go over there and get you the answer." That was for me a real comfort. "My God," I thought, "that is really very much that he wants to do for you, there is really somebody who wants to take me on!"

On the appointed day I travelled to Schönsee to see that old Jakob Wilke. When I arrived there, he said, "Master Mandtler, how are things going with you?" Do you like farming better than tailoring?" "Things are going badly." I replied. "You must not despair. The rainy year and the flood year has taken you out of your composure. It will be better in the future. I experienced the same thing in my early years." I sat perfectly still and couldn't say a thing about money since I was used to earning money, not borrowing it. That old Wilke then said, "You have possibly come here to borrow money? Driedger from Lichtenau has told me about it. You can have money — how much do you owe? "s.10,000," I replied. "That is quite a lot but I will lend you that much so that you can pay off your creditors fully. You can come and get your money in May" I thanked him for his good will and returned home again.

When I came home I found my old creditors there. They were my wife's former brothers-in-law. Peter Claassen wanted to buy the half Hube of land. My wife had told them that I had gone to Schoensee to see the old Jakob Wilke for money and that the Lichtenau Johann Driedger had advised us to pay off everyone. The brother-in-laws had persuaded my wife somewhat to their side in order to hurt my feelings. I welcomed my visitors when I came into the room.

Heinrich Wiebe said to me. "You have been in Schoensee at old Jakob Wilke to borrow money? You will be sorry about that. Do you know how he ran that Nickel in Schoenau off his property, as well as Arendt Peters of Schoenseerfeld?" "Yes, I know that!" I replied. "And it won't be any better for you!" he responded and the other agreed with him. That gave me a lot to think about and many restless nights.

In time I went to get the money from the old Jakob Wilke. He placed before me a hand-written document to be signed. I read it first and when I came to the place where my meager assets were in his control, I broke down in tears. The old Wilke noticing that, said, "The writing seems to be rather harsh. My son has set it up without my knowledge and I didn't know you could read so well." He took the document, tore it down the middle and taking a [Quartblatt] he wrote a new one to be signed, saying, "You shall know that I mean well with you. You are to pay me interest at only 2 ½ %. And if in the meantime



The movements of David Mantler demonstrate considerable mobility among West Prussian Mennonites. Places mentioned where he, or his parents lived are illustrated on this map of modern Poland. Source: Google Maps.

you are in need of money, which often happens to weaker owners, do come back to me." I thanked him very much for this generous goodwill he showed me. My God, I thought, that is so different from what had been prophesied to me. The loving God has led you to such people who have a fatherly concern for you. They never had to remind me when my payments on the farm were due. My sick wife and I were so happy after that and much happier in our farming.

On January 4, 1790 my father died after having been with me for a year. In 1792 I raised my old residence out of the ground, rebuilt the underpinning and moved it thirty feet from the granary and raised it 4 ½ feet higher. I built a barn between the two. My wife who was always ill became more seriously ill whereas I had suffered from poor health also and could not really recover. My wife died on May 23, 1793 after one son and five daughters were born to us, of which the son and two daughters were still living. That is how it is with us when we think that we have set up everything in an orderly way and another situation arises, or even death comes, thwarting everything. I had a good creditor and had rebuilt my buildings and then my wife had to die. If we both could have had our

health restored, that would have been better for me. Now I had to divide off f. 2000, was f. 12000 in debt again and unhealthy at age thirty-six.

Eventually my friends and good acquaintances came to visit me and were asking whether I was going to marry again soon. I didn't know how to answer that. If I were to say 'yes', I would be secretly persuaded, and if I said 'no', they wouldn't believe me anyway. I replied saying that if they knew of an aging widow who would be good for a sick husband and a good mother for my three children, then I would marry again. But neither I nor they knew of such a one. Various girls were suggested, but not the one I preferred who was my cousin, Agneta Driedger of Schönsee. I had known her as a quiet person from her childhood on. She also had capital of f. 4000. I really wanted to marry her but would she really want me was the difficult question.

I thought to myself that I must first of all go to Driedgers in Lichtenau. They know my situation. He had counseled in getting money and maybe he could help me in getting to marry his sister. But to approach him to talk about that was very difficult for me since he was a very hot-tempered man, yet a good friend of mine.

Several weeks later I actually traveled to Gr. Lichtenau to my cousin Driedger to find out how he would respond. When I got there he was just coming out of the church with his sister who was dressed beautifully. In contrast, I was wearing black mourning clothes. When I saw her I was certain that nothing would come of my intentions. You can't talk to your cousin about this. He did welcome me. Entering the house we found many business people present including many city people. He immediately went to the storage room and assigned me to serve the guests with food and drink. After the visitors had left, my cousin said to me: "And you have had to bury your wife. When you were here last fall we did not think her death would come so soon." "Yes," I said, "the illness became more and more serious until she finally died. And I can't seem to get well either." Then his wife told me not to declare myself ill if I wanted to marry again and I would be well again.

My cousin then said, "I should order a carriage for you which I have not done yet." He would give me his and we went to look at it. He asked me how I liked it and I didn't know what to say. The carriage was lined with yellow leather, beautifully painted and didn't suit my status. I answered: "That carriage is too expensive for me." "Don't be so skeptical, as you were with your financial matters," he replied, "and didn't that come out good? You are a young widower and you must not have such a low opinion of yourself. It doesn't matter if you don't pay for it right away. The carriage is of the smallest model, but the girl which you will possibly marry is possibly small as well." Those words really appealed to me, but I didn't dare approach him on the matter.

After returning home my thoughts kept on dwelling on that Agatha Driedger. I had no peace and after eight days I travelled over there again and asked my cousin whether he might help or could help me so that I could get his Agatha Driedger as my wife since she was the only person I had chosen until now and I felt I couldn't live without her anymore. But I was of the lowest rank. He answered, "That does not matter since we are blood relatives" he answered. "If she wants you, I have nothing against it. But she has a capital worth f. 4500 and the other sisters will all discourage her. But if she wants to follow me, as I hope, you have nothing to fear." "Tomorrow, Thursday,

I will go to Schönsee on your behalf to talk with mother and the brother. On Friday you may get your answer from over there." And whether she wanted me for a husband and become a mother to my children, I discussed with the girl. She was very quiet. Finally she said that she was very young and could not respond now, but would first talk with her mother and her brother Johann Driedger. She would do what they would advise her. I thanked her for her gracious answer and asked her in love not to forget me.

When I came to Schönsee on Friday, the mother, my aunt, was very friendly towards me. But her brother, Peter Driedger and his wife acted as if they didn't know me. I was informed by them that the Lichtenau Driedger had said that I should harvest first and if I don't receive a refusal [Abschrift], I could come again. I should really have gone there already earlier since we were close friends, but fearing a refusal, I did nothing.

After harvest time I married that lovely maiden [Jungfer], Agneta Driedger and we had our wedding on October 28, 1793. I have lived with her for many delightful years although not always joyful. In this time we also experienced many difficulties with cattle dying, long years of war, dike breaks, drought years and continuously failing prices which weakened us very much. However, if one of us wanted to despair, the other was there to comfort saying, God has possibly meant this misfortune for our best. We want to cling to Him in trust and He will again bless us. And thanks be to God, who has helped us from all evil and we have had more healthy days than sick ones, and have had more good fortune than misfortune, so that we must surely say that our dear God loves us people so much.

Shortly before the wedding the guardians came and relieved me of the stepchildren. After that I had to pay the interest on f. 12000. The following year I received my wife's paternal capital of 2000 which I used to pay off debts. From 1794 - 1797 we had gained f. 3000 which we used for repayment. After that we still had f. 7000 to pay interest on. When, however, the Lichtenau Driedger noticed that the farm was doing well he thought we could build a new house. When he had advised his sister to take me, he promised her if we did well he would help so that we could build a house. Until that time my house was still in the barn. In 1798 we built a beautiful new house. The barn was enlarged and other buildings were raised. That again cost f. 5000. In 1799 we had four Morgen of sand leveled off and moved, costing another f. 1100. So we again had f. 13000 on which to pay interest, but between 1800 and 1806 we managed to save f. 6000, leaving us a debt of f. 7000.

In 1806 our Prussia entered the war against the French and in October the Prussians were defeated at Jena. On March 1, 1807 the French came over here. They took our money and property, cattle and grain causing us to lose courage and blood. People became very pale and sad in their faces and when met good acquaintances of times past, we hardly recognized them. We had good cattle and horses. We had eleven milk cows, two heifers, a bull and three calves. By 1807 we only had five cows and their calves. All four of our horses were taken so that we kept only a yearling and a foal. Whoever had to buy a cow for household milk paid f. 400 - 500, whereas before the war it had been f. 200. It was the same with grain. If there were high officers from whom the French could not take anything, the owners sold their grain at a high price. But where high officers were not on duty, there was so much quarreling that they spoilt it all. If we had to make deliveries, we had to buy

such at great expense from high officers. Oats was priced at 10 - 15 per bushel, barley at 20 - 24, rye at 20 - 30 and butter at 2 - 3 per pound. If we had no accommodation for quartering we had to buy grain again at a higher price. If we had horses, we could plow during the day but we had to seed during the night so they wouldn't take away our grain. From 1807 to 1812 our war costs on deliveries amounted to war taxes of f. 15,016. This seems impossible but that's how it was. But the Kaiser Alexander of Russia paid for all of it which was most helpful to us. In the village only the slaughter cattle which we had given up were calculated. But the cows which we had slaughtered for quartering were not calculated.

On January 13, 1813, the Russians came and helped our monarch to clean up his lands and fortresses so that enemy troops were chased across our borders. Thus we were delivered from this evil. The world after will praise that great Alexander long after his body has decayed. God's might is great and His leading wonderful.

In 1814 the Russians returned to their Fatherland after having defeated the French in a great victory. There now had been foreigners in our country for eight years and had consequently fallen into great debts which were now overdue and called for much interest. Added to that was the Nogat flood at

Wernersdorf in 1816. In 1818 we had a very great storm which knocked down or ruined many buildings including churches, towers, residences, barns and most granaries. Our granaries were pushed over and lost their roofs. Our children moved to Russia that year. In 1822 I broke my leg and my hearing became weak. In 1825 my left eye became blind. 1828 was a wet year. In 1829 the Schadwald flood occurred and on October 14 my second wife died. 1830 was another wet year. My son Bernhard moved to Russia. In 1831 my right eye went blind also and I rented my property to H. Harder.

Dear Children or dear Readers, if in writing my life story I should have hurt the feelings of anyone, I beg forgiveness.

David Mandtler

Footnote: David Mandtler died at Fuerstenwerder on May 26, 1837. His stepchildren were Helena, married to Hins, Claas and Arendt Claassen. Children of the first marriage who outlived their Mother: Peter Mandtler, Anna married to Driedger, Barbke married to Ensz. The second marriage was blessed with nine children of whom four died in tender childhood. Those growing up are: Agneta married to Jakob Mandtler, Johann, a businessman in Danzig, David, Catharina married to Dyck-Barlewitz, Bernhard, who went to Russia in 1830.

Book Reviews

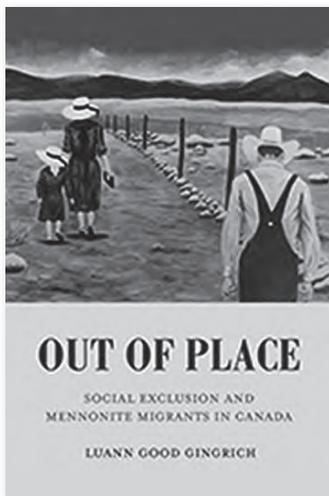
Out of Place: Social Exclusion and Mennonite Migrants in Canada

Luann Good Gingrich

Toronto, University of Toronto Press 2016, 300 pages, Softcover, \$32.95

Luann Good Gingrich has taken the generally maligned and misunderstood *Dietsche* people in Canada, and framed their lives in a radically fresh perspective. She also challenges how to understand people living at the margins of society, and challenges the role of the government in working to alleviate the conditions that lead to poverty.

The *Dietsche* people's lives, to the outsider, seem paradoxical. As Gingrich states, the *Dietsche* come to Canada to earn a better living, but take on jobs that are the least regulated, poorest paid, and lowest in status. They come to provide a better future for their children, but regulate and limit their formal schooling and wish for them to continue in the same kind of work in which they engage. It seems, to the outsider, that the *Dietsche* are the makers of their own demise, that they are choosing poverty and ignorance. However, Gingrich argues, those on the outside must stop judging the *Dietsche* based the larger society's values. When the dominant society's values are seen as "common sense," then



any other way of living, like the *Dietsche*, seems nonsensical. She also argues that there are larger systems at work that exclude the *Dietsche* from all forms of capital - economic, social and cultural - that could make better the lives they want to live.

The author redefines the theory of "social exclusion" by exploring *Dietsche* lives in relation to the dominant society. The idea of social exclusion has to move away from being seen as something that people do to themselves and what people do to others. Instead, social exclusion is the "process" of what *is going on in society* to cause a person to be living in poverty. Social exclusion happens, she concludes, because of the way our dominant society is designed and operates. The dominant society has married the nation state (government)

with the market (making money) creating the "market-state." Thus those in power in the dominant society, work together to organize and manipulate possession — of goods, status, or connections — how much they are worth, and who has access

them. They do this for their own benefit. This process is the ultimate origin of the social exclusion of portions of society including the Dietsche people.

Dietsche, with few resources in Canada, are subject to the scrutiny of the welfare state through their involvement with social services. Gingrich describes how the welfare state is merely the “left hand” of the capitalist market economy of Canada. Social services work at controlling those who do not fit into an employable market. Gingrich describes how service providers, caught in the system, categorize the Dietsche as people who need to be changed and have their behaviour regulated to make “them” be more like “us.” This kind of “inclusion,” desired by the mainstream, is based on a “normal” Canadian that does not really exist and only makes social exclusion worse (p. 217).

The conclusion to the book begins to suggest means of working towards social inclusion through reconciliation. It is *not* a social inclusion that attempts to fit the Dietsche into the

larger society’s mold but one that “makes room for difference (p.206).” The responsibility for social inclusion rests with us all, states Gingrich (pg. 215). At the centre of this philosophy of reconciliation are relationships. It is about moving from a place of devaluing traditional ways to looking for their strengths and assets as a means of empowerment.

This book is written for an academic audience and uses language from social theory. This makes it rather unaccessible to those without a background in the social sciences. Nevertheless, this book provides vital insight for service providers, and government officials who work with populations like the Dietsche “im(migrants)” who desire to live outside the framework of the larger society. Gingrich’s next book could expand on how to do social inclusion.

Tina Fehr Kehler
Winkler, Manitoba

La Honda: 50 Jahre.

Peter Bergen (Durango Mexico).

Peter Bergen: La Honda, Mexico, 2014, 149 pages, softcover, \$29.95 (USD).

This book by Peter Bergen, *La Honda: 50 Jahre*, describes how in 1964 the colony Nuevo Ideal Durango (usually simply called Durango) established a colony of more than thirty *campos* (villages) in the state of Zacatecas on lands of the *hacienda* (country estate) called La Honda. The formation of La Honda colony followed two failed attempts at founding new settlements in 1961 and 1962 when two small colonies were started in Fresnillo and La Batea respectively. These small settlements were unable to purchase more land and eventually, after 1964, some of the residents moved to La Honda. The settlement in La Honda, which was one of the first new Mennonite colonies in Mexico, was not established due to theological disputes, but rather due to the need for more land for the growing population.

Bergen divides his book into chapters, each one telling the story of one of the villages in the colony. Every chapter lists its village’s first residents. For example, on page 96, he includes a picture of the first couple to move to La Honda, Jakob and Maria P. Guenther in Campo 15. They moved to La Honda to continue their cheese factory, an industry which was essential for the economic survival of Mennonites in Mexico no matter what state they moved to. Most chapters include colourful photos that illustrate various activities in industry and farming in that community. Some of these photos also give evidence to the changes taking place in the settlement. For example, readers witness a change in wedding styles, with pictures of Old Colony, *Kleine Gemeinde* and German weddings. Bergen includes a map of the La Honda colony, including the location of villages, for the reader’s reference on the back cover. In the last part of the book the author dedicates several pages to those residents who met a tragic death.

Bergen regrets that the book was not written much earlier. When the author went to an old pioneer from the La Honda ranch, Juan Aldama, to get more historical data, Mr. Aldama told him ‘*vienes muy tarde*,’ which means “You come very late.” Because of the delay in starting this project, unfortunately

many parts of the La Honda history have been lost.

What has been documented in the book, however, provides a foundation for understanding how the colony was established.

When the colony of Durango began to investigate options to start a new settlement for their growing population, they remembered that years earlier their bishop, Rev. Johan P. Wall (1875-1961) had contacted his very good friend Roberto Elorduy, a well-to-do land owner, about the possibility of buying land. Elorduy had at that time offered to sell his hacienda, called La Honda, to Rev. Johan P. Wall. However, the Mexican agrarian reform laws, and the demands by the *agraristas* (peasants), made such sales risky. If a land owner sold land, as Elorduy was considering, then according to Mexican law this land would be considered surplus to the owner, and could be claimed by *agraristas*. Because of the risks involved, the Durango colony at that time did not purchase land from Elorduy.

Discussions between Durango and Elorduy continued over the years, and in the early 1960s, Peter Wall, the new bishop and the son of Johan P. Wall, contacted Elorduy with an offer to buy and Elorduy agreed to sell. However, he did not want anybody to know about his plan to sell the land until he had arranged all legal issues with the *Agraria* Office in Mexico City. When Jakob K. Guenther, one of the Durango residents, asked Elorduy whether everything about the sale had been looked after, Elorduy responded with, “*esta vida es de luchar*” (this life is a battle).

Most likely Elorduy was referring to the *Certificado de Inafectabilidad*, a document that prevents the confiscation of land by agraristas, which always involved a very long bureaucratic process to acquire. In the case of this purchase from Elorduy, Peter Wall had initially negotiated for about 29,000



hectares of land. As conditions for providing the *Certificado de Inafectibilidad*, however, the government made a number of stipulations. To avoid any agitation or a violent reaction from the *agraristas*, the government demanded Elorduy leave 4,000 hectares, which would become the property of the government, but which could be leased by peasants. Elorduy was also asked to leave another 8,000 hectares for *Pequeñas Propiedades* (literally ‘small properties’), that is, land that could be divided into small parcels and owned as private property by peasants. The government further required that 1,000 hectares be donated to the cowboys and other employees of the La Honda hacienda as severance pay since with the sale of the estate they would lose their jobs. In the end, Durango was able to purchase about 16,000 of the 29,000 hectares initially offered. Finally, with these adjustments, the offer made by Roberto Elorduy to Rev. Johan P. Wall years earlier could be finalized on April 24, 1964.

After the papers were signed and the settlement was established, bishop Peter Wall performed the first baptism, the first wedding and the first funeral in La Honda. The problem with the *agraristas* was, however, not quite finished. In 1975, slightly more than a decade after the settlement was begun, some peasants tried to confiscate a portion of the land in La Honda. Because of the *Certificado de Inafectibilidad*, the government ruled that the *agraristas* had no legitimate further claim to the La Honda colony lands, and intervened. It used the military

to forcibly transport the peasants to another location, where they were given land.

In 1980 the candidate for governor of the state of Zacatecas campaigned in the region. The La Honda Mennonite settlement invited the candidate, plus neighbouring Mexicans, to a feast at which Mennonites served everyone delicious food. The expelled peasants from 1975 were there as well, and one of them approached the Mennonites and said, “We were mean to you when we invaded your land, and today you give us food.”

La Honda: 50 Jahre outlines the significant changes the settlement has undergone over the decades. For example, when La Honda began, it only had the traditional Old Colony schools. Today, La Honda has Old Colony schools, Kleine Gemeinde schools, and schools supported by people from Germany. Those residents who shied away from modernizing their schools left to establish the Sabinal settlement in the northern part of the state of Chihuahua.

The half century history of the La Honda Mennonite settlement exemplifies the Old Colony Mennonites’ courage, endurance, and willingness to expend huge amounts of hard work to settle creatively in almost any setting. Enjoy reading this great book!

David Friesen
Winkler, Manitoba/Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico

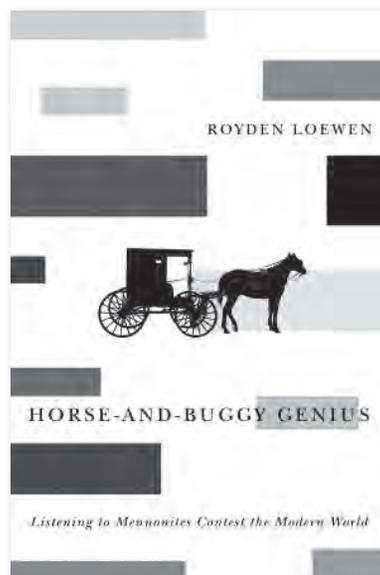
Horse and Buggy Genius: Listening to Mennonites Contest the Modern World

Royden Loewen.

Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016, 256 pages, softcover, \$27.95.

In this valuable book we hear ‘horse and buggy Mennonites’ tell their story and explain their way of life. The book is quite strict about the term, ‘horse and buggy Mennonites’; thus, it does not cover the many Old Colony groups in Latin America and in Canada who have accepted cars, trucks, electricity, etc. Its focus is on about 8,000 Old Order Mennonites in Ontario, and about 100,000 Old Colonists in Latin America who do use the horse and buggy. The book, based on some 250 extended interviews done by Loewen and seven graduate students, is perceptive, well-organized and highly readable. It has two chapters on the Old Orders and five on Old Colonists and covers many aspects of their lives.

Though flowing from different historical streams, both the Old Orders and Old Colonists seek a way of life different from that of ‘modern’ societies with their emphases on consumption, speed, competition, individual ascendancy, etc. They seek one marked by greater communalism, mutual accountability, humility, and patience, one where children grow up in proximity to their parents and where the different aspects of life are more in



harmony. To pursue this, both have held on to distinctive languages, plain dress, simple technology, and various social and religious practises. For both, the one-thousand page *Martyrs Mirror*, about the persecution of the early Anabaptists, has kept the ideas of self-denial and suffering alive.

One of *Horse-and-Buggy Genius*’ strengths is that it shows that these groups, though often thought to resist all change, have in fact made many changes in the way they interact with their host societies. Thus, in Ontario, as the cost of farm land, even in outlying areas, became prohibitive the Old Order groups went into farmyard manufacturing. For this they accepted more sophisticated tools and machines, as well as telephones and computers, while carefully circumscribing how these would be used.

Loewen notes that only by making such limited accommodations with the larger society have they been able to survive as a people separate from it.

For Old Colony groups in Latin America migration has played a larger role. Again and again they have found land and started new colonies despite innumerable pioneering

hardships and frequent legal complications. A basic reason is that with large families, they need land for the next generation. At times they have also moved because people in their parent colony began to accept more modern technology and, in some instances, more evangelical religious teachings. They have then tended to see migration as the only way they could remain true to their baptismal commitment to the *Ordnung*. Loewen says, “It is as if by migrating Old Colonists know they are on the right path, narrow and difficult. [...] [M]igration offers religious hope” (86).

But like the Old Orders, the Old Colonists have also made adjustments. They have diversified their farming practises – often taking lessons from local inhabitants – and started small industries. In Belize one Old Colonist is making rice machines with Japanese motors for farmers in Japan (118). In Mexico they have made accommodations in relation to the state’s social security system, its immunization programs, its support for small farmers, etc. They have also accepted governmental assistance in flooding disasters and at times have sought police and military protection. They do not vote and they tend not to go to court to press their legal rights but their interaction has moved a long way from the 1920s in Mexico when they did not even register their marriages with civil authorities.

The book notes that these groups have significant internal governing systems. For the Old Colonists, their historic *Waisenamt* regulates inheritance practises reasonably well. There is a certain social assistance for the poor. When they start a colony, the poor are usually helped to acquire a little more land than their own assets would justify. They are able to do this because of their internal taxation system and because their legal land titles are held by the colony, not by the individual farmers. Many colonies have vibrant cooperatives. All of this is supported by their religious faith which is genuine and meaningful for many people though they tend not to be very articulate about it. In sum, their resourcefulness and

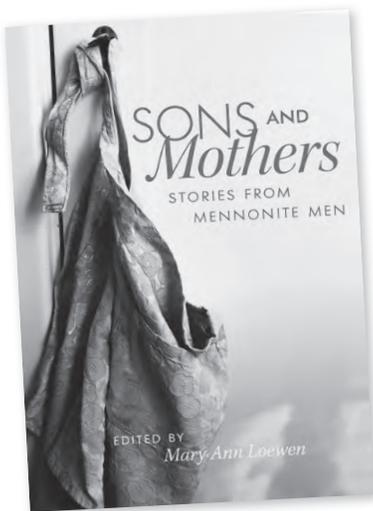
self-reliance and their ability to make selective accommodations while remaining committed to their seemingly difficult way of life is the ‘genius’ referred to in the book’s title.

Loewen does not deny difficult issues, for example, that these Old Colony people in Latin America do not teach the language of their host societies in their schools as the Old Orders in Canada do. Further, he notes that those who leave for Canada or the United States are “almost always driven by poverty” (206). This is evident also in Kerry Fast’s reports of the taped interviews done in the 1970s in Ontario by Ron Sawatsky. It is also what I have heard in my forty years of helping returnees acquire Canadian citizenship. Along with poverty there has sometimes been bitterness about the religious system that precluded options. Loewen notes these and other difficult issues but does not dwell on them. His focus is on those for whom that traditional way of life has sort of ‘worked,’ not on those for whom it has not. I do not fault Loewen for focussing on the former. That story has received far too little attention. But readers, in now learning to appreciate that story, should not deny the latter.

The book’s subtitle about Mennonites ‘contesting’ the modern world alludes to something profoundly important. Modernity needs to be ‘contested’, at many levels; it is certainly not ‘working’ well. But is the horse and buggy way of life the only way, or even the best way, of contesting modernity? What about the sizeable Old Colony church in Ontario whose wise leaders have done remarkably well in creating an alternative? What about us urban Mennonites who also try to resist aspects of modernity? Obviously the book cannot address all such questions but they should be kept in mind.

Despite these qualifications, I hope this book will receive the wide readership it deserves.

Bill Janzen
Ottawa, ON



Sons and Mothers: Stories from Mennonite Men

Mary Ann Loewen, ed. Regina, Saskatchewan:
University of Regina Press, 2015, 144 pages, softcover, \$19.95.

“Have Mennonite men had the opportunity to write about their mothers?” At the Winnipeg book launch of *Mothering Mennonites*, a collection of essays by women writing about their mothers (Rachel Epp Buller and Kerry Fast,

editors), someone in the audience threw out this question. It caught the ear of Mary Ann Loewen, who teaches Academic Writing at the University of Winnipeg. After struggling somewhat with the question of whether men writing about women would constitute a kind of gender cultural appropriation—she decided that it wouldn’t—she proceeded to become a “coaxer”

and solicit such stories from men. This collection is the result.

Twelve contributors were found, with styles ranging from essay to story-telling to poetry. All are articulate and thoughtful, some are lyrical, none are bitter or accusatory. We could say that every writer obeys the fifth commandment, honouring his mother in his own way.

Many of these accounts are written from the perspective of “the other side”—that is, the writer’s mother is deceased, and he has this space now, this absence of the physical person who gave birth to him, in which he can reflect and consider. Most of these Mennonite sons write of the tension arising in their relationships with their mothers when it came to religion. The mothers wanted to raise God-fearing boys, good Christians. The boys, for their part, and in varying degrees, resisted this agenda.

The story of this resistance forms the upward arc of the narrative. John Rempel and his two siblings rebelled against the constrictions of their conservative church environment, and their mother “felt she must have been a failure as a mother and a believer.” Josiah Neufeld, a self-described “wandering son” with a devout mother, quotes a portion of a letter from her: “What breaks my heart is the realization that even though I can dedicate my life to teaching my children to think wisely and use their reason, to be kind and caring of others . . . I cannot teach [them] to love the Lord.” Nathan Klippenstein’s mother LaVerna was committed to teaching her children the virtues of hard work, helping neighbours, and resisting worldly temptations of every kind; encouraging her children to think of one Bible verse for every twenty dandelions they picked. As an adolescent, he rebelled, yearning for his mother to say: “It’s okay. It’s normal to want to react this way. You’re not a bad person.” Lukas Thiessen found that “to be Mennonite was to have your humanity denied in favour of an austere spirituality.” Andrew Martin, growing up in a family environment of conflict between his parents and a church environment of periodic revival meetings instilling in him an anxious and guilty unrest, later judged his mother for not giving him more reassurance and protection. Patrick Friesen recalls the arguments he had with his mother on the subject of religion and how she would sometimes employ “the old martyrdom technique . . . wondering if I knew how my ideas hurt other people.”

But, in all of these accounts, the arc of the mother-son relationship continues; rebellion and religious differences do not sever the binding ties, love prevails. Rempel gives communion to his mother in the last part of her life. Lois Neufeld tells Josiah: “I do have a lot of faith that God will complete the work He has begun in you.” Klippenstein, having described his mother as a “fortress,” concludes: “I have learned that walls are for support, security, and protection . . . the heavy gates never swung shut on me.” Thiessen’s mother, apparently unalarmed by his declared atheism, continues to invite him to church. Martin comes to see that his mother’s shortcomings, whatever they might have been, are outweighed by her unfaltering love. Friesen, still engaging with his aged mother after so many years of what he calls “conflicting freedoms” between them, sees the roles reverse, as he becomes the “parent” who has to arrange

for her to go to a seniors’ home. His very fear, that taking this action might constitute a kind of abandonment of his mother, reveals the continuing deep connection between them.

Other stories in this collection follow a somewhat different line, a theme of mothers, through their sacrifice or example, paving the way for their sons to pursue lives as artists or academics. Paul Tiessen finds that his mother’s “vivid recollections and projections made room for what eventually developed into some of my own presuppositions and affirmations.” Mary Dyck, mother of Howard Dyck, was a southern Manitoba farm wife and mother who loved singing and music; it was her son, similarly gifted, who made a career out of these gifts as a long-time classical music host on CBC radio and international choir conductor: “I was and represented everything she could never be.” Instead of resenting him for embodying the life she herself had missed, she took pride and joy in his accomplishments.

Other pieces in this collection don’t fall so neatly into the categories I have created in writing this review. In a long poem, Christoff Engbrecht captures a midnight moment of connection with his mother, who sews his torn jeans and bids him farewell with a rough, affectionate blessing: “Now get outta here’ / putting her hand to my face / ‘and have a good time tonight.” Lloyd Ratzlaff chronicles the physical decline of his aging mother, her “resurrection”—she makes a remarkable recovery—and then a decline again. He mourns her loss, even before her death: “How bare the prairie stretches around her empty house in the late November afternoon.” Michael Goertzen speaks in images and symbols of his mother in her illness. Listening to her, he finds that “her language and her body no longer conform to the structures I admire: rationality and health.” Byron Rempel violates all rules of Mennonites solemnity and earnestness by laughing at his now-deceased mother for her obsession with appearances—while profoundly honouring her attitude of joy and acceptance, including her celebration of him: “She . . . confirmed that I was indeed the most talented, most beautiful child on this earth. If I would just get those teeth fixed.”

Ralph Friesen,
Nelson, BC.

Prairie Pioneers: Schönthal Revisited

Mary Neufeld. Winnipeg: Manitoba
Mennonite Historical Society, 2016, 138 pages, softcover, \$20.00.

In this volume the author, who will be known to the Mennonite audience for her biography of her father Ältester Wilhelm H. Falk, stakes out a much wider context in which to examine her roots, and in the process provides a history of her ancestral village, Schönthal, which lay just northwest of Altona. As Adolf Ens notes in his Foreword, this book makes a valuable contribution to the study of West Reserve villages, and will interest both descendants of the original settlers and history buffs in general.

The term “Mennonite West Reserve” often refers to the Reserve that was created west of the Red River in 1875, and

then settled by Mennonites directly from the Old Chortitz Colony in Russia (now Ukraine). It is perhaps useful to point out here that the Mennonite settlement on the West Reserve had two distinct components: first, the Old Colony settlers who arrived as early as July 1875, and established about thirty-six villages by the time the 1880 Census was taken, and second, the Bergthaler settlers who first settled on the East Reserve and began migrating to the eastern portion of the West Reserve in about 1879-81, with some scattered families coming earlier and some later. This book is a history of the second type of West Reserve village; i.e., a village that was established by families

from the Bergthal Colony (Ukraine), families that had already pioneered once in Manitoba (on the East Reserve) and started from scratch a second time west of the Red River.

The Introduction focuses on the land itself, noting that before the arrival of the Mennonites the land that became the West Reserve had been inhabited at least seasonally by various Indigenous groups. Neufeld provides background on Treaty #1 (1871), and comments on the less than forthright manner in which the Federal Government delivered on the promises inherent in the agreement.

The second and more substantial part consists of write-ups on family groupings, listing ten groups into which the twenty-one original pioneer families belonged. These familial relationships are outlined in some detail, with information about ancestry, extended family, marriages, children, and deaths, and are supplemented with photos of pioneers and often buildings that constituted the village or surrounding homesteads. Coincidentally one of the pioneer families is the direct ancestor of this reviewer. This will be an excellent resource for families who trace their roots back to Schönthal. In the case of Abram Dyck Sr, (family group #4) the information includes the name of the village on the East Reserve where the family first settled (near Tannenau). It would have been of interest to do the same for more of the families, since almost all of them first settled in villages on the East Reserve before abandoning their homesteads there and starting over on the West Reserve.

A third part deals with the development of the village, including its administration, midwives, schools, and churches.

Without getting into the emotions aroused by the event, Neufeld discusses the church schism that occurred in the early 1890s, a split that fractured the *Gemeinde* into two parts, the first led by Rev. Johan Funk who claimed the name Bergthaler, and the second, a majority group that elected a new bishop who lived in Sommerfeld and so became known as the Sommerfeld Gemeinde.

In somewhat greater detail, Neufeld provides information on the development of the local school, referring specifically to School Registers now held at the Manitoba Archives. An especially notable feature is the translation and inclusion of letters printed in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* during the debate about the implementation of District Schools. Several letters (in translation) have been published in their entirety, giving both a sense of the issues, and a bit of the voice of the protagonists. These letters will provide a new level of insight into the troubling times that the school issue aroused. The section is followed by a discussion of Schönthal teachers who made contributions that well exceeded that of the norm, and in several cases became notable firsts in Western Canada. A case in point is Dr. Cornelius W. Wiebe, teacher, doctor, Member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, Order of Canada, and much more.

Schönthal was a significant Bergthal village, in part because of the notable figures that arose from its ranks and played important roles in the larger community. Neufeld identifies

and give short summaries of the life story and contribution of several notables. Again, a case in point is John J. Siemens in business, establishing the Co-op movement in the area, and Ältester David Schultz, in the ecclesiastic domain, not to mention Ältester Wilhelm Falk himself.

The locations of two cemeteries specific to Schönthal are given and the names of the people buried there are listed. Other burial plots identified with the area are also mentioned briefly.

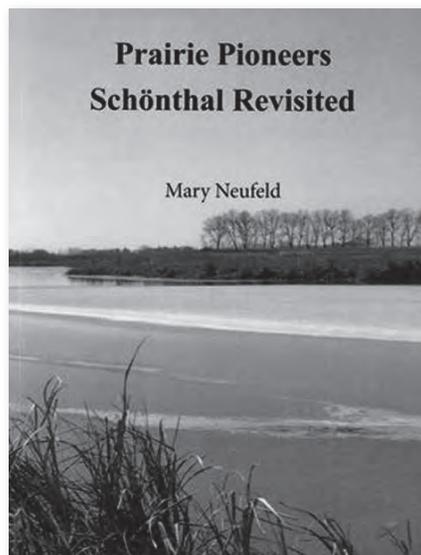
The last section of the book explores the changes that inevitably engulfed the open-field village and eventually obliterated it. Here Neufeld provides more general information and comments on the trends and developments that produced the dissolution of the village and the end of the era.

The book ends with an array of seven excellent appendices, giving tables of settlers, school teachers and trustees, Reeves and councillors, and some unusual images of a Sunday School register of 1912, and a preaching rotation for 1914. Endnotes document the sources clearly and provide handles for confirmation of data or further research by readers.

This book is an excellent example of the village history genre, giving detailed information on the families that settled there, and background on the institutions and notable contribution of the village to the history of the area. The book is based on extensive use of homestead microfilm records, a personal knowledge of the area and its people, as well as the published literature on the topic of West Reserve village development. In general the style of the book is non-academic, even chatty, as the author frequently uses the first person to engage the reader and to advance the

narrative, and is easily accessible to the average reader. The photographs break up the narrative in an attractive way, and provide effective visual sidebars to the information. *Prairie Pioneer: Schönthal Revisited* could well serve as a template for further village histories still to be done.

Ernest N. Braun,
Niverville, Manitoba



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“Facebook” of a century past: New access to *Mennonitische Rundschau* Index Vol. 4

The long-awaited volume four subject and author index to the internationally read *Mennonitische Rundschau* has been completed thanks to Bert Friesen, with financial support from the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation. The 1,394-page index provides simplified access to the German-language paper in the years 1910–1919. Friesen indexed the periodical with a fine-toothed comb so that researchers could find the proverbial “needle in a hay stack.” The index represents an intellectual organization of the vast and varied contents in the paper. Friesen believes that providing an index was urgent because increasingly fewer people in North America have the skills to read the German language, especially in the Gothic script. This index is designed for the English reader, giving students, scholars, genealogists, community historians, novelists, film producers, etc. pointers to information they want, which makes working through the archaic font manageable.



Archivist Conrad Stoesz, holding the bound copies of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*.

If the index were taken apart and laid out, it would cover 820 square meters of space. In contrast, the paper that Friesen read was published once a week and had sixteen pages and covers 5,491 square meters. The index is now the key to accessing the contents in the paper. In 1910–1919, the *Mennonitische Rundschau* was published in Scottdale, Pa. The paper began publishing in 1878 and ended in Winnipeg in 2007, making it one of North America’s longest-running German-language papers.

It was the Facebook of 100 years ago. It was a forum where average people would write about their family and community so that relations in the next province or continent could stay connected. As the Mennonite community spread from Russia to Canada and the U.S., the *Rundschau* kept the inter-Mennonite web of family and friends connected. The creation of this index has been six years in the making and accompanies volumes 1–3, 5 and 6. Friesen has been the workhorse behind the indexing project that saw its first volume published in 1990, covering the 1880–1889 decade. He is responsible for volumes 1–4. The index itself shows the vast range of topics people were writing about: farming, war, weddings, anniversaries, courtship, health, births, deaths, earth quakes, blizzards, missions, worship, airships, dreams, Eskimos, insects and discipleship, to name a few.

—Conrad Stoesz is archivist at the Centre for MB Studies. This article first appeared in the *Mennonite Historian*.

Mennonite Archival Image Database – A growing resource

The Mennonite Archival Image Database is growing and with it, extending its reach for people looking for rare images. On the eve of its first anniversary, the Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) welcomes the Mennonite Library & Archives at Fresno Pacific University (ML&A) as our newest archival partner. ML&A is the eighth MAID partner and the first outside Canada, which enhances MAID's vision of being a source for "the discovery of photographs of Mennonite life from around the world." MAID's eight partners have now collectively uploaded over 82,000 photographic descriptions into our Internet-accessible database (archives.mhsc.ca); nearly 19,000 of these have scanned images attached.

With each new partner the Mennonite family and network becomes larger and stronger. Archival photo experts from each centre help provide valuable information about photos in their own collection and collaborate with other partners improving the contextual knowledge of various collections, benefiting everyone. Over time, and as families and their records scatter, information becomes lost. However, as photo experts work at posting and describing photos, connections between photos that are held in different archives are found. It is not uncommon for two, three, or four archivists to be in discussion on a series of photos. Each archivist can supply important pieces of the puzzle that brings us collectively closer to identifying a photo or people in the photo. Each archivist has long standing knowledge, and networks that can be tapped to help identify



Archival Student Assistant, Anneli Carlson hard at work scanning photographs at Mennonite Library and Archives, Fresno, CA.

people, places and events. Through the collaborative network of MAID and its partners, the Mennonite community of yesterday is slowly being re-constituted.

The Mennonite Archival Image Database is a project of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. It was launched in 2015 by seven original partners: the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Winnipeg), the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, the Mennonite Heritage Centre (Winnipeg), the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, and the Mennonite Historical Societies of Alberta, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan.

Visit MAID at <https://archives.mhsc.ca/>

For more information contact:

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 Conrad Stoesz, Conrad.stoesz@mbchurches.ca



Palliser program aids Mennonite community

*Reprinted from the Lethbridge Herald,
www.lethbridgeherald.com*

By Kuhl, Nick on November 8, 2016.

Craig Albrecht

Communications Specialist – Palliser Regional Schools

The subject matter was a departure from the usual lessons taught at John Davidson School, but Principal Janice Loitz knew the information evening would prove invaluable all the same.

The Palliser school, which offers an alternative program for families of Low German-speaking Mennonite students, provided parents the opportunity to learn about various community services available to them as well as information on healthy lifestyles, police relations, hunting and fishing regulations and safe firearm handling.

Creating greater awareness of such issues was key, but Loitz said the Low German information evening was also about building trust and relationships. It is imperative, she added, for home and school to work together as a community.

“When the family supports the school and the education of their children, it has a direct impact on the attitude of the child towards his or her education,” she said. “A positive relationship regardless of background or language is essential and we definitely work to keep this relationship open and positive.”

Community Health representative Tina Fielding, one of the organizers of the event, said some of the information is available to the LGM community elsewhere. It was hoped there might be greater buy-in, however, by offering messages from multiple support agencies, in the evening, and after the farming season was done so the whole family could be present.

Since language is often a barrier for the LGM community to access such information, all sessions were offered in, or translated into, Low German.

Fielding was hired by Alberta Health Services to work solely with LGM clients in southern Alberta. She has roots in that community, and said her family would have welcomed such support.

“In building relationships and building trust, it opens the doors for them to become more involved in the community and takes away the fear that we are trying to assimilate them into the Canadian culture and we want them to lose their heritage,” said Fielding.

She recalled teachers during her formative years who went that extra mile, and can’t emphasize enough the impact educators can have on LGM families.

“The kids bring home this sense of trust and community from the school and in turn the families feel more comfortable

to come to the school and ask the questions they need to,” said Fielding.

Among others involved in organizing the information evening were Palliser Regional Schools, Alberta Hunter Education and 40-Mile Community Adult Learning. Fielding praised the work of Dan Doerksen, Palliser’s Low-German-speaking Mennonite liaison worker.

“They’ve always had good things to say about Dan and how he has supported them and how he likes to build relationships with them and how he likes to jest and have fun,” she said. “And that’s a huge thing in this community because they love to laugh and make jokes. “

Palliser Regional Schools offers alternative programs for families of a Low German-speaking Mennonite background at John Davidson School, Barons School, Huntsville School and Carmangay Outreach.

At all the LGM alternative programs, students learn English and study a regular Alberta program of studies in English. In addition, students learn High German.

The learning environment is sensitive to the Low German Mennonite culture. They also have staff who speak Low German to assist with communication with parents and may offer them English classes.

For a German language brochure on Palliser Regional Schools’ alternative programs for families of Low German-speaking Mennonites, go to <http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/download/286>.

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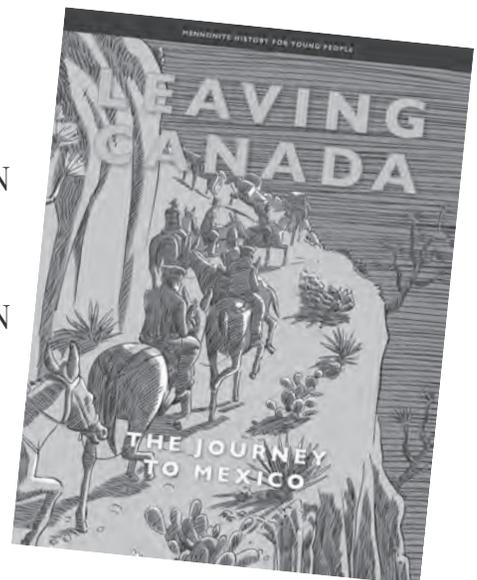
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Preservings

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With this mailing, the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation is pleased to be able to provide another issue of *Preservings*. Through it we hope to continue the vision of Delbert Plett to help readers better understand and appreciate their Mennonite heritage.

We also invite you to contribute articles, biographies, or news. You may know of people whose story should be told in these pages. Maybe grandparents, relatives, or neighbours' stories would be of interest to our readers. Please contact us about writing such stories, or let us know who might be able to do so. We depend upon many willing writers for the content of the paper.

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