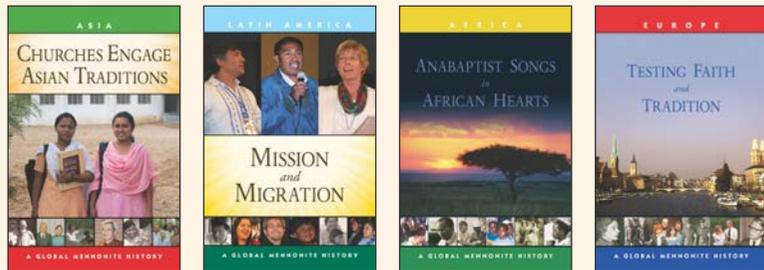


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The Global Mennonite History Series was initiated by Mennonite World Conference at its 13th Assembly held in Calcutta, India, January 1997. In order to “tell the story of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches” and to promote “mutual understanding, and stimulate the renewal and extension of Anabaptist Christianity world wide,” the Global Mennonite History organizers received a mandate to produce a five-volume history series, with the aim of telling the stories of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches from around the world. The volumes, one for each continent, were to be written by persons from their respective continents, and would reflect the experiences, perspectives and interpretations of the local churches.

The volume on Africa was first published in 2003, and presented at the MWC Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. This third edition is published by Good Books, co-published with Pandora Press. The GMHS volume on Europe was published in 2006 and presented at the Mennonite European Regional Conference (MERK), meeting at Barcelona, Spain, in May, 2006. Still under preparation are individual volumes on Asia, North America and Latin America. John A. Lapp is the project coordinator for the GMHS; C. Arnold Snyder is the general editor for the Series.

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# SEEKING PLACES OF PEACE

**GLOBAL MENNONITE HISTORY SERIES:  
NORTH AMERICA**

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Good Books  
Intercourse, PA 17534  
800/762-7171  
[www.GoodBooks.com](http://www.GoodBooks.com)

*co-published with*

Pandora Press  
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R2  
519/578-2381  
[www.PandoraPress.com](http://www.PandoraPress.com)

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Book Design and Layout: C. Arnold Snyder  
Cover and Map Design: Cliff Snyder

### SEEKING PLACES OF PEACE

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ISBN: 978-1-56148-797-4

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2012946712

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### Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Loewen, Royden, 1954-.

Seeking places of peace : global Mennonite history series: North America / Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt ; general editors, John A. Lapp ; C. Arnold Snyder.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-56148-797-4

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Mennonites --United States --History. 2. Mennonites --Emigration and immigration. 3. United States --Church history. 4. Pacifism --Religious aspects --Mennonites. I. Nolt, Steven M., 1968- II. Lapp, John A. III. Snyder, C. Arnold. IV. Title. V. Series.

BX8116 .L635 2013  
289.7/73 --dc23

2012946712

# Table of Contents

Foreword . . . . .	v
<i>John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder</i>	
Preface . . . . .	vii
<i>Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt</i>	
<b>Part One: Settling in North America, 1683-1950</b>	
I Finding Faith and Leaving Europe . . . . .	1
II Faith and Family in a New Land. . . . .	25
III Creating Communities in the Interior . . . . .	49
<b>Part Two: Integrating in North America, 1930-1980</b>	
IV Struggling Stewards of the Earth . . . . .	81
V Mennonites in Town and City . . . . .	107
VI Midcentury Faith Journeys . . . . .	137
VII Transformed through Mission and Peace . . . . .	165
<b>Part Three: Growing in North America, 1960-2010</b>	
VIII Families of Faith . . . . .	193
IX Mennonites and Money . . . . .	221

X	Worshipping Communities . . . . .	249
XI	Media, Arts, and Mennonite Images . . . . .	277
XII	Discovering a Global Community . . . . .	305
	Epilogue . . . . .	335
	Appendix A: Major North American Conferences/Branches . . .	339
	Appendix B: Mennonite/BIC/Amish/Hutterite baptized membership in the United States, by state . . . . .	341
	Appendix C: Mennonite population (baptized members and children) in Canada, by province and territory . . . . .	343
	Appendix D: North American Mennonite, BIC, Amish, and Hutterite baptized membership, 2010 . . . . .	343
	Appendix E: North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Universities, Colleges, and Seminaries. . . . .	344
	Appendix F: Major North American Mission and Service Organizations . . . . .	345
	Abbreviations . . . . .	347
	Endnotes . . . . .	349
	Index . . . . .	386

# Foreword

*Seeking Places of Peace* is the fifth and final volume of a dream that dawned in the mid-1990s. The dream for a Global Mennonite History was sparked by the announcement in 1994 that more Mennonites and Brethren in Christ were now living in the global South than in the global North. What was then 55 percent in the South is now nearly 70 percent. The shift of the numerical center of the world Christian movement from the North to the South is now a clear reality for all major denominational families.

In 1995 at a conference of historians and missiologists, Wilbert R. Shenk, the leading Mennonite mission historian, forcefully suggested that this historic development called for a new history: "A global church requires a global history." The Mennonite World Conference in 1997 commissioned the Global Mennonite History Project. They asked that this history reflect "The call of the churches in the South to be recognized as full-fledged actors in the Anabaptist-Mennonite story and to be able to tell the story from their own perspectives."

After five years of incubation the Global Mennonite History was launched in 2003. Subsequent volumes appeared in 2006, 2010, and 2011. *Seeking Places of Peace*, which tells the stories of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches of Canada and the United States, completes this pioneering effort, a new and contemporary effort to place the Anabaptist-descended movement in the context of "World Christianity."

The "Epilogue" of this volume captures this intent in its final sentences: "Following Christ in North America would require joint effort with Mennonites in every part of the world. By working together, by imagining a global congregation, by sharing gifts of all sorts, this community would thrive."

We are very pleased with the uniquely shared effort of Professor Royden Loewen of the University of Winnipeg and Professor Steven M. Nolt of Goshen College. Both Loewen and Nolt are masters of the North American story and have charted a fresh journey through remarkably diverse experiences in "seeking God's face, following the simplicity of Christ, extending the witness of the church, and working to secure peace

in all its forms.” Both Loewen and Nolt bring to this task the insights of “social history.” As such they focus on people in many geographical environments rather than on institutional development and theological controversy. Like other writers, they freely use the resources of oral history and the artifacts – large and small – that illuminate the creative dimensions of visual culture. The references to many groups and places greatly enrich the character of this volume. Like the other volumes in this series, *Seeking Places of Peace* deserves wide reading in congregations and classes on Mennonite history and life.

This final volume of the global history series, like all other volumes, has enjoyed the strong support of the Mennonite World Conference, particularly of the recently retired general secretary Larry Miller. The MWC also named an Organizing Committee for this project. They are mentioned elsewhere in this volume. We have been mindful of their support and encouragement throughout the past decade. The Preface includes the acknowledgements of the authors for the support of many colleagues, students, and several educational institutions. We join in these appreciations.

This volume like the others in this series has benefited from the generosity of numerous donors. Since most are North American based, we will mention these major ones: The University of Winnipeg and Goshen College for giving time to the authors as well as research support for themselves and their students. Major donors include Mennonite Central Committee, United Service Foundation, Mennonite Mutual Aid (now Everence), Goodville Mutual Casualty Company, Oosterbaan Foundation through the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit* (Netherlands), Good Books, Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, Mennonite Foundation Canada, Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, Canadian Mennonite Historical Society, Mennonite Historical Society (Goshen). We are also grateful for donations from regional conferences and historical committees as well as individuals in Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States. Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary welcomed the project to three conferences held on their campus.

We editors have lived with this series since 1999. Each volume has brought us deep satisfaction. We are greatly appreciative for the contributions of each writer and the support of each expert reader. Now with this final volume, we include with gratitude also the authors of this authentically new history of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in North America. It is a fitting capstone to the Global Mennonite History series.

John A. Lapp  
C. Arnold Snyder



## Preface

*In 1877 Maria Lange Becker left her European home – the village of Gnadenfeld in Molochna (Molotschna) Colony in the southern steppes of the Russian Empire – and began a momentous trip to a new home in North America. Her destination was the frontier state of Kansas in central United States. She found emotional security in traveling with her husband, her five children, her mother-in-law and fellow members of her congregation. Still, she described the departure date as “a difficult day for me,” since all of her “brothers and sisters remained in Russia.” As the train departed she felt deep sadness: “I stood at the window and looked back till I could not see our loved ones anymore. My heart was heavy, the tears . . . flowed freely.” On the train trip toward the western seaports of Europe she marveled at new vistas. But she confessed that “I did not feel at home, and I often felt my soul long for quietness.” The separation from her old community caused Becker prayerfully to sing “Jesus only my journey’s Guide.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Saulo A. Padilla remembered his immigration to Alberta, Canada in 1986 as momentous and disruptive. “When I think back on it, I compare it to birth. When a baby is born it suddenly moves from a warm, familiar environment to a big, cold room with a lot of unfamiliar people who are speaking a language it doesn’t understand. Everything is new, and the baby can only cry.” For the fifteen-year-old Saulo who had boarded a plane in Guatemala City, arriving at the Calgary International Airport a few hours later in the middle of winter was the first in a series of jarring adjustments to North America. Easing the pain of this “new birth” was his family – his father had earlier fled to Canada when the Guatemalan government marked him as a subversive – and the people of the Primera Iglesia Evangélica Menonita en Calgary, where the worship seemed familiar and the leaders helpful. His mother soon returned to Guatemala – the transition to the North was too difficult for her – but Saulo remained and participated in a Mennonite Central Committee job training program that “helped me believe that I had a future here.”<sup>2</sup>*

Maria Becker and Saulo Padilla were two of the tens of thousands of immigrants who arrived in North America as members or soon-to-be members of Mennonite churches between the late seventeenth and late twentieth centuries. They came with a wide variety of emotions, often sadly parting from an old world, but anticipating better, blessed lives in a new one. Life in Europe – or more recently, in Latin America, Asia and Africa – had come to be associated with martyrdom and persecution, military service and land restrictions. In contrast, life in North America promised freedom from military service, an abundance of farm land, economic opportunity, and the possibility of living out one's faith unmolested by authorities.

Indeed, the history of the Mennonites of North America is intricately tied to the hopes and aspirations of a people of faith on the move, as newcomers to a vast continent. While the North American Mennonite community today is increasingly shaped by African-American, Latino, Asian-Canadian, Indigenous North American, and other peoples, this story begins with the coming of northern Europeans to a new homeland more than two centuries ago. The experiences of the immigrants, their identity as a faith minority, their emphasis on ethnic boundaries and their accommodation to multicultural societies have shaped this continent's Mennonites. Indeed these factors are central in making this story distinct from the stories of Mennonites in other parts of the globe.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1683 tens of thousands of Anabaptists – the wider family of faith including the Amish and the Hutterites – have arrived with distinctive identities, religious practices, and even specific dialects and folkways. And North America itself has spawned new Anabaptist expressions, such as the Brethren in Christ tradition and numerous new Mennonite denominations. Like Mennonites elsewhere, the North Americans came to be known for their teaching that Christians could find personal peace in yielding to God and accepting Christ; many emphasized the biblical idea of “peace, not as the world gives it.” They also taught that yielding to God meant following Christ daily and living lives of peace. Thus, they strove to follow ancient teachings on nonviolence, on living simply and in humility, on caring for the poor, on choosing leaders from within the local community, and on insisting that love was the crucial measure of a congregation's spiritual strength. In practice they often failed, but they refused to give up the conviction that Christ's

teachings could be taken practically, in this world, and were not to be dismissed as a vague set of ideals or relegated to some future millennium in the by and by. Like Mennonites elsewhere, the North Americans also practiced adult baptism, a sign that faith could not simply be inherited but must be reaffirmed in each generation.



Dietrich Gaeddert (1837-1900) and his wife Helena Richert Gaeddert (1858-1953). Dietrich led the migration of Mennonites from Molochna Colony to the area near Buhler, Kansas in 1874, the year in which his first wife, Maria Martens, died. Dietrich was a school teacher and farmer, and was elected a minister in 1867. In Kansas he organized Hofnungsau Mennonite Church and helped start Bethel College. Dietrich and Helena married in 1879. Dietrich had thirteen children with each of his two wives; eighteen survived infancy.

It mattered a great deal in their history that the first Mennonite immigrants to North America came from Europe with specific cultural habits and that they came at particular times. The first sizable groups of Mennonites were Swiss and South German in origin, arriving in Pennsylvania between 1707 and 1755, carrying memories of persecution and an eagerness to obtain farm land. The second significant group, also of Swiss-South German origin, came to the young United States and to what was then Upper Canada between 1817 and 1860 when wars and social unrest in Europe brought economic upheaval and the military draft.

The third group, this one of Dutch-North German origin, arrived in the western parts of both the United States and Canada from homes in the Russian Empire between 1874 and 1880 when the government there began speaking of universal military service. During the 1920s many of the most conservative members of the Canadian cohort of this group migrated again, this time to seek greater social isolation in northern Mexico and central Paraguay. The fourth and fifth major groups of North American newcomers, also of Dutch-North German descent and also from Russia – or the Soviet Union, as it was then named – arrived in Canada escaping revolution and war during the 1920s and the late 1940s.

Because the Mennonite immigrants to North America usually came as groups, often as pre-existing congregations, or through chain migration, they were also able to reassemble as distinctive communities, often in rural places or small towns. Certain specific places came to be associated as Mennonite, places such as Lancaster County in Pennsylvania, Newton and Hillsboro in central Kansas, and Osler and Rosthern in central Saskatchewan. In these and many other places an identifiable ethnicity took shape, built on shared memory, transplanted custom, common kinship, and spoken dialect. In these communities one could hear the Palatine-Swiss German dialect, nicknamed Pennsylvania Dutch, or the northern Low German dialect of *Plautdietsch*, infused with numerous actual Dutch and Russian words. These cultural conditions enabled the development of closely-knit communities in the 1700s and 1800s. They marked places in which Mennonites sought to chart lives of peace, simplicity and faith.

North America, however, was not a static place. In the three centuries since the first Mennonite congregations took root in Pennsylvania, what Europeans called the “New World” has undergone massive changes. This transformation fundamentally affected Mennonites.

In 1776 Pennsylvania aligned itself with a political revolution that would form the United States. Based on a republican form of government heralding personal freedom, the young country eagerly encroached on Indigenous lands and oversaw the opening of the vast interior grassland for farm settlement. When the Dominion of Canada was created as an independent country in 1867 to the cry of “peace, order and good government,” it also used force to create opportunities for white settlers in the continent’s vast northwest. In both countries hopes of peace were tested by one war after another.

In the twentieth century, cataclysmic world wars followed by a militaristic “cold war” tested Mennonites’ resolve to link faith and peace. They found that they could no longer simply ignore the gripping idea of nationalism and patriotism, nor the logic that nations had enemies that must be killed.

During the twentieth century an encroaching modern world compelled Mennonites to take stock, to reaffirm or readjust the central tenets of their faith. Some became intense champions of nonviolence and advocates for social justice in the wider society, others recommitted themselves to traditionalist lives in more isolated Mennonite heartlands, and still others abandoned old beliefs and assimilated the values of militarism and patriotism. All the while, North America’s thriving ethnic and religious pluralism, which placed the Mennonites among a myriad of other church groups, each with its own understanding of peoplehood or religion, also shaped how Anabaptists lived their faith in Canada and the United States. Some embraced dual identities of religious faith and ethnicity, others insisted that they must be separated and that ethnic identities were an impediment to spiritual wholeness.

One aspect of North America that most Mennonites had to contend with was the continent’s highly developed economy, its wealth and commerce. How did a people of faith, committed to the simplicity of Christ and to a humble life on the farm, deal with a continent that rapidly became one of the most technologized and industrialized places



Saulo Padilla, front row far left, and other youth wear white on the day of their baptism at Primera Iglesia Evangélica Menonita, Calgary, Alberta, in 1986. Padilla and his mother and siblings had immigrated from Guatemala to Canada earlier that year.

on earth? How did such a people of faith adjust to national ideologies that spoke of the “American dream,” of upward mobility, promising that hard work would lead to personal success measured with ample consumer products? How did the vast movement of farm families to towns and cities and their places of higher learning and consumer goods, affect Anabaptist values of simplicity and community cohesiveness? What happened when their churches and communities began to include people whose heritage was not European and whose understanding of faithfulness was refracted through other ethnic lenses? What was the effect on North America’s Mennonites of a shrinking globe, made smaller by new technologies of travel and made more visible by a communications revolution? How did North American Mennonites respond to stories of war and poverty in other parts of the globe, of Mennonite brothers and sisters on other continents?

The story contained in this book shows a people of faith seeking first to transplant and then to cultivate lives of peace within congregations and communities. The narrative outlines the challenges and the remarkable transformation of this mission over time. This book is not an exhaustive history of North American Mennonites. It is intentionally not the full story of the great Mennonite institutions and great Mennonite leaders from North America. Certainly the temptation for us as historians of North America in the writing of a “global history” was to write a “trunk history,” one in which the roots and the core of the social organism of the global Mennonite community reside in the north, while the branches and vines reach into the south and east. Such a conceptual scheme has not guided the writing of this book.

Rather this book is more along the lines of an essay. It seeks to answer a single question: How did Mennonite men and women live out their distinctive religious calling to follow Christ in North America? The answer is that they did so as ordinary people, in everyday life. In their lives they often aimed for holiness, neatness and orderliness, but the fact is that life is not always neat, it is never sin-less, and indeed it is often messy. There have been joys and tears, moments of achievement and times of failure.

It is in telling these stories that we as authors seek to contribute to a global history of Mennonites. From our conversations it became apparent that the wider global Mennonite community wanted to know how ordinary Mennonites of North America have “followed Christ daily,” how they have created places of peace, both in spiritual

and physical terms. It seemed to us that our global readers were less interested in singular North American achievements. And because the twentieth century was a time of upheaval and far-reaching change for the Mennonite people in North America and around the world, we focused on it rather than on earlier periods.

This story of faith begins with a chapter co-authored by us, the first part focusing on the exodus of the Swiss and South German Mennonites to Pennsylvania and beyond, beginning in earnest in about 1707; the second part focuses on the exodus of Dutch and North German Mennonites via West Prussia and Russia to the North American interior, beginning in large numbers in the 1870s. The second chapter, focusing on the construction of communities in the eastern half of the continent, and then chapters six, seven, nine and ten, dealing with diverging church lines, the ideal of nonviolence, the problem of money and new ways of worship and spiritual care were written by Steve. The third chapter, following settlement construction in the midwest and west, and chapters four, five, eight and twelve, recording land stewardship, life in town and city, family relations, and then the evolving world beyond the continent were written by Royden. Chapter eleven, examining new media in Canada and the United States, was again co-authored. These multifaceted themes seemed to us to encapsulate the main aspects of the Mennonite world in North America. They reflect the complex ways that Mennonites have sought to be a people of peace, externally in geographic sites, internally in mind and soul.

No doubt our own lives and convictions have shaped the narrative we tell. We are both historians of immigration and ethnicity who have most often written for non-Mennonite audiences. We are also committed Mennonites. By some measures we represent different master narratives within this saga, Royden a so-called Dutch-Russian Mennonite from Canada and Steve, a so-called Swiss Mennonite from the United States. Yet we share some common perspectives. Both of us come from places in the Mennonite world – the *Kleine Gemeinde* (or Evangelical Mennonite Conference) of rural Steinbach, Manitoba and the Lancaster Conference of suburbanizing Smoketown, Pennsylvania – in which a self-confident religious identity relied on a keen sense of tradition and had little interest in denominationalism. In these places, Mennonite institutions were few or distant, an academic articulation of an “Anabaptist Vision”

in the 1940s was not a watershed, and ethnicity remained an ally rather than a competitor in the quest for faithfulness.

Today we are members of large, theologically progressive Mennonite conferences that differ from those of our upbringings. We are active participants in these churches, but sometimes find ourselves wondering if mainline Mennonites take themselves too seriously. We also cherish our friendships with Old Order, Old Colony and other more conservative groups. How Mennonites like us, coming from such hearths, contribute to a conversation on the global Mennonite story, and what our perspectives and biases reveal and obscure about the Mennonite experience, we leave for readers to judge. But we have confidence that in the minority corners of the Mennonite world we have known, there resides some wisdom.

Community is a major theme in North American Mennonite history, and it has been critical to the writing of this book. We are deeply grateful for the hundreds of Mennonites who have told their stories to us. This work is based on dozens of autobiographies and family histories, as well as on the work of the many historians of congregational, institutional, regional, or national Mennonite groups. The historiography of Mennonites in North America is voluminous. Indeed, as authors, we joked that given the richness of historical sources in North America our main challenge was not what to say, but what *not* to say.

Many people helped us say what we did choose to share and we gratefully acknowledge their assistance. John A. Lapp, coordinator of the Global Mennonite History Project extended an invitation to us and then offered unfailing support and encouragement. Arnold Snyder's probing questions and thoughtful editing were most welcome. Merle and Phyllis Pellman Good have provided generous support and fine production skills as publishers for the entire Global Mennonite History Series, including for this volume. Mennonite World Conference paid for some research and writing time early in the project and for incidental costs throughout. We also wish to thank our respective academic homes, the University of Winnipeg and its Chair in Mennonite History, and Goshen College and its Department of History for their financial and collegial support. As writers we also benefitted from sabbatical appointments at the University of Guelph and Conrad Grebel University College in Ontario (Loewen) and the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania (Nolt).



This book benefits from a mountain of records in Mennonite archives, large and small, in all regions of North America. The following staff members of various historical libraries and archives provided invaluable assistance: Conrad Stoesz of the Mennonite Heritage Centre and Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg; Joe Springer of the Mennonite Historical Library in Goshen, Indiana; Colleen McFarland, Rich Preheim and John D. Thiesen of Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Indiana and North Newton, Kansas; Sam Steiner and Lauren Harder at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario; and David Luthy of Heritage Historical Library, Aylmer, Ontario.

In October 2004 Mennonite historians from across North America gathered at the University of Winnipeg for the conference “North American Mennonite History: The State of the Field.” We benefitted greatly from those presentations and ongoing interaction with many of the participants. Other colleagues read portions of our manuscript and offered comments and corrections that sharpened our thinking and saved us from embarrassment. Readers included Dora Dueck, Timothy Paul Erdel, Mary Ann Loewen, Ronald Peters, John D. Roth, Janis Thiessen, and Hans Werner. Goshen College student research assistants who contributed to this book have included Katie Yoder, Jason Kauffman, Joshua Weaver, David Harnish, and Hannah Canaviri. University of Winnipeg student research assistants included Donovan Giesbrecht, Megan Janzen, Konrad Krahn, and Kelly Ross.

This book has benefitted greatly from the very many conversations Royden and Steve have had with Mennonites – fellow historians, students, church leaders, lay people, women and men, progressive and traditionalist, the youthful and the elderly – from dozens of places across North America. These voices have instilled a sense of hope that the Mennonite search for a biblical peace, lived out in community, might contribute to the wellbeing of the global community.

It may be customary to thank family members last, even though their contributions should rank them near the top of any list. As always, our spouses and children have provided us with perspective, good humor, patience and joy.

Royden Loewen, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Steven M. Nolt, Goshen, Indiana



# Finding Faith and Leaving Europe

*Perhaps it was giddiness born of a successful jailbreak that sparked the men's joking about their future as fugitives. Working quickly in the cold night air, a group of fourteen convicts had just escaped from a prison tower in Zurich, Switzerland, by using a rope to climb over a wall and into a dry moat. Two weeks earlier, in March 1526, officials had sentenced them and six women to confinement on bread and water unless they stopped baptizing adults apart from the state church. Now, as the escapees broke the lock on the gate that stood between them and freedom, some imagined slipping back into ordinary lives they had once known, "but the others joked among themselves and said they would go to the red Indians across the sea."<sup>1</sup>*

*Three hundred and fifty years later another group of Anabaptists, Dutch-North German Mennonites in Russia, were pressed by the state to abandon a central feature of their faith, in particular their belief in Christ-like non-violence. These Mennonites had a firmly organized church, a confession of faith, and even a dialect that separated them from neighbors. But they faced uncertainty, having heard that the government was about to alter their military exemption status. A delegation of twelve men headed across the sea to examine lands in the United States and Canada, and here they found sympathetic hosts. But upon their return to Russia, they faced many doubts. One was based on a February 1874 rumor that "the main features" of the New World were "privation, starvation and great bodily danger on account of Indians who ... massacre the white man wherever he is to be found."<sup>2</sup>*

## Imagining North America

From a twenty-first century perspective, the curious bit of humor from 1526 and the ungrounded fear from 1874 raise intriguing questions about European Anabaptist-Mennonites and the North American continent they considered a “New World.” What did they mean when they joked about going to the Western Hemisphere, and what did they really know about the Indigenous people who lived there? Did they view the Americas as a safe haven? A potential mission field? Why did the Americas come to mind in these moments of high tension? Could they have imagined that their convictions and choices would inspire a religious movement that, in one form or another, eventually would spread around the globe and have more than a million spiritual heirs on continents they could only imagine?

If nothing else, the off-hand comic relief of 1526 and the fearful comments of 1874 marked beginning points of what would become the Mennonite encounter with North America. Years before they arrived in North America, European Anabaptists and Mennonites possessed hopes and anxieties about life there. Those images mixed with their experience of religious persecution, their passing knowledge of transatlantic territory, and their prospects for immigration, all of which would shape early Mennonite relationships with North America.

The way the European Anabaptists imagined North America was important in shaping the sequential waves of migration to the so-called “New World.” In the sixteenth century, the continent now



Some of the many arrowheads unearthed by Mennonite Bishop Peter R. Nissley (1863-1921) as he plowed the fields of his Mount Joy, Pennsylvania farm. Aboriginal artifacts bore silent testimony to the original inhabitants of the land.

called North America was home to between four and ten million Indigenous people who represented dozens of local languages and cultural traditions.<sup>3</sup> But the rich variety represented by those numbers was hardly known or understood in Europe. Even educated Europeans, like the Zurich Anabaptists, had limited knowledge of the Western Hemisphere and even less

**Europeans had few intellectual tools for dealing with the Americas**

sense of its significance. Three hundred years later it was clear that parts of North America remained a mystery, easily generating half-truths and misconceptions of the Indigenous inhabitants of the great continent.

It seems obvious to today's North Americans that their continent's "discovery" by Europeans was an event of profound importance, but sixteenth-century Europeans were not so sure.<sup>4</sup> The social world into which Anabaptism was born and Mennonite traditions developed was one that only gradually incorporated the Americas into its thinking. After 1492 Europeans did *discover* America, in the root meaning of that word – to reveal, to expose, or to gaze upon – but they had no collective sense of what they were seeing, let alone any real understanding. Europeans had gotten along for centuries without knowledge of continents and populations to the west, and for many of them it was not at all self-evident how this new information would change their lives. In 1513 some European intellectuals suggested that if the Americas really had been important, God would have revealed their presence to the church much earlier. In the absence of a biblical Cornelius story or a Macedonia call, this "new world" would need to prove its significance.

As the sixteenth century wore on, books about Asia or the Turks – places and people with which Europeans were already familiar – continued to sell briskly, but the reading public showed scant interest in writings about the Americas. Even the memoirs of Spain's Charles V, who presided over the violent conquest of much of Latin America, made no mention of the Americas, which he apparently considered an incidental footnote to his reign. In the Catholic states of southern Europe, princes discussed gold and clerics debated the conversion of Indigenous people, but there was no sustained discussion of what it all meant.

Indeed, Europeans had few intellectual tools for dealing with what, bit by bit, they were coming to know about these places across the sea. The frequency with which they described the Americas as *Eden* or its people as *savage* (a biological term for uncultivated plants, such as those of the Garden of Eden) pointed to how utterly different they perceived this world to be from their own. Early European travelers to the Western Hemisphere despaired of detailing what they saw since it all seemed so novel. In the end, many resorted to describing the Americas in terms of traditional *European* mythology – giants, fountains of youth, kingdoms of amazons – while obvious things in front of them escaped their notice.

What Europeans slowly did begin to recognize was that these new worlds promoted European movement – movement of wealth, people, and ideas. And where there was movement, there was opportunity. Illiterate, illegitimate peasants on the eastern side of the Atlantic might transform themselves into powerful officials on the other side, where Europe's old rules did not apply. North America, in the European imagination, became a place where one could begin again, transcend the past, and experiment with new social relationships – from representative democracy to race-based chattel slavery – that they dared not broach in their own "Old World." In the end, such desires and the accompanying flow of people and capital, would tie Europe more tightly to the Western Hemisphere than to Asia or Africa, in large part because Europe saw itself anew in the Americas. This inter-regional relationship, complex from the start, was part of the context in which Mennonites met North America.

### **From Anabaptist to Mennonite**

Mennonites who later immigrated to North America saw themselves as heirs of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, men and women like those who had been jailed in 1526 Zurich. Emerging from the spiritual ferment known as the Protestant Reformation – a movement marked by challenges from figures such as Martin Luther and John Calvin to the theological and political claims of the Church of Rome – Anabaptism was both similar to and distinct from other Protestant programs.

Anabaptists shared Reformation concerns for greater involvement of lay people in church life, the use of the Bible to challenge old religious traditions, and a notion that divine salvation hinged on God's grace and not human effort. But Anabaptists also believed such

faith was understood only by adults who were aware of the ethical implications of salvation. As a result, they rejected infant baptism and thereby earned the nickname – and criminal label – *Anabaptist* (re-baptizer) when they declared their own infant baptisms invalid and baptized one another upon confession of faith.<sup>5</sup> Anabaptism first surfaced in Zurich, Switzerland in 1525; independent of the Zurich movement, re-baptism began in the Dutch city of Emden in 1530. The movement spread from both places.

## **Faith produces the fruits of the Spirit**

Such faith, as one of their early catechisms explained, is “one that produces the fruits of the Spirit and works through love.”<sup>6</sup> Sharing one’s material possessions, rejecting violence and self-defense, and refusing to swear civil oaths were among the fruits most Anabaptists identified. Yet Anabaptism by nature was a loosely constructed movement drawing on diverse interests and lacking central theological leadership or state protection and regulation. While some Anabaptists came from the aristocracy or well-to-do classes, most were common village folk, and some were veterans of an ill-fated 1525 peasants uprising in South Germany, or disaffected artisans in the northern Low Countries.

The role of women within Anabaptism varied from place to place, although especially in the early years and in the midst of persecution, women’s activity was essential to the movement’s survival.<sup>7</sup> One group of Anabaptists from what is now the Czech Republic folded their worldly goods into a common purse and took up a communal existence under the leadership of Jakob Hutter, eventually taking the name Hutterites.

Although few Anabaptists created a collective life as tightly as the Hutterites, the vast majority understood the church to have clear social dimensions. The church was to be a distinct people separate from the degenerate “world.” In 1535 such sentiments mixed with apocalyptic expectations to spark an Anabaptist attempt to usher in the Kingdom of God and crush the worldly. The most fanatical of these tendencies occurred in the city of Münster, where Anabaptists subjected their opponents to a reign of terror before collapsing – and permanently linked Anabaptism and violent revolution in many Europeans’ minds.

Most European Anabaptists, however, were decidedly peaceful, though they were inherently subversive in their refusal to acknowledge church-state ties or participate in armed defense. Meanwhile, the

very world the Anabaptists hoped to hold at arms' length reinforced their separatist sensibilities. Harassment, discrimination, and death came from officials bent on stamping out dissent. Before executions ended in the early 1600s, as many as 2,500 Anabaptists were martyred, confirming Anabaptist suspicion of larger society and encouraging them to view the state in confrontational terms. Government might be a necessary evil, ensuring minimal social order, many Anabaptists admitted, but the Christian's ultimate allegiance was to the church, the body of believers.



The Martyrdom of Anneken Heyndricks, Amsterdam, 1571

One voice pressing such claims was that of a Dutch Anabaptist named Menno Simons (c.1496-1561), whose prolific writings calling for simplicity and nonviolence left most Anabaptists with the name *Mennists*, or *Mennonites*. Although the label *Mennonite* was not used by all Dutch Anabaptists, and rarely by Swiss and South German Anabaptists, it became a useful way to identify second and subsequent generations of Anabaptists who, as an established sect, increasingly focused attention on passing the faith to their children. Along the way



Mennonites developed a distinct relationship with “the world,” one characterized both by wary distance from the cultural mainstream and by dependence on the goodwill of sympathetic rulers and neighbors in order to survive.

### **Patterns of Mennonite Peoplehood**

These patterns of Mennonite peoplehood developed in two geographic directions. One had begun to take shape in the midst of sixteenth-century persecution when many Dutch and North German Mennonites fled east to religiously tolerant enclaves in what is today northern Poland. In the process they created a network of Anabaptist connections spanning northern Europe. Exceptional was the experience in the Netherlands itself, where toleration became the norm after 1570, and many Mennonites moved into prosperous commercial and professional positions. The political leverage the Dutch Mennonites gained from their privileged status later allowed them to assist Swiss and South German Mennonites in immigrating to North America.

The Swiss and South German Mennonite tradition – distinct, though never disconnected, from that in the Netherlands – endured outsider status longer. During the later 1500s and 1600s these Swiss and South Germans shifted from artisan and craft pursuits to agriculture and adopted a theology of humility that made sense of the continued harassment they experienced.<sup>8</sup> Responding to invitations from estate owners in the Palatinate, Alsace and other areas in the Rhine Valley, small groups of Swiss Mennonites relocated downriver to work leased land in exchange for limited liberty. This was especially so in the wake of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) when landlords stuck with pillaged fields were desperate to find reliable and loyal tenants.

### **Dutch and Swiss Mennonites remained in contact with one another**

Religiously, the Swiss and South German Mennonites borrowed from their Reformed neighbors’ prayer books and hymnody, but retained an Anabaptist emphasis on the Gospels at the expense of other portions of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, in the seventeenth century a Pietist renewal movement across Protestantism promoted a religion of the heart that appealed to many Mennonites, both Swiss and Dutch.<sup>10</sup> In one sense, Pietism exploited an internal Mennonite tension, inher-

ited from the earliest Anabaptists, between the authority of personal faith, on the one hand, and ethical expressions of faithfulness discerned by the church, on the other.

Pietism was not innately at odds with Mennonite spirituality, but Pietism would provide a perennial source for self-criticism among Mennonites who felt their tradition had become too rigid. By the 1670s the attraction of a more individual approach to faith led some Mennonites in the Rhine Valley to respond favorably to English Quaker missionaries. Conversion to Quakerism was notable especially around the city of Krefeld in central Germany where Mennonites were engaged in the weaving trade.<sup>11</sup>

The importance of the Rhine River for trade and communication meant that Dutch and Swiss Mennonites remained in contact with one another, despite their different political contexts and social orientations, and they continued to recognize one another as spiritual kin. In 1614 when Swiss officials beheaded Hans Landis (the last Anabaptist execution, it turned out), Dutch Mennonite leader Hans de Ries included Landis in the *Story of the Martyrs* published the next year.<sup>12</sup>

By the 1640s the wealthy and politically-connected Dutch Mennonites were sending financial aid – formalized by 1655 into a Relief



A legal order issued in 1695 by the city council of Bern. The title page reads:

“Published Mandate of the city of Bern, dated March 9, 1695. Concerning the elimination of the Anabaptists in Bernese territory.”

Fund for Foreign Needs – to Swiss Mennonite refugees. Later, influential Amsterdam Mennonite merchants pressured Swiss officials who were harassing Mennonites, and the Netherlanders enlisted noted Dutch Reformed church theologians and civic leaders to scold the Swiss for their religious intolerance. Nevertheless, new waves of Swiss legal harassment in the 1670s targeted Mennonites, who then fled into South Germany and eastern France – the Palatinate, Alsace, and other parts of the Rhine Valley – where local lords offered refuge to prospective leaseholders. Dutch Mennonites responded again by sending significant relief aid to the Swiss refugees.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the relative religious toleration available in places to which the Swiss Mennonites fled could also be a source of in-group conflict for them. Accustomed to hostility from the world, they suddenly had to make sense of living in places that tolerated them and even offered them grudging respect. By 1693 disagreement over how to respond to the wider more accepting world produced a sharp division among the Swiss and South Germans. Supporters of Jakob Ammann, the *Amish*, encouraged an intentional separation from host societies poised to accept them.<sup>14</sup> The Amish won most of their adherents in portions of Alsace and the Palatinate where toleration threatened to weaken a strict sense of church-world dualism. Fewer Mennonites were attracted to Ammann's brand of renewal in Switzerland and other places where Anabaptists were still harassed, and where the need to rely on sympathetic state-church neighbors for survival blunted the appeal of the highly sectarian Amish message.

By 1711, in the face of further rounds of state harassment, South German and Swiss Mennonites and Amish were beginning to contemplate leaving the region entirely. Again, their ties to wealthy and influential Dutch Mennonites served them well, since the Dutch helped finance emigrant transportation down the Rhine River – although on at least one occasion Mennonites and Amish heading north, still sore from recent schism, refused to ride together on the same boats.<sup>15</sup>

But before either Mennonites or Amish decided with whom they would travel to North America, they had to choose to make that risky ride across the Atlantic – and that choice was far from straightforward. True, the Europe they had come to know most immediately had given the Swiss and South German Mennonites enough reasons to seek other homes. But immigration required additional elements, including knowledge of alternative places to live, the physical and

financial means to get there, and the sense that unknown possibilities would outweigh known risks. In other words, it required not only a “push” but also a “pull.” Mennonites and Amish experienced these dynamics in religiously-mixed company.<sup>16</sup>

### **The South German Search for Peace and Prosperity**

During the 1700s many South Germans – not just Mennonites and Amish – began to feel enough pushes and pulls that the possibility of leaving long-time homes for distant destinations became plausible and even appealing. Decades of regional warfare ceased by 1714, but the coming of peace brought new challenges. Nobles and authorities from new nation-states sought to strengthen control of lands newly won or almost lost during a century of armed conflict. Increasingly rulers overrode historic privileges of village residents, appropriated common pasture land, and restricted hunting and timbering, leaving rural folk unsure of their ability to support future generations.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, population growth that followed the peace placed new pressure on families’ abilities to provide for their children. The tradition of partible inheritance dictated that acres be split among all family members, and the practice began rendering farms into unviable parcels. Since many of the region’s Mennonites were estate tenants, having moved from Switzerland at the invitation of nobility who needed labor, they did not face exactly the same challenges as their peasant neighbors. But they did share the general problem of securing an economic future for their families, given the limits and vulnerability of lease-holding and the division of estates.

In any case, these push and pull inducements opened Mennonites to promotional literature advertising the merits of immigration. So too did letters sent back home by those who were the first to relocate and who urged their relatives to follow.<sup>18</sup> But alongside these general inducements were powerful forces encouraging resettlement in particular places. At the time, North America did not rank especially high among settlement destinations.

For several centuries, German-speaking people seeking to improve their fortunes had moved *east*. In the 1700s, those migration patterns took on new life as centralizing empires – Prussian, Austrian, and Russian – actively lured southwest Germans to participate in colonization plans in Eastern Europe. Potential settlers to those places



Although Mennonites of the 1700s showed little interest in mission to Indigenous people, today the North American Mennonite world includes First Nations Canadians and Native Americans. Here, two long-time Mennonites, Bertha Little Coyote, a Southern Cheyenne from Seiling, Oklahoma, and Essie Cotton, a Choctaw from Philadelphia, Mississippi, attend an aboriginal Mennonite assembly in Lame Deer, Montana in 1996.

received promises of help in defraying moving expenses, exemption from certain taxes, limited rights of self-rule, and religious toleration. Indeed, of the thousands of Germans who left their homes during the 1700s, the overwhelming majority followed well-worn paths to Eastern Europe.

Only about 15 percent of all German migrants chose North America. But in the eighteenth century most of the Mennonites and Amish who left Swiss and South German lands opted for this less common destination.<sup>19</sup> In choosing North America these Mennonites faced daunting prospects. First, North America was less inviting when compared with Eastern European settlement options because the cost of relocating to North America was not subsidized. Apart from a brief and unsuccessful British attempt to sponsor immigrants in 1709 and 1710, the crown in London did not pay the expenses of settlement in North America.

This lack of underwriting compounded the fact that privately-funded Atlantic voyages were long, difficult, costly, and dangerous.

Nor were Germans sure about their safety in North America. Eastern European governments promised to provide standing armies and fortified towns to protect recruited settlers, but in North America, the absence of a strong government and stories of fighting between Europeans and native people added to the perceived risk. In response, British recruiters tried to paint a picture of Indigenous people as benign, exotic, and docile – images that may have calmed the nerves of potential emigrants, but which also shaped their view of Native Americans well before they encountered them in person.<sup>20</sup>

Despite North America's relative disadvantages, it seemed to promise Europeans two distinctive things: a sense that there was an enormous amount of available land and that government would play a minimal role in people's lives. In America, historian Aaron Fogleman has pointed out, "a group of six or seven families often owned as much land as did an entire village populated by hundreds of people in the [German] Kraichgau." Although Eastern Europe promised security and religious toleration at lower resettlement costs, those settlements were still bounded communities that might become overcrowded. In contrast, American promotional literature stressed expansive space that could support countless future generations.<sup>21</sup>



Amish Mennonite Bishop Jacob Zehr (1825-1898) and Elizabeth Ehresman Zehr (1830-1902) at their home in central Illinois. Both were immigrants from southern Germany. Jacob moved from Bavaria to Illinois in 1848. Elizabeth had immigrated to Ohio as a five-year-old girl.

Why did Swiss and South German Mennonites find these images of North America attractive? First, Mennonites who ventured across the Atlantic in the 1700s were part of a mass migration motivated especially by concern for maintaining family integrity through the accumulation and distribution of land. For parents who wanted to provide farms for their children, grandchildren, and generations beyond, North America seemed to offer that possibility. Second, in choosing North America, Mennonites and Amish were going to a place where government was widely believed to have a much lower profile than it did in Europe. If part of the appeal in migrating to Eastern Europe was what the state promised new settlers, in America the state offered mostly its absence. Remarkably, mission to Indigenous Americans does not seem to have been a motivation for Mennonites and Amish. In this respect they differed from members of the Moravian Church (Unity of the Brethren), who saw the opportunity to settle in the Western Hemisphere as a providential opening to share the Gospel.<sup>22</sup>

Almost a century later, following the upheaval of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, another wave of South German and Swiss Amish and Mennonites left their homes for North America. This time, from roughly 1815 to 1870, the motivations for migration were somewhat different from those of the eighteenth century. Now pressure to participate in citizen-armies modeled on French conscription practices surfaced in many German states. Moreover, the sorts of privileges that local pockets of lease-holding Mennonites had negotiated with individual landlords collapsed in the face of new notions of universal citizenship that assumed all residents had a stake in the success of modernized nations.<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, during the nineteenth century some European Mennonites and Amish had warmed to the new civic welcome these European developments offered. A good number took the opportunity to integrate themselves more deeply into their host societies. But others resisted, and for them North America now promised their sons freedom from military service as well as the prospect of land ownership. In both the 1700s and 1800s, Mennonite parents moved with their children's welfare in mind, but the threats they most imagined for their offspring shifted over time. Again, transatlantic correspondence

and the promotional literature offered by immigrant shipping companies reinforced these images and made moving plausible and possible.

During all of this time, other European Mennonites had been weighing the costs and benefits of migration, seeking peace and considering their families' futures, but had come to conclusions that pointed them, initially at least, away from North America. Many of the Dutch-North German Mennonites who established new communities in eastern Europe from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries would eventually find North America attractive, too, though the "pushes" and "pulls" of this movement were products of their own times and places.

### **The Dutch search for freedom in the East and in the West**

The migration path for the second main grouping of European Mennonites – Dutch Mennonites especially from the provinces of Flanders and Friesland – also led to North America, but not before a long sojourn in eastern Europe.

Persecution in the Netherlands came early and very hard. During the 1530s the region was under the rule of a devout traditionalist,

#### **The 1530s marked a time of welcome in Poland**

Charles V, a member of the Spanish monarchical family. In 1535 he issued a proclamation

against all Anabaptists, but unleashed it with particular furor against those in the province of Flanders. These Flemish Mennonites consequently fled in several directions – England, Germany, and Friesland in the northern Netherlands.

By coincidence the 1530s also marked a time of welcome for religious minorities in distant Poland, and especially in its German-speaking province of West Prussia. Poland attracted thousands of Dutch Mennonites, both from Flanders in the south and from Friesland in the north. The movement only slowed after 1570 when, under Prince William of Orange, the Netherlands rebelled against the Spanish monarchy and transformed the Dutch state into a place of unusual toleration.

By 1547 there was a permanent Mennonite settlement in the Polish province of West Prussia, one visited by Menno Simons himself two years later. Within a century so many Dutch Mennonites had relocated here that they were said to constitute one half of all Mennonites in the world. Those skilled in textiles set up shop around the city of



Danzig (today Gdansk). Those with lowland farming skills began a century-long task of turning the rich, but water-covered Vistula River Delta into a productive agricultural region. The work was extremely hard, but in time the water-pumping Dutch windmills, surrounded by dikes and willow hedges, intersected by adjoining house-barns, heralded one of Europe's richest farming areas.

Mennonites still faced opposition, but strong Polish kings as well as local landlords extended privileges of religious freedom and military exemption to the Mennonites. The most notable was King Wladislav IV's 1642 charter of privileges treasured by Mennonites as their own "Privilegium." Under these terms religious faith flourished. Mennonites read the sixteenth and seventeenth century works of Dutch Anabaptists, including the pietistic writings of Pieter Pietersz and others, but also works by conservative Flemish

**By the end of the 1700s many Dutch-descended Mennonites had migrated to the southern reaches of the Russian empire**

writers, like George Hansen, who called Mennonites to a life of simplicity, humility and peace.<sup>24</sup>

To a large extent Mennonites were left to their own villages and farms. Still enough social interaction occurred that sometime during the mid-1700s they began to lose the Dutch language and instead began speaking the closely-related tongue of West Prussian Low German or *Plautdietsch*, though with a sprinkling of Dutch words. At about the same time they adopted High German for worship.

By the end of the 1700s many Dutch-descended Mennonites undertook a second major migration. Again it was eastward, this time from West Prussia to the southern reaches of the Russian empire. They had made West Prussia their home for some 250 years. But in 1772 the Kingdom of Prussia under the militaristic Fredrick the Great annexed northern Poland and soon introduced new military laws that made it very difficult for pacifist Mennonites to acquire land from non-Mennonites.

Fortuitously for the Mennonites, the Russian empire under Catherine the Great had just conquered the vast steppes of present-day Ukraine from Turkish forces, leaving those grasslands to Cossack and Nogai nomads. Russia wished to build a strong rural economy and began advertising widely in Western Europe for farmers to come and cultivate those lands. Catherine's government offered travel subsidies and interest-free loans, and tens of thousands of German-speaking

western Europeans moved eastward. The surviving remnant of the Hutterites, having endured a history of severe persecution and dislocation in Eastern Europe, were among those migrating to New Russia. The immigrants also included some Swiss Mennonites who in 1791 founded several villages in the western-most Russian province of Volhynia.

The largest group of Anabaptists moving eastward, however, were the Dutch-North German Mennonites of West Prussia who were troubled by growing restrictions and who had been courted by an agent of Catherine the Great. These Mennonites established two large colonies, one at Khortitsa (or Chortitza, as the German-speaking Mennonites named it) in 1789 and the other 150 kilometers (100 miles) to the south, at Molochna (or Molotschna) in 1804. Mennonites from West Prussia continued to come in smaller groups, so that by 1850 some 30,000 Mennonites had arrived on the Ukrainian steppe.<sup>25</sup>



"Threshing in pioneer days, Russia," a painting by John P. Klassen. The horse draws a threshing wheel over the stalks to separate the grain from the chaff.

The sojourn in Russia signaled great changes for the Mennonites. The initial invitation from Catherine the Great had promised religious freedom for all western European immigrants but in 1800 a special *Privilegium* issued to the Mennonites by Czar Alexander I also assured freedom from military service without restriction, a modified partible inheritance system (allowing estates to be liquidated and then divided equally among all children), and their own local government.

In turn Mennonites were asked to obey national laws, which included respecting the Orthodox Christian faith and not proselytizing among the Orthodox. Environmentally, the Ukrainian steppe was completely different from the high moisture areas of West Prussia and the Netherlands. Their new homeland was wheat-growing and sheep-raising country. Mennonites now lived a great distance from any significant cities, and the state encouraged their transition to farming by giving free land, about 175 acres, to each family.

Significant cultural changes followed. Even though Mennonite communities were formed in close proximity to other people – German Catholics and Lutherans, Ukrainian and Russian peasants, including the peaceful Doukhobors, fellow Anabaptist Hutterites, and even Mongolian Nogai nomads – the Mennonites were assured their own territory. Russia mandated that the foreign colonists such as the Mennonites would be self-governing, answerable only to a German-language arm of the Russian government. In this setting West Prussian Low German became a distinguishing cultural feature. So self-contained did the Mennonites in Russia become that scholars have suggested that they came to constitute both a religious and an ethnic group.<sup>26</sup>



A prosperous Mennonite farm in Tiege, Molochna, Russia

These very conditions, however, also led to a century of dynamic religious challenges. It seemed that the abundance of land, the cozy relations with Russia's government, self-governance, and tight social boundaries combined to inhibit Anabaptist values of complete separa-

tion of church and state. This contradiction sparked a series of protest and renewal movements.

In 1812 the conservative Kleine Gemeinde church was founded on the Molochna (Molotschna) Colony and it became known for insisting on a simple lifestyle, absolute pacifism and a close reading of Anabaptist texts. The most fundamental church rupture occurred in 1860 when the revivalistic Mennonite Brethren denomination was founded by those who were said to have “experienced conversion and come to a living faith.”<sup>27</sup> P. M. Friesen, the leading Mennonite Brethren historian, suggested that the new church had found an “apostolic balance” between the “joyous doctrine of justification” in German pietism and “Menno’s very serious, somewhat melancholy theology.”<sup>28</sup>

Mennonites were not the only ones changing during the nineteenth century, so too was the Russian government. Embarrassed by defeat at the hands of the British and Turks during the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the Russian state moved to lift itself from the “backwardness” of a feudal state to a more modern nationalistic state that recognized all citizens as equal before the law. The first step was the freeing of all serfs from their slave-like conditions in 1861, and this was soon followed by integrated local government councils, the partial russification of education, and the idea of universal military service. Mennonites who had come to Russia hoping to establish



Mennonite delegates from Russia on the land inspection tour in Manitoba in 1873. The man standing in the center foreground is assumed to be delegate Leonhard Sudermann.

### Major Migrations from Europe to North America

1683-1702	ca. 200 Mennonites from northwestern Germany to Pennsylvania
1707-1774	ca. 4,000 Mennonites and 500 Amish from Switzerland and South Germany to Pennsylvania
1815-1860	ca. 3,000 Amish from Alsace-Lorraine and South Germany to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, New York and Upper Canada (Ontario)
1820-1870	ca. 700 Mennonites from Switzerland and South Germany to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa
1874-1880	ca. 18,000 Mennonites from the Russian Empire to the U.S. Midwest and Manitoba, Canada (ca. 10,000 to Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Dakota Territory; ca. 8,000 to Manitoba)
1874-1880	ca. 300 Mennonites from Prussia to Nebraska and Kansas
1874-1877	ca. 1,300 Hutterites from the Russian Empire to Dakota Territory
1881-1914	ca. 3,000 Mennonites from the Russian Empire to Canada and the U.S.
1923-1930	ca. 24,000 Mennonites from the Soviet Union (Ukraine) to Canada
1941-1943	ca. 7,000 Mennonites from the Soviet Union (Ukraine) to Canada, some coming via Paraguay
1990s	ca. 5,000 <i>Aussiedler</i> of Mennonite descent from Russia and Kazakhstan, via Germany to Manitoba

isolated communities in which to farm and worship in peace while avoiding military service, saw these changes as a clear abrogation of their venerated 1800 *Privilegium*.

When numerous appeals to the Russian authorities to guarantee military exemption seemed to fall on deaf ears, Mennonites began corresponding with American Mennonites. The well-to-do grain trader, Cornelius Jansen of the seaport of Berdyansk, contacted American and British consulates and began publishing pamphlets extolling religious freedom in North America. Publisher John F. Funk wrote him from the United States to say “how dearly we would like to see you here in free America in order that [we] might enjoy together ... this noble and God-given gift, namely complete freedom of conscience.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1873 a delegation of twelve men – ten Mennonites and two Hutterites – traveled to North America, visiting both Canada and the United States. In both countries they found vast tracts of land that had recently been taken from Indigenous people. Canada, a young country desiring settlers for its uncultivated western prairie region, readily agreed to Mennonite requests for military exemption, block settlement and private schools. The United States welcomed the Mennonites too, but insisted that they should purchase land from privately held railroad companies and negotiate military exemption with individual states.

Between 1873 and 1880 some 18,000 Mennonites – one third of all Mennonites in Russia – took trains for western Europe and boarded ships to New York or Quebec City. The more conservative settlers with roots in Khortitsa (Chortitza) Colony (especially the daughter colonies of Bergthal and Fürstenland) and the Kleine Gemeinde from Molochna (Molotschna) colony chose Canada. More accommodating settlers from Molochna, as well as the Swiss Mennonites from Volhynia and Galicia, and some Mennonites who were still living in West Prussia, tended to choose the United States.

For the Mennonites who stayed in Russia the costly emigration seemed unnecessary. Historian P. M. Friesen later suggested that the emigrants of the 1870s had betrayed Russia, loving it only for its fertile lands, and failing to embrace mission opportunities in Russia.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Russia quickly acted to discourage Mennonites from leaving by altering its plan to impose a military draft, allowing for alternative service in special forestry units known as the *Forstei*. In addition, unprecedented economic opportunities arose for Russian Mennonites to begin new colonies on the vast plains of Siberia, which attracted thousands of Mennonite settlers eastward by 1907. By 1914 half of all Mennonites in Russia lived outside the original colonies and fully 20 percent lived east of the Ural Mountains.



Mennonites gathered at Lichtenau, Molochna (Molotschna), July 1924, prepare to embark from the Soviet Union to Canada.

For those not wishing to leave the original colonies, industrialization provided business and work opportunities besides farming. Some Mennonites became wealthy and formed a sort of aristocracy, living in massive houses on secluded estates. There was even an abiding nationalistic love for Russia. Mennonite poet Bernard Harder, who in 1881 described the Russian czar as the “noblest and best man,” was himself lauded in 1910 “for his glowing patriotism for Russia.”<sup>31</sup> Even during First World War, when anti-German sentiment was high in Russia, large numbers of Mennonites served on the war front as medics.

The February 1917 revolution that deposed the Czar of Russia and the October 1917 revolution that saw the rise of the radical communist Bolshevik regime ended the “long summer night” of privileged sojourn for the Mennonites. Horror-filled civil war ensued. Mennonites were especially terrorized – plundered, raped and murdered – by a large Ukrainian anarchist force under a ruthless general, Nestor Machno, allegedly a one-time worker on a Mennonite estate. These militias pillaged Mennonite villages during the winters of 1918 and 1919. As historian Frank Epp has concluded, the “immense wealth locked into the Mennonite settlements and the unfortunate history of the Mennonite neglect, if not exploitation, of the Russian peasant, made them immediate and quite understandable targets of such aggression.”<sup>32</sup>

The occupation of Mennonite lands by German forces during the summer of 1918 brought reprieve, albeit a short one. An attempt by Mennonites around Molochna Colony to organize their own militia, known as the *Selbstschutz*, made matters all the worse. When the Bolsheviks finally took hold of the southern regions they exacted very high taxes, essentially bankrupting Mennonite communities. Wide-spread hunger and disease set in, just as communist forces began to introduce atheist teaching in the schools.

Many Mennonites who had chosen to remain in Russia during the 1870s now began planning to leave their homeland of over 100 years. In 1919 a special commission from the Russian Mennonite churches undertook a long tour of North America and Europe to seek aid and find a new homeland. The Mennonites who had migrated to western

**The migrants were drawn by an opportunity for rural living, a welcoming government and a friendly cultural context**

United States and Canada during the 1870s responded to this challenge as did the long-established Swiss Mennonite communities there. Indeed, it was as a result of this request for assistance that Mennonites in the United States organized the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in 1920 and soon sent out aid workers who set up field kitchens in Ukraine that ultimately served some 60,000 Mennonites.<sup>33</sup>

In both Canada and the United States, Mennonite leaders lobbied their governments to allow a second major immigration of Mennonites from Russian lands, even though in the xenophobic atmosphere that followed the First World War both countries were extremely reluctant to accept large numbers of newcomers. A 1921 law in the United States introduced a very strict quota system that essentially shut the door to refugees from the Soviet Union. In Canada, however, large sections of unsettled lands in the west, and the fact that Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had grown up among Ontario Mennonites, led to changes to war-time laws that had forbidden Mennonites from entering Canada. Doors were now opened not only to Mennonites but to 150,000 other Eastern European farmers, even as Canada's overtly racist immigration laws barred those of African, Asian and Jewish descent.

Between 1923 and 1930 some 20,000 Mennonites – about 20 percent of the Soviet Mennonite population – came to Canada, and many others found refuge in Paraguay. In Russia a tenacious schoolteacher, B. B. Janz, a founding member of an organization strategically named the “Union of Citizens of Dutch Ancestry,” almost single-handedly convinced the Soviets in his trips to Moscow to let the Mennonites leave for North America.<sup>34</sup> In Canada, another schoolteacher, David Toews of Saskatchewan, who came to head the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, facilitated the migration, working to convince long-settled Mennonites of their duty to support the newcomers. Toews also worked out an agreement with the Canadian Pacific Railroad to extend a generous travel and land loan to those newcomers.<sup>35</sup>

The door to Canada closed firmly in 1930. The Soviet Union had a new, more repressive leader in Joseph Stalin and in North America the onset of the depression ended all immigration. In the Soviet Union 100,000 Mennonites faced a new round of extreme difficulties in the 1930s. They were forced to collectivize their farms into communist-run organizations, many were exiled to concentration camps in Sibe-



ria and then they faced an unspeakable horror when about one half of all adult Mennonite men were arrested and executed during the 1936-38 Stalinist purges.<sup>36</sup>

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1942 during the Second World War brought a temporary reprieve for many Mennonites, but another round of intense suffering for most. The retreat of the German forces, however, did give thousands of Mennonites, many now consisting of women-headed households, a chance to flee westward, over land, to freedom from Communism. Some 8,000 reached the Netherlands, re-claimed their Dutch ancestry, and found passage to Canada.<sup>37</sup> The vast majority of those who tried to get to the west, however, were captured by advancing Soviet forces, forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union and sent directly to prison camps in distant Siberia and central Asian Soviet satellites. Even as the most difficult times ended in 1956, the struggle to survive as Mennonite people under a communist regime was extremely difficult.<sup>38</sup>

The late 1990s marked the beginning of a fourth migration wave to North America when several thousand Mennonites and Baptists of Mennonite descent, the so-called *Aussiedler* people, arrived in southern Manitoba via Germany.<sup>39</sup> Like the very first Mennonite immigrants in the late 1700s, these migrants, too, were drawn by what seemed to be an opportunity for rural living, a welcoming government and a friendly cultural context.

## Conclusion

The history of North American Mennonites is intricately tied to the story of European newcomers. Over the course of hundreds of years, they came in sequential waves, always searching for a land where they could live out their lives of faith in humility and simplicity. They also came in search of peace, seeking places in which governments would not force them to provide military service. Most importantly for their history, these newcomers came to North America as "Mennonites." No matter the year of their entry – 1711, 1815, 1874, 1923 – they were aware of their minority religious status; indeed many guarded their uniqueness with inherited cultural customs and dialects. For those Mennonites who came between 1711 and 1930, an abundance of land and tolerant governments allowed for the creation of thriving immigrant communities. For many of those who came between 1874

and 1950 aid from long-settled Mennonites was important to their successful settlement.

In North America these various Mennonite migrant groups brought their visions of peace, their faith in God's guidance, and their ideas of Christian communal accountability to bear on everyday worlds. When land opportunities ended in the eastern sections of the continent, Mennonites found new sources in the western half and northern reaches of the continent's farm land. But even in those places, Mennonites would discover that life in North America required an accommodation with many other ethnic, racial and religious groups. Life in North America was not going to be static and unchanging.

# Faith and Family in a New Land

*Sometime after 88-year-old widower Christian Weber died in 1820 in Earl Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, his children commissioned a decorative family register as a memorial. The piece listed his birth and death dates, along with those of his wife, Magdalena Ruth. But the register was more than just a piece of art work. It also carried a pointed message, reminding readers that Weber had been a devoted member of the Mennonite church and had hoped “that his descendants would follow after him in this regard.” For Weber, that desire had been no small thing, since “all of those who descend from him and were born in his lifetime number 309.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Mahala L. Yoder turned twenty in 1870. The fourth child in an Amish Mennonite family farming land in McLean County, Illinois, Mahala suffered from some debilitating illness – perhaps rheumatoid arthritis – and sometimes did not leave the house for a year at a time. Nevertheless, she was a keen follower of community events, recorded in a diary given to her by her brother. There was Sunday school, singing school, corn husking, oyster suppers, and even dances, which youth held “on the sly if they can have them in no other way.” When her physical limits hampered her, she wondered “why God should ... create such unutterable longings in us, if He never meant to fulfill them,” but decided that “God fits our backs to the burdens he gives us to bear, and we find, when the time comes, that they do not hurt us as we expected.”<sup>2</sup>*

## Facing the Future

A half century of time separated the Weber family register and Yoder's diary, yet they shared a similar outlook, a perspective that seemed oriented toward the future and situated faith and family in a new environment. Family registers like the Webers' were common among North

American Mennonites in the 1700s and 1800s. Lovingly displayed on farmhouse walls or preserved in family Bibles, these prints highlighted the importance of faith and kinship – twin motifs in the Mennonite story of these years. European Mennonites came to North America seeking economic opportunity for future generations in a place that also promised religious tolerance. But the logic of the marketplace and the implications of civil liberty could threaten both the household and the church. The Weber family register was a visual reminder of the boundaries of baptism and bloodlines, even as the art work also suggested a wider ethnic world, since the artistic design and German language it employed were shared by the Weber's Lutheran and Reformed neighbors.

What was more striking was the way in which North American Mennonites told their family stories. Mennonite family registers did not look backward. They did not say where the family originated in Europe, mention the date of immigration, or focus on ancestry. Instead, they were oriented toward the future, pointing to posterity and ignoring the past. This pattern held even when those commissioning the family register were themselves immigrants, such as Rudolph Bollinger, who arrived in Pennsylvania sometime before 1728, and whose 1763 family record listed his progeny, but not his parents. Likewise, a family register from about 1850, made for David and Maria (Bechtel) Bauman, of Waterloo, Upper Canada (later, Ontario), presented a North American family narrative focused on the Baumans' heirs in a new land.<sup>3</sup>

Decades later, the religious and material tensions that Mahala Yoder so keenly observed among the Amish Mennonites in her community were struggles to come to terms with life in this dynamic social and economic environment. Her father, Elias "bought the very plainest wooden" chairs when Mahala hoped "he would get some new cane-bottomed" ones. She debated with Thomas Lantz whether reading secular novels was a sin, and her step-sister, Mag, marched in "a grand Republican [Party] mass meeting."<sup>4</sup>

Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Mennonite communities bore the characteristics of the kin registers and diaries they produced. Faith and family were key components of their experience, as was the ethnic neighborhood and a cultural context that celebrated progress, downplayed critical reflection on the past, and favored posterity over ancestry. It was a yeasty mix for fashioning Mennonite peoplehood.

## North American Neighbors

The names of the first Mennonites to arrive in North America are largely lost to time, but a number of “Anabaptists” were among the residents of the Dutch colonial outpost of New Amsterdam (now New York) in the 1640s. Two decades later, a handful of Mennonite-connected individuals participated in the utopian colony planted in 1663 by Pieter Plockhoy in a region dubbed New Netherlands, on the Delaware Bay. Plockhoy’s experiment ended the next year, collateral damage in a series of English attacks on Dutch settlements in the Americas.

Those attacks sprang from a renewed imperial expansion on the part of the British Empire, a drive that also launched a spate of new colonies, including one dubbed “Pennsylvania” and granted to a Quaker dissenter, William Penn. Penn’s colony would become the focus of German immigration, including permanent Mennonite settlement. Already in 1683 a Dutch-speaking Mennonite couple from Krefeld, linen weavers Jan and Merken (Schmitz) Lensen, were among a group of thirteen households – most were Quakers of Mennonite lineage – who formed the village of Germantown just north of the colonial capital of Philadelphia. But the Lensens would not be typical of the 4,000-or-so Mennonites and Amish who followed them. Those immigrants were largely German-speaking and Swiss.



Germantown Mennonite meetinghouse, built 1770. Mennonites began arriving in Germantown in 1683, and by 1699 were meeting regularly for worship.

In many ways, Mennonite and Amish arrival in North America fit broader patterns of transatlantic people movement. Sailing between 1707 and 1770, Mennonites crossed the Atlantic during the peak years of eighteenth-century German immigration. And in choosing Philadelphia, their port of entry matched that of 80 percent of all German newcomers. In at least one crucial way, though, Mennonite and Amish immigrants were unusual. During the 1700s, three quarters of all people who landed in British North America were slaves, indentured servants, or convict labor. With few exceptions, Mennonites and Amish came as free labor, able to negotiate the terms of their work, and that status gave them a fundamental economic advantage.

**Mennonite immigrants followed patterns of European settlement that included the dispossession of Indigenous people**

Because Mennonites arrived in British North America in the 1700s, well after the English colonizing schemes of the 1600s had been put in place, Anabaptist

immigrants followed established patterns of European settlement, patterns that included the dispossession of Indigenous people. At times such dispossession was the result of physical encroachment, but just as often it was a result of changes to the land and natural environment. The introduction of European crops and domestic animals, weeds and germs, remade the North American natural world and undercut Indigenous ways of life even in places where direct European-Aboriginal contact was minimal.

Reliable evidence of Mennonite attitudes toward Aboriginal people in the 1700s is thin. Perhaps Mennonites did not reflect much on the displacement of Indigenous communities, although some Mennonites did support politically-connected Quakers who were concerned that Indigenous people receive fair compensation for land. Yet these same Mennonites and Quakers assumed that land was so abundant in North America that Indigenous people should and would sell it to Europeans, never really understanding Native American notions of the land or their relationship with it.

More broadly, Mennonite attitudes toward Indigenous people can be read through scattered evidence. On the one hand are the examples of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Mennonites who tried to warn English officials of an impending attack by Scots-Irish Presbyterians on a Conestoga Indian village in 1763. When civic leaders took no action and

the Conestogas were all but wiped out, Mennonite minister Christian Hershey hid the two survivors and then housed them for the rest of their lives.<sup>5</sup> Other sources suggest that perhaps more than a few Mennonites accepted dominant European patterns of thought: Somerset County, Pennsylvania, community memory held that a prominent Amish pioneer there once reckoned that “killing an Indian was pretty near like killing a person.”<sup>6</sup>

Significantly, though, the story involving Native Americans that Mennonites and Amish told most often in later years was one that highlighted Anabaptist nonresistance. In September 1757 Delaware and Shawnee allies of the French brought a war between contending French and British imperial powers into the colonial frontier in Berks County, Pennsylvania. There, Delawares burned colonizers’ homes, including that of the Amish Hochstetler household. Seeking to save their surrounded family, father Jacob Hochstetler’s sons reached for their guns. But Jacob called on them to remember Jesus’ command to turn the other cheek. The sons heeded their father, put down their weapons, and about half the household died, defenseless, in the ensuing attack.<sup>7</sup>

Told and retold across the generations, the story spoke powerfully to the practice of nonresistance, and it confirmed its listeners’ belief that Amish and Mennonites had stood on the political sidelines, rather than as actors in the drama of imperial warfare. Equally important was the way the story interwove the claims of faith and family. In their obedience, the Hochstetler sons placed religious teaching ahead of a desire to defend their kin – but only because their father told them to.

### **From Subjects to Citizens**

The warfare that pressed in on Berks County Amish families was another reminder that North American Mennonites lived in a world of imperial political claims. They were ambivalent about their place in that world, appreciating the property rights and civic order that the state provided but, as nonresistant Christians, eager to distance themselves from “the sword” that government wielded. In Europe they had acted politically as *subjects*, people who petitioned for privileges and performed certain obligations in return. Very often Mennonites had agreed, citing Jesus’ words to “give unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s,” that subjects owed their rulers taxes. When European princes had asked for payment in lieu of military service, Mennonites obliged, and they carried that assumption across the Atlantic even though Quaker-

ruled Pennsylvania initially had no militia. But life in North America would raise new political circumstances for Mennonites and challenge them to think of themselves as *citizens*. Unlike subjects, who were not part of the state but rather lived under a particular ruler's patronage,

**Life in North America  
challenged Mennonites  
to think of themselves  
as citizens**

citizens actually comprised the state. Citizens possessed rights without asking for them and had responsibilities whether they wanted them or not. Citizenship

was, in theory at least, universal and equal in its protections and its demands.

Already as imperial colonists Pennsylvania Mennonites and Amish had begun moving toward citizen-style participation in public life. No longer confined to being tenants as they had been, for the most part, in Switzerland and South Germany, they eagerly obtained North American land titles and worked with the provincial government to secure their real estate rights. And even partisan politics seemed congenial because Pennsylvania's ruling party, through the mid-1750s, was shaped by pacifist Quakers who did not force militia duty on the colony's citizens.

Even after Quakers lost control of the legislature, a good number of Mennonites joined Quakers in an organization known as the Friendly Association for Regaining and Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Means. The Association raised substantial sums of money to pay Indigenous people for confiscated land, return hostages taken in war, and attempted to negotiate more equitable treaties. Although the Association was a private venture, it represented an activist mentality associated with citizenship. Moreover, some Mennonites remained involved in traditional politics even after religious Quakers no longer ran the colony. In 1768, for example, one Lancaster, Pennsylvania, English official reported that "the head Men among the Menonists have had a Meeting ... and have fixed a new [election] Ticket," carrying their endorsement.<sup>8</sup> Other documents from the day suggest Mennonite participation in partisan politics was commonplace.

But any gradual coming to terms with citizenship ended abruptly with the American Revolution (1775-1783). After 1776 citizenship was the ideological order of the day, and Mennonites' nonresistance and general wariness of rebellion cast them as clear political outsiders. A generation earlier, in the 1750s, a good number of Mennonites, acting as dutiful subjects, had given horses or acted as teamsters for the



British army even while refusing to bear arms themselves. Now, in the midst of revolution, most were unsure such noncombatant support was appropriate for an upstart Congress seeking to overthrow a king. Nor did the new state assembly wish to accept anything less than full support from its citizens.

Tension among Mennonites over what faithfulness entailed in a revolutionary situation became so serious that in 1778 it sparked their first Mennonite schism in North America. Most church leaders broke fellowship with a bishop named Christian Funk after Funk, who remained nonresistant, argued that – like it or not – the rebel Congress was now Mennonites’ legitimate earthly authority and they should pay their taxes to the new Congress. Time would prove the pragmatic Funk correct in his sense that the British would be unable to turn back the forces of revolution. But the widespread Mennonite opposition to Funk’s easy embrace of



*Fraktur* inside an *Ausbund* hymnal.

A decorated style of writing, *Fraktur* was a form of folk-art common among Pennsylvania Germans, including Mennonites, in the 1700s. The inscription says, "With each new day more time does pass and who knows which will be the last. This lovely songbook belongs to Ana Stauffer and is given to her by her father for the honor of God on the 24th of March, 1793. Guide me dear Savior, lead me into your Kingdom, Hallelujah."

Congress over king pointed to North American Mennonites’ bias toward political stability and traditional political authority, and suggested just how comfortable they had been as subjects rather than citizens.

Regardless of their political leanings, very few Mennonite sons took up arms for either side in the war, and at least one, Christian

Newcomer, a gunsmith, refused to manufacture any firearms if he had reason to believe they would be used for battle. Revolutionary leaders in Pennsylvania rejected nonresistant neutrality and required all men to take an oath renouncing royal allegiance and recognizing the new state. Mennonites, German Baptist Brethren, and many Quakers, who had qualms about oath swearing, not to mention the content of this particular oath, demurred. As a result, beginning in 1777 their menfolk lost the right to vote. Only in 1790 did they regain access to the ballot box when a new constitution welcomed all citizens back into the political process. Negotiating nonresistant citizenship was only beginning for North American Mennonites and Amish as the nineteenth century dawned, and it was not an easy beginning.

In the complex aftermath of revolution, peace and opportunity for some people spelled disaster for others. In the early 1780s the British Crown had given the land along the Grand River – much of which would later become Waterloo County, Ontario – to the Six Nation Iroquois and “their descendants ... to enjoy forever.” But after Britain and the United States signed a peace and trade agreement in 1795, colonial officials in Canada no longer needed to curry favor with the Six Nations and acted to sell the Iroquois block to white farmers, including some Pennsylvania Mennonites who acquired 60,000 acres of Six Nations territory in 1805.

Mennonites and Amish had moved into the Niagara Peninsula as early as 1785, but now, lured by the possibility of large property tracts along the Grand River, as many as 2,000 more Mennonites made



The Mennonite Meetinghouse, Ebytown, Upper Canada, built in 1834. Today First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario stands on the site.

Upper Canada their home. The communities they created on the Six Nations Block centered around the crossroad village of Ebytown, founded in 1807 by Mennonite Benjamin Eby, and which eventually would become the city of Kitchener.<sup>9</sup>

Now Mennonites lived in two different North American political environments, a Canadian one marked more by stability and the language of privilege, and a United States one shaped by liberal claims of progress and citizens' majority rule. The implications of those environments would not be immediately apparent to most Mennonites and Amish. They maintained close churchly and family ties across the border, ties that would, for quite some time, mean more to them than any political loyalties.

### Emerging Ethnicity

North America's mixed and mobile population created a dynamic social environment that forced its European peoples to rethink who they were in relation to new neighbors. In such a context ethnicity was complex, drawing and redrawing cultural, religious, and kinship identities. Mennonites who had settled in rural southeastern Pennsylvania were part of a much larger population of Germans. Many were religiously Lutheran or Reformed; others were Schwenkfelders, Moravians, or German Baptist Brethren. In time, English-speaking observers labeled all of these folks *Pennsylvania Germans* (or *Pennsylvania Dutch*), notable for their distinctive customs and their German dialect, *Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch*.

From architecture and clothing styles to folklore and foodways, Pennsylvania German culture cut across confessional lines and set its members apart from their English, Scots, Irish, and Welsh neighbors. For example, Pennsylvania Germans of various churches marked time with holidays that included Pentecost [Whitsun] Monday and Second Christmas (December 26) – days of visiting and feasting ignored by British-American neighbors who observed a different ritual calendar. "Whitsun Monday," English storekeeper James L. Morris noted in his journal in 1846, is "a holiday among the Amish and other Germans of our neighborhood, but altogether disregarded by the English part of the community."<sup>10</sup>

Mennonites attended Pennsylvania German-dominated schools, sometimes intermarried with Brethren, Lutheran, or Reformed families, and shared local burial grounds. In general, Pennsylvania German religious values stressed humility, resisted innovation, and guarded local

tradition and authority, all of which confirmed traditional Mennonite sensibilities. This sense of ethnicity also made Mennonite separation from the world more complex, since Pennsylvania German Mennonites could be different in the company of others. The ethnic subculture that emerged in Pennsylvania – and spread as its members moved into Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, and Upper Canada – often provided Pennsylvania German Mennonites with a comfortable niche, setting them apart from society's mainstream without isolating them.

The durability of Pennsylvania German ethnicity was clear to John H. Bernheim, a Lutheran pastor from Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania,

**Pennsylvania German  
culture cut across  
cultural lines** |

who traveled to Upper Canada in 1835. Although Bernheim's synod had sent him on a traveling mission to visit Lutherans recently

arrived from Germany, he made few strong connections with those new immigrants, yet he was warmly received by Pennsylvania German Canadians, including Waterloo County Mennonites. Already in Hamilton, Bernheim "became acquainted with John Pinkley and Abraham Horning, two Germans of Pennsylvania, who were serviceable to my further progress." The next day he met a Peter Bomberger, "a Pennsylvanian, who has resided in Canada already 31 years, [and] received me with much friendship."

In August, Mennonite Bishop Benjamin Eby, who had been born not far from Bernheim's Pennsylvania Lutheran church – allowed Bernheim use of the Mennonite meetinghouse for Lutheran services. As Bernheim traveled, he lodged with Mennonites and noted conversations and exchange of news. In October, in Bienville, when Bernheim finally found some European Lutherans open to his ministry, he baptized five of their children in "the house of a Mennonist." The next day he "preached in a Mennonist Meeting-house to a very numerous [Lutheran] audience and administered the Lord's Supper."<sup>11</sup>

### **Church Life and Piety**

Mennonites had congenial relationships with other Pennsylvania German Protestants, in part, because they shared a similar spiritual style and a common language of piety. Yet Mennonite tradition had its own distinct emphases and certain Anabaptist convictions set them apart. During the 1740s, for example, as imperial conflict between France

and Britain increased the chances of war, Pennsylvania Mennonites went to great lengths to have the Dutch Mennonite *Martyrs Mirror* translated into German and printed. The purpose, they explained, was to give the example of nonresistant Anabaptist martyrs to the next generation. The martyr book, along with several catechisms and confessions of faith, detailed doctrine in written form.

Troubled by rumors of war, Pennsylvania Mennonites arranged to have the *Martyrs Mirror* translated and reprinted. The book was produced in 1748-1749 by the Seventh-day German Baptist Brethren, a branch of the group that is known today as the Church of the Brethren.



But Anabaptist teaching was caught as much as taught, communicated in a community context that urged members to imitate the meek Jesus and submit to God's will. As preacher Christian Burkholder put it in his 1804 *Useful and Edifying Address to the Young*, "True faith leads us into a state of self-denial, a state in which we follow Christ as did His faithful followers in the time of His incarnation." Such an example was one of peace, "whether it be between man and wife, between brother and brother, or between a minister and his congregation," and "the doctrine and deportment of Christ do not allow us to go to war or to use violence towards our enemies."<sup>12</sup>

The spirit of discipleship and submission also came through hymns. Initially North American Mennonites and Amish sang from the *Ausbund*, a sixteenth-century Anabaptist collection of songs that included martyr ballads and texts on repentance and steadfastness. Hymn 58 suggests something of the flavor:

*To shun sin is needful for us  
 If we want to be saved,  
 For to be carnally minded is death,  
 As Paul made known to us.  
 Forsake the world, goods, possessions, and money.  
 Who constantly thinks of dying,  
 He has at the last chosen the best,  
 Christ does provide grace for us.<sup>13</sup>*

By 1803-1804, however, North American Mennonites replaced the *Ausbund* with two new hymn compilations that their Pennsylvania churches had commissioned. The newer Mennonite books retained some *Ausbund* hymns, but tended to feature Lutheran and especially Reformed hymns penned by noted Pietist hymn writers.

Without doubt, Pietism was a vital force in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American religious life, including Mennonite life. Although some streams of Pietism fostered the cultivation of a private spirituality that downplayed the gathered church, other streams stressed the renewal of the corporate church itself. These latter impulses proved perennially attractive to Mennonites, who sometimes found their own tradition's emphasis on obedience to be deadening. Not that the Pietism that attracted Mennonites shied away from submission to God, but it coupled that emphasis with attention to collective ritual and language of personal and churchly renewal.

The German Baptist Brethren (today's Church of the Brethren and related churches) were a radical Pietist group, begun in Schwarzenau, Germany in 1708 and soon thereafter relocating, as a body, to Pennsylvania. They provided an attractive spiritual alternative to disaffected Mennonites. Brethren shared many Anabaptist convictions, including adult baptism and nonresistance, but also practiced a particular form of triple immersion baptism and a communion service that included a love feast and footwashing in imitation of the Last Supper.

The Brethren combination of Anabaptist and Pietist emphases made them some of the Mennonites' closest spiritual cousins. Inter-marriage between Brethren and Mennonite families created another layer of linkages. In the United States, the Brethren would later often prove to be allies in the struggle for conscientious objection and other minority religious rights.

About 1780 another similarly-minded fellowship emerged in Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River Valley, under the leadership of Jacob

Engel. First known as River Brethren (and then taking the name Brethren in Christ in the 1860s), the group embraced Anabaptist and Pietist convictions, mixing them with emphases from Wesleyan revivalism. The River Brethren/Brethren in Christ would remain closely associated with Mennonites, especially in Pennsylvania and Ontario.<sup>14</sup>



A "brush-arbor tabernacle" constructed for Brethren in Christ evangelistic meetings in Leedy, Oklahoma in 1919. The evangelist, Bert Sherk from Welland County, Ontario, is third from right.

For the most part, mainstream Mennonite discussion of the spiritual life revolved around talk of repentance, the new birth, and Christian humility. "Evidence of repentance and conversion," explained one thoughtful commentator, "were not subjective experiences but objective, visible, ethical fruits," such as love, submission, honesty, and above all, humility. Indeed, "humility saturated ordinary Mennonite and Amish discourse." When Virginia Bishop Peter Burkholder described the "holy nature" of Christ in which Christians must "partake," he used the words "meek and lowly" five times in just nine lines of text.<sup>15</sup>

Mennonites also lived in a spiritually-charged world in which angels and divine dreams took few by surprise. Jacob Swartzendruber, a South German Amish man who immigrated in 1833, eventually serving as a bishop in Iowa, recorded numerous dreams, including one in which his step-son was the target of flaming arrows shot by an unseen enemy. "I pushed you before me away from the fire because there was danger, but you were so heavy," Swartzendruber later told his step-son, interpreting the dream as a divine warning

against the fiery darts of the devil.<sup>16</sup> About 1840 in Simcoe County, Ontario, Mary (Ruhl) Swalm “saw a vision” and “a voice told her

**Submission to God and  
submission to the church  
were closely linked**

... to go to these people who had long hair and beards and whose women wore prayer veilings.” She “obeyed the voice” and walked to

Markham where she was baptized by the River Brethren and became a stalwart member.<sup>17</sup>

Mennonites often interpreted their dreams in ways that reinforced their remarkably practical and concrete view of the church as the local, visible body of Christ. Submission to God and submission to the church were closely linked. Baptism ushered one into the church, and might even have to be repeated if, for example, one switched from a Mennonite to an Amish congregation. Participation in semi-annual communion services was as much, or even more, a ritual of reaffirming accountability to the local congregation as it was a symbol of communing with the divine.

In fact, most nineteenth-century religious unrest in Mennonite and Amish circles – and the occasional schisms it engendered – stemmed from conflict over the place of the church in various approaches to personal spiritual renewal. Advocates of evangelical revivalism, such as William Gehman in Pennsylvania or Daniel Brenneman in Indiana – ministers who found themselves excommunicated in 1858 and 1874, respectively – complained that the larger Mennonite body rejected their teaching on dramatic heart-felt conversion, temperance, and the reformation of personal morality. Their critics countered that it was not that such emphases were alien to nineteenth-century Mennonites, but rather that leaders such as Gehman and Brenneman personalized them in such an individual way that the church, as a conduit of God’s grace, seemed incidental or even unnecessary.

The importance of church life was signalled by the church membership letters that nineteenth-century European Amish and Mennonite immigrants carried. Amish man Peter Oswald, who arrived in Philadelphia in 1827, secured a letter signed by Bishop Johannes Schwarzentruer and minister Joseph Güngrich, of Winnerod in South Germany, certifying “that [Oswald] has been received as a brother through the covenant of baptism, and since that time has



also conducted himself as a brother to the best of our knowledge, that he may be considered as a brother amongst us."<sup>18</sup>

Church letters not only vouched for immigrants' integrity when they asked established North American church members for financial aid in the course of purchasing land or establishing trades, they also opened the door to religious fellowship, participation in communion, and the possibility of marriage in the church. For Oswald, who ended up in Holmes County, Ohio, and eventually married fellow-immigrant Magdalena Oesch and raised a family of ten children, the letter established his place among people to whom he was related by baptism rather than blood.



Tin cup used to serve communion at Holdeman Mennonite Church, near Wakarusa, Indiana, as early as 1873. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Mennonites and Amish in North America typically held communion services twice a year, once in the spring and again in the autumn. They shared wine from a common cup, such as this one. This cup is 14 cm high and 9.5 cm across the top.

If there was a persistent tension in nineteenth-century Mennonite society it was between the potentially competing authorities of church and family. Extended kin groups loomed large in many local congregations – indeed, church meetinghouses often assumed the surnames of locally significant Mennonite clans. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, alone was home to Bossler Mennonite meetinghouse, as well as the Erb, Erisman, Good, Habecker, Hernley, Hess, Kauffman, Lichty, Mellinger, Metzler, and Risser congregations.

At the same time, bishops and ministers might struggle to assert their authority over patriarchs and matriarchs who wielded familial

influence. In 1837 an Amish church discipline seemed to sum up the frustration of ordained men seeking to temper the behavior of unbaptized teens: "With regard to the excesses practiced among the youth, namely that the youth take the liberty to sleep or lie together without any fear or shame, such things shall not be tolerated at all. And when it takes place with the knowledge of the parents . . . the parents shall not go unpunished."<sup>19</sup>

### **Social Refinement and Plain Living in a Market Economy**

For all its real and potential challenge to churchly authority, patriarchal power was far from certain in an environment of unprecedented freedom afforded by North America. Dramatic economic transformations challenged established ways of life, often placing parents and bishops on the defensive. If North America had long offered immigrants and their descendants remarkable opportunities to acquire land and take up trades of their choice, the cultural fruits of individual enterprise matured in the early 1800s when they combined with new political notions.

An expansive economy had made inherited status less important, at least for white Americans. Free from constraints of European guilds that had limited the practice of crafts, and able to accumulate enough property so that each child could receive a worthwhile inheritance, North Americans enjoyed unusual social mobility as they gained and lost wealth in a risk-taking market economy where values remained in flux.

Paradoxically, the fact that whites did not suffer from sharp social class distinctions meant that anyone could aspire to live like an aristocrat, fueling interest in imitating gentility. Publishers began to offer detailed guide books, based on Renaissance-era manuals for young nobility, which promised to teach anyone how to speak, eat, dress, and entertain themselves like ladies and gentlemen. The aspiring worked long and hard to give the appearance of not having to work at all, and surrounded themselves with the trappings of gentility. Genteel people transformed their homes from centers of production into places of retreat. A central work space that might have housed the family loom or cobbler's tools now became a parlor, complete with stuffed furniture and display objects whose only purpose was "for show."<sup>20</sup>

This transformation of daily life in the first half of the nineteenth century was both far-reaching and profound, not only because it changed how thousands of people lived, but also because it changed the way they thought about how they should live. For generations,

North Americans had praised simplicity as a virtue and sign of moral standing. Suddenly, in the wake of the refinement of material and social culture, respectability meant anything but plain and simple.

The transformation of domestic life was all too obvious to David Beiler. Writing in 1862, the seventy-six-year-old Amish bishop was startled by the “great changes during these [past] sixty years,” certain that “whoever has not experienced it . . . can scarcely believe it.” Back then “there was no talk of fine shoes and boots nor did one know anything of light pleasure vehicles.” Wagons were unpainted and “there were not such splendid houses and barns.” Nor did homes boast sofas, writing desks, carpets, and decorative dishes, as was now the fashion.



Anna Mellinger (1848-1930) had her picture taken about 1864 in a rather fancy dress she would give up when she was later baptized and joined the Paradise (Pennsylvania) Mennonite Church, along with her husband, George Keener. In the nineteenth century Mennonite young people often requested baptism shortly before or after they married.

Equally troubling, a consumer culture had displaced household production. “It was customary to hear the spinning wheel hum or sing in almost every farmhouse,” Beiler recalled. Now, “the large amount of imported goods with which our country is flooded, and also the domestic cotton goods which are to be had at such low price, have almost displaced the home-made materials so that the daughters who now grow up no longer learn to spin.” Young men, too, worked away from home, earning cash for fancy harness or “strange colored fine store clothes.”<sup>21</sup>

Beiler was not alone in being anxious about the abrupt cultural shift that put his interest in simplicity on the defensive. Amish and

Mennonites like Beiler had long regarded humility and non-ostentation as Christian virtues, but not ones that sharply separated them from their neighbors. Especially in a larger Pennsylvania German

**The tradition-minded minority came to be called the Old Order**

cultural milieu, plainness had not been a uniquely Anabaptist characteristic. But by about 1860 such assumptions were becoming

unsettled. In 1862 when Amish ministers convened a continent-wide ministers gathering – a *Diener-Versammlung*, held annually from 1862 to 1878 except 1877 – to discuss specific conflicts over church polity, it quickly became clear that a deepening cultural divide separated those who hoped to stave off the influence of consumer culture from those who accepted or even welcomed the change.

Between the 1860s and 1890s, Amish church districts across Pennsylvania, Ontario, and the U.S. Midwest gradually separated into change-minded and tradition-minded camps. The tradition-minded minority came to be called the Old Order because they sought to maintain the *alte Ordnung*, or traditional way of going about life, marked by commitment to small-scale community and household production and by a skepticism of consumer goods. Old Orders also stubbornly resisted turning the church into a bureaucratic organization with committees and budgets. Similar sentiments surfaced in some Mennonite communities, too, and in 1871 in Indiana and 1883 in Ontario, small Old Order Mennonite groups formed, soon to be joined by Old Order Mennonite movements in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

Such was the context in which some Mennonites and Amish came to view the German language and its *Deutsch* dialect in a new way. As Lizzie Zimmerman Nolt, an Old Order Mennonite, later explained, “There’s nothing wrong with the English language, but when German people want to speak English, that’s pride.”<sup>22</sup> For Nolt and other Old Orders, German was not a sacred language, nor was it somehow better suited than English to convey spiritual truth. But accepting the language of one’s upbringing suggested, in a concrete way, that personal identities were not fluid or open to the whim of social refinement. English was a necessary means of communicating with the wider world, and Old Orders never questioned the value of bilingualism nor did they oppose English schooling. Still, abandoning German signaled to them dangerous flirting with individualism.

Most Mennonites and Amish did not take the Old Order path. A small number actually welcomed refinement and wedded it with the popular Protestant impulse to endorse religious progress, betterment, and good taste. During the early 1870s, Mahala Yoder, the progressive Amish Mennonite young woman and diarist in central Illinois, subscribed to Scribner's magazine, wore a white straw hat "trimmed with blue ribbons and a pretty red rose," and asserted her belief that "The beautiful goes with the good and true, always, in God's method."<sup>23</sup>

More than a few idealistic young people surely shared Yoder's views. But so did a number of influential church leaders. Since 1847, in eastern Pennsylvania, a progressive-minded Mennonite minister, John H. Oberholtzer, had led a small group of congregations that had embraced refinement and whose faith in progress affirmed updating Mennonite traditions, new clothing styles, and the use of constitutions and business meeting procedures that matched the rational modes of modern management and decision making. In 1860 Oberholtzer's group joined with recently-arrived Bavarian Mennonite immigrants living in Iowa and Illinois to form the General Conference (GC) Mennonite Church. Ethnically and geographically disparate, these GC members were agreed that being Mennonite did not preclude being middle class Americans.

Somewhere between progressive GC Mennonites, on the one hand, and Old Order traditionalists, on the other, was a sizable body often known as (Old) Mennonites. In their case, the designation "old" did not refer to Old Order conservatism, but to the fact that their conferences were the earliest, and thus the oldest ones that had been established in North America. In the late 1800s and early 1900s most (Old) Mennonites dressed plainly in ways that distinguished them from mainstream society. But they also engaged in missions, publishing, and higher education that set them apart from Old Order groups.

## **Nationalism and War**

In the United States the burgeoning economy of the early nineteenth-century was tied to national expansion. That geographic growth opened more acres to new waves of immigrants, including some 3,000 Amish and 700 Mennonites who arrived from Europe between 1817 and 1860, and who secured land in Ohio and Illinois, as well as Indiana, Iowa, Ontario, and New York. But national expansion also provoked war with Mexico and with Indigenous people, and it raised political tensions over the future of slavery in western territories.

In 1861 those tensions exploded into a bloody Civil War between Northern and Southern states. The war not only produced casualties unmatched in North American history, but also transformed politics and culture in the United States and played into Britain's support for the creation of the self-governing Dominion of Canada in 1867.

**The American Civil War shaped Mennonites' evolving sense of peoplehood**

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States and played into Britain's support for the creation of the self-governing Dominion of Canada in 1867.

For Mennonites and Amish, the American Civil War also shaped their evolving understandings of peoplehood. Although they had resolutely opposed slave owning – Virginia Mennonites considered it grounds for excommunication – they had not embraced abolitionism, which their two-kingdom theology regarded as the domain of worldly political responsibility. Instead, their experience of the war, as revealed in letters and churchly correspondence, often revolved around familial concern for sons facing conscription or enticed to enlist.

In 1864 Christina Herr of Medina County, Ohio, wrote her cousin “the sorrowful news” that Christina’s “three oldest brothers went to war.” It was very hard to see them go she admitted, “but it cannot be helped.” Someone must go, she said, drawing on popular fears, “or else we must lose our country.” Worse, we might even “be treated like the slaves are.” In the same letter her father, John Herr, poured out his sorrow: “I little thought that we was raising children to go to war . . . but it really now is so and I am often overcome that I can’t keep back the tears when I think of the thousands which have already gone to an untimely grave.” Christina’s mother, Barbara, “wept bitterly day and night,” but “tried to be resigned to [God’s] will.”<sup>24</sup>

Near Middlebury, Indiana, an Amish man who would stay out of the army nevertheless mused on the excitement that military life might offer. “If I was single yet,” Levi Eash wrote to his brother-in-law in Holmes County, Ohio, “I think I would [have] been gone myself before this time.” But Eash was married and had joined the church and was now seemingly satisfied to remain at home. However, his wife, Mary (Yoder) Eash, “much troubled herself when she heard that her brothers had gone to war.” Levi agreed there was “badness” in war, since the scriptures command against it, but in a land of liberty “every one to his own notion.”<sup>25</sup>

Although four of Mary Esch’s brothers willingly donned uniforms – two of the men survived the war – they apparently were not typi-

cal. Records generally show that sizable majorities of Mennonite and Amish men applied for conscientious exemption from state (1862) and federal (1863-1865) conscription. "Christ expects all his followers to resemble him," explained Marietta, Pennsylvania, minister Peter Nissley in a letter in which he also reported on hearing the canon fire of the Battle of Gettysburg, "to abound in every good word and work, to be honest and just in all our actions – to be charitable to the poor and needy – to visit the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked – in a word to love our neighbor as ourselves."<sup>26</sup>

In Nissley's Pennsylvania, longstanding civic and ethnic community ties allowed Mennonites to cultivate political alliances so as to secure military exemption. In contrast, those living in the Midwest often found themselves politically marginalized by their scruples, and wartime nationalism there encouraged greater sectarian separatism.

For Mennonites living in the rebel Southern Confederacy, a sense of alienation was even sharper. As non-slaveholders who had opposed secession and then refused to take up arms, Mennonites, along with their pacifist German Baptist Brethren neighbors, were clear outsiders. In addition, since they lived in the Shenandoah Valley where several major military campaigns raged, war engulfed them in terror and destruction. Throughout the war, Virginia Mennonites systematically hid men liable for military conscription and spirited them out of rebel territory. The extent of this resistance network, in which women played prominent roles as coordinators and messengers, was revealed only after

Gabriel D. Heatwole (1834-1922) and Lydia Frank Heatwole (1840-1904), Rockingham County, Virginia. During the Civil War, Gabriel and Lydia hid fugitives from military conscription and deserters from the Confederate army. When Confederate officers came in the middle of the night to take Gabriel away, he testified that "they could kill me but they could not make me fight." In 1862 he was among a group of seventy conscientious objectors who tried to flee Virginia, but were captured, imprisoned for five weeks, and each forced to pay \$500.



the war was over, and certainly stands as the largest act of collective civil disobedience ever undertaken by North American Mennonites.

Of course, the frightful Civil War had had no equivalent in Ontario, and Mennonites and Brethren in Christ there experienced neither civic alienation nor the familial heartache that war engendered for some south of the border. That absence would contribute to an emerging continental divide among Mennonites, marked in part by a less suspicious stance toward the state on the part of Canadian Mennonites.<sup>27</sup>

### Imagining a North American Mennonite World

“War ... is a dreadful curse upon a land,” Mennonite Bishop Jacob Hildebrand wrote, soon after the Civil War’s conclusion. Fighting had often raged near his Augusta County, Virginia, home, and “at every discharge of the cannon the window sash would shake, and we trembled.” With the war’s end, mail service resumed between the Northern and Southern states, and Hildebrand – eager for contact with Mennonites outside Virginia – was writing to a friend in Ohio. Hildebrand’s letter soon appeared reprinted in *Herald of Truth*, a monthly periodical issued by a Chicago Mennonite entrepreneur named John F. Funk. Funk had launched the paper during the war to connect geographically-scattered Mennonites. When Hildebrand received his first issue he called it “a warm friend,” kindling “a fresh love” for “our distant brethren.”<sup>28</sup>

Editor Funk had been raised in a Mennonite home in eastern Pennsylvania, but as a young man moved to Chicago to join relatives in the lumber business and – at his father’s urging – to make money. There he drifted into evangelical Presbyterian and politically progressive circles. But the war left him disillusioned with popular patriotism, and he re-embraced the nonresistance of his upbringing.

Funk soon wondered whether other Mennonites shared his new moral clarity. Their varied responses to the war and conscription illustrated for him an intense localism and family-centered orientation – orientations Funk found unsettling from his position in bustling Chicago. In contrast, he sought to encourage a sharp sense of theological identity undiluted by competing claims of neighborhood, ethnicity, or kinship. Funk’s first publication, entitled *Warfare: Its Evils, Our Duty*, was boldly addressed to the “Mennonite Churches throughout the United States and Canada.” Soon thereafter his *Herald of Truth* and



its German companion, *Herold der Wahrheit*, were appealing to a wide array of Mennonites and Amish, urging greater doctrinal unity and connecting correspondents across the map.



Employees of the Mennonite Publishing Company, Elkhart, Indiana, 1886. John F. Funk, far left, founded the company, began several periodicals, and launched institutions devoted to mission and education. Funk was a bishop in the (Old) Mennonite Church but maintained ties with Mennonites arriving from the Russian Empire in the 1870s.

John Funk was imagining a North American Mennonite world in which people who lived in widely differing contexts and circumstances and who had never met one another, would feel a common bond of Anabaptist peoplehood that would trump the many things that otherwise divided them. Key to this vision was fostering a historical and theological identity. Through the pages of the *Herald*, readers exchanged news and ideas, learned about matters of church concern and absorbed the devotional piety of men and women writers who were separated by distance. Decidedly Old Order perspectives were absent from the paper, and notably acculturating viewpoints from the General Conference were few. But the *Herald* cast a remarkably wide net, taking in subscribers in large (Old) Mennonite and Amish Mennonite communities, as well as geographically scattered individuals who came to believe they were part of this diaspora of faith. More

than one *Herald* correspondent called for merger of Mennonite and change-minded Amish churches.

Until the 1860s few Mennonites had imagined such an interconnected Anabaptist world, or had the resources to call one into being. But just how expansive that world might be became clearer after 1873. That year, a delegation of twelve Mennonite and Hutterite leaders from Prussia and the Russian Empire arrived in North America to explore options for a potentially massive emigration. By meeting with Mennonite leaders in Canada and the United States, these Europeans were asking North Americans to view them as spiritual siblings despite the fact that their histories and, to some extent, practices and customs, had diverged generations earlier in Europe.

"We have now, indeed, a very good opportunity to show our love in deed and in truth with our Russian brethren, who in their great need call to us for help," *Herald of Truth* editorialized. "Some might say that our Russian brethren are not genuine Mennonites," the paper conceded, "and that we were not therefore bound to help them." But even if some were not "faithful brethren (even as we also here in America are not all what we should be) we are still in duty bound to help them in their necessity." And besides, the paper asked, "where could we find a Mennonite who could not give one dollar if need be?"<sup>29</sup>

The *Herald's* arguments seemed to carry the day, and scores of North American Mennonite and Amish congregations collected money to assist the Dutch and North German Mennonites living in Russia and Prussia to immigrate. To be sure, the North Americans created competing aid committees and could never quite harmonize their offers of charity or travel advice. They still operated in local and uncoordinated ways. But their encounter with needy immigrants who bore the Mennonite name and claimed a Mennonite faith demonstrated the possibility of imagining wider Mennonite worlds in the years to come.

In the meantime, nearly eighteen-thousand Mennonites from the Russian Empire and from Prussia were bringing their customs and convictions, practices and prejudices, to North America, dramatically changing the composition of the Mennonite community imaginable there.

# Creating Communities in the Interior

*The 1874 diary of 25-year-old Margaretha Jansen of Jefferson County, Nebraska, describes not only the daily physical activities of her family's new life on the frontier, but also the stirring sentiments that accompanied such a strange, new life. Often this frontier was a lonely place. It was for Margaretha, a single adult woman living with her prominent, but small and uprooted family, disconnected from an established Mennonite community. She seemed pleased by the presence in their home of an elderly aunt, but she pined bitterly for the rest of her extended family, especially her cousins and an aunt and uncle, still in Europe. True, she noted the Nebraskans as a "friendly" people, and in particular praised the African Americans she saw on Sundays in nearby Beatrice as a "neat" and "serious" people. She also enjoyed the physical beauty of eastern Nebraska – she recorded one October day as "a very lovely day, a real Indian summer," spent near her house by the "small river very close to the woods." But in many other ways Nebraska seemed strange and alienating, a place instilling uncertainty, even anxiety. Margaretha fretted about her mother Helena's health, and worried for the well being of "our dear Papa," Cornelius Jansen, the prominent immigration leader who traveled widely throughout North America, for whom she often prayed "dear Lord, give him good health! ... here in this foreign country." She was especially anxious about the conflict that settling in a new land produced within her family, distressed for example that her beloved brother Peter, a future state senator, "often [was] unkind toward Papa" and bent on going "his own way, in ... blind infatuation." She pled with "the Lord" to "have mercy upon us and restore the peace and love among members of our family in this strange country." Her mind often traveled nostalgically back to her old home on the Black Sea in Russia, but ultimately her refuge was her deeply personal faith. On the last day of 1874, she thanked "the dear Lord [who] has kept us all together until this very day," and she recommitted herself to "just believe and pray more*

firmly.”<sup>1</sup> Life for individual families on the vast and strange frontier could be very disconcerting.

The 1898 diary of 56-year-old Heinrich Friesen of Hochfeld, Manitoba records quite a different frontier, one that was less individualistic and more community-based. Heinrich was a member of the established conservative Chortitzer Mennonite Church, and a resident of the transplanted farm village of Hochfeld on Manitoba’s close-knit Mennonite “East Reserve.” His was a large family, one that included his wife Aganetha and their nine grown children (four had died as small children), the older of whom were now married and established on nearby farms. As a lay preacher in his church, Heinrich traveled constantly, but usually within the boundaries of the East Reserve, from village to village, meeting with the Ohms (elders), attending Brotherhood meetings, and preaching at communion and baptism services or at funerals. Occasionally Heinrich did leave the East Reserve – to visit the French-speaking villages of St. Pierre and St. Anne, or even the more distant Winnipeg – but usually non-Mennonites came to visit him and not the other way around. Jewish peddlers (Loeb, Joseph, Isaac, and Herschke), for example, regularly came to spend the night at his house, and one day in 1898 Moravian Brethren pastor Andreas Lilge made the trip to Heinrich’s place to repay a loan extended by the Chortitzers.<sup>2</sup> Heinrich’s social life lacked the individualism often associated with frontier life, but so did his devotional life. For example, the prayers he recorded at the end of each month reflected not so much a personal spiritual struggle as a farmer’s yieldedness to a God of nature. When a heavy rainfall hurt the crops in 1898, Heinrich declared “God knows what is best”; when the harvest was finally completed on October 26 he credited it to “God’s help”; when faced with ill health in April, he simply prayed “Lord give us your blessing/ It is your hand that rules the world/ Bless us with the cleansing rain/ [Rain] for our hearts and for the fields.”<sup>3</sup>

### Diversity on the “Frontier”

Margaretha Jansen and Heinrich Friesen were but two of thousands of Mennonites who made their homes on the great western North American plains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their worlds differed significantly – Margaretha in Nebraska lived on an isolated farm separated from other Mennonites, Heinrich in Manitoba farmed within a closely-knit transplanted farm community – but both helped build Mennonite households and communities on a vast, so-called, “frontier” where no Mennonites had been before.



Family of Cornelius and Helena (von Riesen) Jansen in 1873 just weeks before their immigration from Russia to North America. Standing left to right, Margaretha (the diarist quoted on pages 49-50 above), Peter, John, and Anna; sitting left to right, son Cornelius, mother Helena, father Cornelius, daughter Helena, and Anna von Riesen (sister of Helena von Riesen Jansen).

Historians have often emphasized the distinctive features of the western frontier in the United States and Canada. Frederick Jackson Turner, for example, spoke of the former as a culturally dynamic place that broke old ways and introduced a spirit of democracy among settlers, while Donald Creighton emphasized how the frontier in Canada was subdued through an orderly march westward of British-Canadian institutions based in eastern metropolises.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these important differences in the two countries' western experience, they can be exaggerated, for in some ways the Mennonite communities on either side of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel were more similar than those on the east or west of the 95<sup>th</sup> longitude. The most striking feature of the frontier for the 20,000 Dutch-Russian and Swiss-South German Mennonites who settled in a line that stretched from Manitoba in Canada, south through the Dakotas, Minnesota and Nebraska to Kansas, was that it consisted of a wide open plain that contained plenty of land in which to build rural communities of faith, allowing for a hopeful pioneer era of new beginnings.

The Mennonites on the plains on either side of the Canada-U.S. border shared many common characteristics. True, the U.S. plains tended to attract more progressive Mennonites and the Canadian prairie more conservative Mennonites, but the fact was that the Mennonite and wider Anabaptist communities on both sides of the border varied internally.

In the United States the wider Anabaptist community of the West ranged from the most traditionalist or Old Order groups, such as the

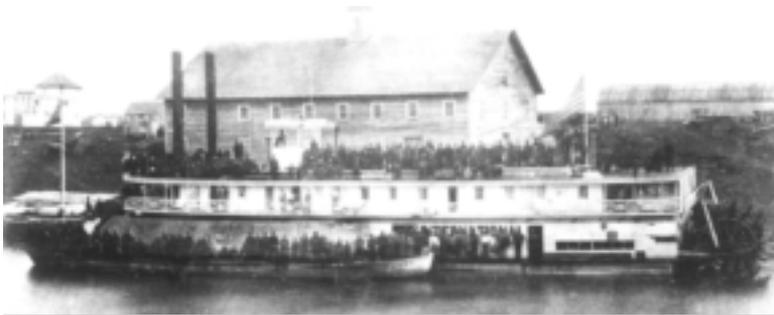
**Mennonite migrations  
were propelled by their  
culture and faith**

Amish who arrived in Kansas by about 1870 and the communalist Hutterites who came to the Dakotas in 1874, to “progressive” groups such as the so-called Prussian Mennonites in Nebraska,

noted for their high level of education and musical sophistication. A wide variety of other groups stood between these two poles. Members of the large so-called (Old) Mennonite Church, later known as the Mennonite Church (MC), mostly native-born Americans of South German and Swiss descent, began arriving on the plains from Indiana, Virginia, Ohio, Illinois and Missouri in 1871. They were soon followed by Brethren in Christ members, also from the eastern United States.

The majority of the settlers on the western frontier belonged to one of several Dutch-North German Mennonite church groups who arrived from Russia between 1874 and 1880. The 10,000 Mennonites from Russia in central Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas and Minnesota were mostly the more progressive *Kirchliche* Mennonites (who soon joined the General Conference) and the Mennonite Brethren (MB), both with roots in the Molochna (Molotschna) Colony. Other settlers on the western plains included smaller numbers of Dutch and Swiss Mennonites from the eastern European provinces of Volhynia and Galicia and even smaller numbers of moderately conservative groups, including the Kleine Gemeinde, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, and Prairieleut Hutterites.<sup>5</sup>

In Canada, the 8,000 Mennonites who settled in Manitoba consisted of three conservative groups – the Old Colony (*Reinländer*) and Bergthaler Mennonites with roots in the Khortitsa (Chortitza) Colony in Russia and the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites who emerged in the Molochna (Molotschna) Colony – but each with a somewhat different approach to issues such as education, local government and village life.



The S.S. International with the very first Mennonites from Russia docking in Winnipeg (or Fort Garry) in July 1874 after arriving from Moorhead, Minnesota, via the mighty Red River. It marked the last leg of an arduous journey that had begun on the Dnieper River in present-day Ukraine ten weeks earlier. The tall man standing on the upper deck, far right hand side, is believed to be David Klassen, one of the 12 delegates from Russia who scouted out locations for settlement in the North American interior in 1873.

In the decades following their initial settlement in the West in the 1870s, this diversity increased as many Mennonites moved a second time, leaving their Manitoba or Kansas farms for new frontiers. Usually the Mennonites undertook these secondary migrations simply to seek land for the next generation, but some also looked for greater isolation from the wider world while others sought better land in more temperate climates. Mennonites in the United States moved westward, not far from the original settlements in eastern Kansas and Nebraska, to the semi-arid plains of Colorado in 1889 and to Montana and western Kansas in 1903. At the same time Mennonites reached the west coast, coming to the fruit-growing region around Salem, Oregon by 1887 and in much larger numbers settling in the temperate districts around Fresno, California by 1897.<sup>6</sup> They also traveled southward, to lands in the “Indian Territory” of Oklahoma in 1889 and a few years later to ranch land in Texas,<sup>7</sup> and northward onto the Canadian prairies.

Canadian Mennonites also moved westward in the 1890s, from Manitoba onto the vast prairie of the Northwest, a region from which the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were created in 1905. In the late 1920s these Mennonites, joined now by the newly arrived *Russländer* Mennonites from the Soviet Union, also settled in the northern parkland of the prairie region, as well as on the rich soils of the Fraser River Valley in southwestern British Columbia.

Just as the American Mennonites readily crossed the national boundary northward, Canadian Mennonites crossed it southward, moving to Texas, Kansas, Oregon, California and western Kansas. The most momentous of the Canadian migrations southward was the relocation during the 1920s of 6,000 conservative Saskatchewan and Manitoba Mennonites to the semi-arid mountainous valleys of the northern Mexican states of Chihuahua and Durango; another 1,800 Mennonites relocated to the distant Paraguayan Chaco.

These migrations were never simple physical relocations, but migrations propelled by the Mennonites' culture and faith. The eighteenth-century settlements in the eastern half of North America and the western settlements that began in 1871 had a common cultural link in that farm families saw their vocation as sacred and their rural communities as places of Christian unity. As historian Theron Schlabach has argued, this vocation did not translate into an "attachment to hallowed soil," keeping the Mennonites just in one place, but allowed them to move easily for they "carried their own sort of rootedness with them as they moved." Their communities did not require a particular territory, merely soil on which to farm and the close-knit network of fellow believers.

Mennonites also relocated because they had learned a migration culture from their Anabaptist ancestors who had been on the move in various ways since the sixteenth century, teaching that the true Christian was a sojourner and a pilgrim in this world. A final factor

**In both countries,  
Indigenous people  
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white farmers**

encouraging frequent migrations was the remarkably egalitarian and partible inheritance system of the Mennonites. It had a way of dislodging young men and women. This system of inheritance led to land fragmentation, making farm-

ing difficult in well-established communities, but by selling those parcels in high-priced districts "young couples could generate enough money to invest in new places," on less expensive land.<sup>8</sup>

Mennonites also moved because they were citizens of nation states which encouraged such relocations. Their relocations were part of a truly global phenomenon, the cultural "creation" of agricultural lands. In South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, the Argentine pampas,



the Siberian steppe and the North American interior, agriculturally-oriented “neo-Europes” were created amidst a “great land rush.”

Historian John Weaver describes a world-wide movement of European farmers “of modest means” who encroached on nomadic hunting lands, justifying the move with claims that their superior technologies and science added “value” to the lands, or that the land grabs facilitated the spread of Christianity. In most cases the land was fully subdued by having it surveyed, mapped, turned into a legal commodity and named a “frontier” or “settlement” or “pioneer district.” The quarter section and correction lines in Kansas and Manitoba, the barbed wire in Texas and Saskatchewan, the irrigation wells in California and Alberta, and the planting of a host of Euroasian plants, all made the farmers’ march across the American grassland and Canadian prairie seem natural, even predestined.<sup>9</sup>

Overseeing the expanding line of settlement were national governments, eager to build market economies. Events in both Canada and the United States spurred the farmers along. In 1865 the long and bloody Civil War in the United States ended, bringing peace to a fractured nation, and in 1867 the English and French came together to create the bilingual, but united Dominion of Canada. Both national governments spoke confidently of divine guidance. The American term “manifest destiny” explained violent measures used to put down Native American resistance, while the Canadian claim of “dominion from sea to sea” justified the dispatch of the North West Mounted Police and tough treaty negotiations with Aboriginal people in its domain.<sup>10</sup>

In both countries, Indigenous peoples were sent to “reserves” or “reservations” to make way for the white farmers. In the United States the Native Americans, led by such notable leaders as Sitting Bull, were defeated after a series of bloody Indian Wars – leading to horrific suffering, including outright massacre and multiple relocations – before finding an impoverished existence on reservations.<sup>11</sup> In Canada a more orderly negotiation of treaties preceded the establishment of “Indian Reserves,” but here, too, Indigenous people, allied to the “mixed race” Métis resisted, especially along the Saskatchewan River in 1885. When they were defeated by a Canadian militia, the Métis leader, Louis Riel, was hung for treason in Regina while the most noted Aboriginal leader, Big Bear, was arrested, and with his long hair shorn, given a life sentence in Winnipeg.<sup>12</sup>



The Jacob J. Dyck family of the village of Bergthal, Saskatchewan posing for a photograph in early 20th century. Bergthal was one of dozens of Mennonite farm villages founded on the Saskatchewan prairie during and after the 1890s. Although the first-generation Mennonites from Russia in western Canada lived in house-barns that resembled European traditions, the second-generation Mennonites such as the Dyck family constructed buildings that resembled those of their English-Canadian neighbours, including houses with verandas and a detached or semi-detached red-colored barn.

Linked to the armed conquest of Indigenous peoples were laws that privileged white farm families. In the United States, the Homestead Act of 1862 promised each farm family a quarter section of land (160 acres or 64 hectares); in Canada the Dominion Lands Act of 1872 replicated the American system with only a few modifications. Both countries eagerly built railroads, the United States completing its first transcontinental line in 1869, and Canada its Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1885.

These instruments of western settlement were so effective that when Mennonite immigrants arrived in the United States from Russia in the 1870s, they leapfrogged over the rich soils of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa and joined the stream of people moving into the expanding westward frontier. In Canada, the Mennonites from Russia landed in Quebec City, but then boarded trains for southern Ontario, traveled westward on Great Lakes steamers and American trains, before turning northward on riverboats, thus skirting the 1500 kilometer (1000 mile) long Canadian Shield of granite rock and lakes. In both countries, native-born North American Mennonites, from Ontario in the north to Pennsylvania and Virginia in the south, also seized opportunity by migrating westward into the interior and to the west coast.

In these remote western rural districts, the Mennonite immigrants believed they were isolated from the throes of a wider, problem-ridden world. The facts, however, suggest that they were part of a

national and global enterprise that was reshaping the very world they sought to avoid.

### Faith Dynamics

As the Mennonites moved throughout western North America, diversity within the wider frontier community increased, and it did so because at the foundation of each of the settlements lay a dynamic religious faith. In most cases the newcomers were quick to organize congregations and commence worship services, at first in barns or granaries or the outdoors, and then in the simple white wooden structures that began to dot the countryside. Faith shaped their cosmologies as biblical stories were told and retold, of God guiding people, protecting them, and rewarding sacrifice and faithfulness.

Their own writings suggest a devout people who thanked Christ for his sacrificial death and believed that Christ's teachings on love, peace and humility could be realized in this life. However, if religious faith brought Mennonites together, it could also divide them, especially on the issue of what it meant to follow Christ in peace and humility. This dynamic faith shaped the new Mennonite settlements of the west.

Faith was at the foundation of the large Manitoba Mennonite community founded in the 1870s and 80s, even though its formation is often described in economic terms. Although Manitoba's relatively primitive economy in the 1870s and its legendary harsh winters left plenty of free homestead land, attractive to poor settlers, an overriding religious motivation propelled these Mennonites to choose Canada over the United States. A June 1873 letter from the Canadian government to the Mennonites – one they soon mythologized as their special *Privilegium* – promised them official military exemption for all time and large land “reserves” exclusive to Mennonites for twenty years.

Mennonite leaders also emphasized that Canada's head of state was the British monarch, the legendary Queen Victoria, signaling in their minds a God-ordained government. Thus when the Canadian Governor General, Lord Dufferin, visited the Mennonite's East Reserve in 1877, and reaffirmed their military exemption under “the aegis of the British constitution,” the Mennonite elders responded “with thankfulness [as] we acknowledge your fatherly protection” and “pray to God that your Excellency and her Majesty may be blessed.”

In historian Adolf Ens's words, Manitoba Mennonites preferred being “‘subjects’ of the British crown than ‘citizens’ of a new nation.”<sup>13</sup>

As in the American west, most Manitoba Mennonites ignored the ballot box, but they felt it was their God-granted privilege to make direct appeals to the “*hohe Regierung*,” the highest executive authority, the national prime minister or the provincial premier.<sup>14</sup>

The religious leaders of each of the three Manitoba church groups – the large Old Colony (or *Reinländer*), the Bergthaler, and the small Kleine Gemeinde – spoke openly of God leading their respective congregations to Canada. In 1875 Bishop Peter Toews of the Kleine Gemeinde asked his congregants to see in the transatlantic move “how the hand of

**Strong religious convictions established the foundation of the Manitoba settlements, but also shook them**

the Lord ... has led you.”<sup>15</sup>

He bade Russian authorities farewell by reminding them that “it is our Holy duty to preserve and cling to the faith of our fathers ...

by walking in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>16</sup> The migration was nothing less than an act of “following Christ.”

Bishop Johan Wiebe of the much larger Old Colony Mennonites sounded an idealistic note as he addressed an historic church organization meeting on the banks of the Red River in 1875. He envisaged “an entirely different order from the one ... accustomed to in Russia – to deal with everything according to the gospel, ... the teaching of Christ which the apostles had received from the Lord more than 1800 years ago.”<sup>17</sup> As Wiebe saw it, the church in Canada would once again be the central institution in the community.

Some years later, Bishop Gerhard Wiebe of the Bergthaler congregation, also recalled the migration to Canada in terms of faith. His metaphor for the move from Russia to Canada was the migration of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. At every turn the “wicked enemy” of nationalism and secularism had undermined the “sincere simple love” in the congregation, yet the “Lord kept us together in love and unity through his Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

The Mennonite migration to Manitoba has been described as a “search for utopia,” an exaggerated reference to the community’s hopes and ideals.<sup>19</sup> The Mennonites’ location on the two large land blocks, the East and West Reserves, one on either side of the Red River, allowed for a complete transplantation of old ways. In each place the newcomers re-established an “old world” village system that more or less ignored the highly individualistic homestead system. This old vil-

lage system enabled farm families to live next to one another, but also to pool village lands, keeping a large parcel for a communal pasture, and dividing the rest into narrow strips, ensuring that each family possessed an equal amount of fair, good, and the most fertile land.

Congregations also quickly re-established a full slate of exclusively Mennonite community institutions – regional councils, village councils, school boards, fire insurance agencies, and the all-important *Waisenamt*, the body that made sure that farm land was equally distributed to all children, boys and girls, who had lost a mother or father. Farmers on both the East and West Reserves thus aimed for complete self-governance.

Strong religious convictions established the foundation of the Manitoba settlements, but also shook them. Within a decade of arriving some families began leaving the farm villages, an act that some elders strongly opposed as acts of individualism and greed.<sup>20</sup> Another divisive issue intruded when the provincial government took steps to introduce municipal governments on both of the Reserves.

An issue especially affecting the West Reserve Mennonites was the establishment of a progressive teachers' training school in the town of Gretna by U.S. Mennonite educator H. H. Ewert. As a result, the traditionalist Old Colony church lost many of its more progressive members to the more open Bergthaler group. But the Bergthaler group itself split on the school issue as the majority of its members left to form the new, more conservative Sommerfelder church. And not wishing to identify with the progressives, the Bergthaler Church on the East Reserve changed its name to the Chortitzer Mennonite Church. Ultimately, the large Bergthaler group was split into three groups – the progressive Bergthaler rump, and two larger conservative groups, the Sommerfelder of the West Reserve and the Chortitzer of the East Reserve.

The arrival in Manitoba of ministers from Kansas and Minnesota heightened tensions for some, and brought personal peace to others. Revivalist John Holdeman's visits in 1879-1881 introduced a message of rebirth and "'true' historical lineage" that left a deeply divided Kleine Gemeinde church. Heinrich Voth's visit in 1884 created a Canadian chapter of the Mennonite Brethren by attracting many from the Sommerfelder congregations with a message of assurance of salvation, capped by rebaptism by immersion.<sup>21</sup> H. T. Fast and Aron Wall in 1896 helped form a congregation linked to the U.S.-based Bruderthaler Church, later known as the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, after "preaching repen-

tance and the forgiveness of sin."<sup>22</sup> These emotion-laden messages often led to conflict, especially within families, but the sermons also resulted in recommitments to faith, often fusing old and new teachings, all the while maintaining a strong Mennonite identity.



A gathering of the Rosehill Mennonite Brethren church congregation in Munich, North Dakota in the early 1900s. The Rosehill Church gathered for two large church celebrations a year, including a *Kinderfest* or children's day on July 4 and a fall-time Harvest Missions day. Both events featured meals prepared by both men and women.

In the United States religious life was no less dynamic. Although this story of settlement could be told in economic terms – including the Mennonites' negotiations with the Santa Fe Railroad and their significant introduction of Turkey Red milling wheat<sup>23</sup> – historians have also argued that these settlers were not “economic maximizers,” and that most events were “related in some way to the local church.”<sup>24</sup>

If there was a difference between the American and Canadian frontier it was that the former did draw a greater percentage of modernizing Mennonites than did the latter. As sociologist Rodney Sawatsky argued, in comparison to western Canada, Mennonites in the U.S. West tended to emphasize a more individualistic faith within more formally structured religious organizations.<sup>25</sup> Kansas Mennonites, for

example, organized as church conferences, formal federations of congregations that were not considered inherent parts of a single church or a *Gemeinde* and hence did not demand complete conformity under a single bishop. The American Midwest of course had its share of conflict, but it tended to be channeled into debates rather than into schisms.

The very largest of the various church groupings, the *Kirchliche* Mennonites, early on amalgamated with the progressive General Conference [GC] Mennonite Church, founded in the U.S. Midwest in 1860 by Swiss-South German immigrants to accommodate frontier diversity among relatively progressive settlers. Although Kansas Mennonites at first organized a separate Kansas Conference, by 1892 that body had evolved into the Western District of the General Conference.

**Wilhelm Ewert called on Mennonites to stop equating the United States with the “world”; Samuel Haury argued that a “Christian state” could not exist**

The largest block of churches within the Western District were the Alexanderwohl congregations from Molochna (Molotschna) Colony in Russia; some of these congregations followed Bishop Jacob Buller to settle on Santa Fe Railroad lands north of Newton, Kansas; others followed Bishop Dietrich Gaedert to lands west of Newton. Smaller groups also joined the GC. They included the Dutch and Swiss Mennonites from Volhynia and Galicia and some Mennonites directly from South Germany and Switzerland.<sup>26</sup> One of the more powerful of these smaller constituent groups was the Prussian Mennonite congregation transplanted from West Prussia. Historian John Thiesen suggests that the Kansas Prussians may have seemed a little aloof; “considered as being wealthier than other Mennonites, perhaps having better education, being more cultured,” they nevertheless were eager participants in the new union.<sup>27</sup>

Midwestern GC church leaders readily debated fundamental social problems. As historian James Juhnke notes, they quoted “the Bible to good advantage” and invoked “the authority of Menno Simons.”<sup>28</sup> They questioned the morality of taking out American citizenship, and most hesitated to do so, or even to vote, until the turn of the century.<sup>29</sup> One view, voiced in 1877 by the Prussian church leader Wilhelm Ewert, called on Mennonites to stop equating the United States with the “world.” He argued that the United States was not

“that hostile creature which stands in the service of the prince of darkness against God,” but a promoter of Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

An opposing view was voiced in 1894 by Samuel S. Haurly, a one-time missionary to the Arapahoe and Cheyenne people who had worked under the auspices of federal Indian Agents. The “principle of nonresistance,” he argued, was “self-sacrificing love, the essence of Christianity,” meaning that a “Christian state” really did not exist.<sup>31</sup> What would become a long-simmering debate in the United States surfaced early.

Kansas leaders also debated education and religious revival. Historian Dennis Engbrecht emphasizes the issues of schools, revival

### **A lively debate followed on the merits of emotion-laden revival meetings**

meetings and missions. On schools, the Mennonites readily accepted the public three-month winter English language school, agreeing that they needed “to be active in the Kingdom of God” but “also among the English-speaking population.”<sup>32</sup> A supplementary, springtime “religious instruction ... in the German language,” they argued, was enough to keep the children in the faith.<sup>33</sup> Still, the issue of education engendered debate. The founding of Halstead Seminary (a teachers training school) in 1883 and of Bethel College in 1893, were said to have raised “suspicions of higher education” and worries that the youth were embracing “everything American.”<sup>34</sup>

A lively debate followed on the merits of special emotion-laden revival meetings. These nightly services typically were held over several weeks in massive tents and supported by unsanctioned home prayer meetings.<sup>35</sup> Supporters saw in them a rejection of “weary formalism” while opponents saw a particular variety of “frontier religion” led by frenzied, renegade preachers.<sup>36</sup> Most Kansas Mennonites were resolute on the issue of biblical authority, as well as on two other matters: the need for the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indian mission field in Oklahoma and the spurious nature of the intellectual “modernist-fundamentalist controversy, a non-issue among most Kansas Mennonite laity.”<sup>37</sup>

On the edges of this main GC constellation were many smaller groups that identified with a revivalistic, “born again” or evangelistic spirit. The largest and most progressive was the Mennonite Brethren (MB) denomination. It emphasized a personal and joyful faith, a pre-millennialist view of the end times that stressed the imminent second





This sod building was an early meeting place for the Mennonite Brethren Church at Kirk, Colorado.

coming of Christ, and insisted on an immersion mode of baptism. In 1879 it re-established itself in the United States as a conference when its two leading elders, Abraham Schellenberg of Buhler, Kansas and J. J. Regier of Henderson, Nebraska arrived from Russia. In time the group came to be associated with the town of Hillsboro, Kansas, in which the MBs established Tabor College in 1908.

A second group, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren led by Jacob A. Wiebe, had roots in the Crimea in Russia, and combined revivalistic methods with old ideas of community cohesion and a simple lifestyle. It emphasized personal repentance, opposed smoking, baptized by immersing persons forward, and exuded “an atmosphere of forgiveness and love.”<sup>38</sup>

A third revivalist group, the Church of God in Christ Mennonite or the Holdeman Mennonites, was the most conservative of the pietistic groups. Born in Ohio, its founder John Holdeman made a special pitch to poor Kansas Mennonites from Volhynia, Russia, and attracted followers among those at Hillsboro and Inman, Kansas. Holdeman’s preaching on the new birth, conservative plain dress, the evil of charging interest on loans, and a “true” historical lineage from the early church in the book of Acts had special appeal, it seemed, among small, uprooted groups.<sup>39</sup>

Outside of Kansas a variety of small church groups ranged from the pietistic to the communitarian, from the progressive to the traditionalist. The most outgoing was the Bruderthaler (later known as the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren) established in Mountain Lake, Minnesota and Henderson, Nebraska. The Henderson chapter began when Isaac Peters, highlighting “a new birth and a separated life,” led a group to withdraw from the main Mennonite church. The Bruderthaler rejected the use of “tobacco in any form, musical instruments, worldliness in dress, the oath,... going to court ... and the possession of firearms.”<sup>40</sup>

Among the more conservative groups were the Prairieleut Hutterites of southeastern Dakota Territory. They opposed the idea of communalism that defined most Hutterites – the Lehrerleut, Dariusleut and Schmiedeleut – and recognized individual, small family farm economies. Nevertheless they were distinguished by dark dresses worn by women, beards for the men, a knowledge of Hutterian history and an Austrian-Bavarian dialect.<sup>41</sup> Another small conservative group, the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites, settled in Jefferson County, Nebraska and had ties to their co-church in Manitoba.

### **Local Faith Experience**

The histories of these groups outline an institutional church history of the Mennonite and wider Anabaptist-related community on the frontier. Equally important was the dynamic faith of the everyday, existing at the local level, within a myriad of congregations and households, within dozens of villages and counties. Women and men, children and the elderly, all expressed this faith. It conveyed insights gleaned from informal Bible readings, and from conversations, dreams and visions. It spoke of following Jesus, but also about being moved by the Spirit, tormented by the devil, and comforted by angels. God was creator and sustainer of life, but also one who could discipline the people of God through natural disaster or illness.

Mennonites also spoke of a cosmic love, of overwhelming feelings of generosity, of sins forgiven, bodies healed, and an eternal future. This faith seemed especially pronounced on the frontier, a place not only of hope and anticipation, but one filled with fear, uncertainty and uprootedness. It was in the small places, away from the main centers in Kansas or Manitoba – in small closely-knit communities in Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Saskatchewan,

Alberta, British Columbia and California – that these expressions of faith were often recorded with special clarity.

Faith at the local level was expressed by both women and men, although not equally noted in the written records. An official, institutional history of Mountain Lake, Minnesota Mennonites reads authoritatively that in “1888

**Faith at the local level  
was an emotional faith**

there were three well-organized churches in our community” and it then describes them: two *Kirchliche* churches, led by Aron Wall, “a man with a quiet will,” and Gerhard Neufeld, “sturdy as an oak” and “large hearted,” and one Mennonite Brethren church under the guidance of Heinrich Voth, “a man of evangelistic zeal.”<sup>42</sup>

But this record fails to mention Mountain Lake’s lively corps of strong women, persons without official church titles. Dr. “Frau” Neufeld, “a midwife and doctor whose services were valued far and wide,” was the most widely-known.<sup>43</sup> Suzanna Ediger Balzer, who arrived in Mountain Lake with her cabinet-maker husband Jacob in 1877, had obtained sound schooling in Gnadenfeld, Molochna (Molotschna) Colony, Russia. Hence she “was much concerned about education for the children of the community” and gave up “her ‘front room’ for a schoolroom, where her daughter Anna served as teacher.” The enterprising Suzanna even seems to have facilitated her daughter Anna’s marriage to the associate teacher, Jacob Bergen.<sup>44</sup>

Maria Buhler Penner, who arrived in Mountain Lake in 1875 with her merchant-husband Abram, always “had room for strangers coming through town.” Then too, she was noted as the first undertaker in the Bethel Church and the first president of its women’s sewing circle.<sup>45</sup> Her daughter Aganetha later recalled the many songs Maria Penner taught her children to sing, especially the evening German lullaby: “Good night, good night, Again a day has ended, Father forgive us our sins, Let us find grace in you, Watch over us, Good night, good night.”<sup>46</sup> Few Mennonite women made it into the official records, but their influence within the generations of family lore was profound.

Faith at the local level was also an emotional faith, variously expressed with hope, anguish and generosity. From Henderson, Nebraska came accounts of how the local Mennonite Brethren church was begun by two un-ordained, but ardent laymen, Henry Nickel and Peter Regier who, feeling a “stirring of the spirit” in 1877, began making rounds in the community. Unimpeded by family duties or snow

storms they called on neighbors, seeking “any lost sheep of the House of Israel living in this area.”<sup>47</sup> Upon finding scattered Mennonite families of like mind they found “their hearts melting together in their mutual love for Jesus Christ.”<sup>48</sup> By 1878 their efforts had led to the formation of a congregation, one with 200 members by 1885. Here members studied the Bible, asked for forgiveness of one another, and partook in the “reconciling kiss.”

But joy at Henderson was also sometimes followed by mental anguish, grief and a struggle to forgive. In one unusually difficult case from October 1889, a young 7-year-old Peter Nachtigal was accidentally shot and killed by a 17-year-old recently-baptized son of a minister, leaving the bereaved family and the congregation reeling in anguish. The church forgave Peter’s deeply remorseful father for possessing the forbidden, loaded revolver. But it took months for the grieving mother to find

**Daily faith expressions were often affected by conflict**

the strength to forgive and the willingness to “share communion with him,”

the young offender, “at the Lord’s Table.”<sup>49</sup> Members of this community measured their community’s spiritual health in simple terms of love and forgiveness.

Daily faith expressions in Mennonite and other Anabaptist communities were often affected by conflict that pitted members of different church groups against one another. At Yankton, South Dakota, an especially dynamic situation arose as a result of the close proximity of the household-based Prairieleut Hutterites to the passionate communalist Hutterites, as well as to more acculturated Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB).

Certainly the Prairieleut farmers were secure in their faith. Historian Rod Janzen writes that they “often felt a special closeness to God,” especially out in the fields where they “had much time to reflect in silence” and revel in the “in-pouring voice of the supernatural.”<sup>50</sup> Still the Prairieleut were regularly confronted by their strictly communalist Hutterite cousins who chided them for living “out on the steppe,” “outside the ark,” unable to commit “to true Christian *Gelassenheit*” of colony living. The communalist Hutterites’ emotional invitations to the Prairieleut to return to the old fold sometimes resulted in conversions, but they left painful family divisions, as well as a mix of “anxious decision making, joy and regret.”<sup>51</sup>



Lizzie and Lydia Waldner, Prairieleut young women near Langham, Saskatchewan, 1915. About one-third of the Hutterites who came to North America chose to live communally. The rest moved onto family farms on the open prairie and were known as Prairieleut. Some Prairieleut affiliated with the General Conference Mennonites, but many, including those at Langham, joined the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren.

From the other side of the Prairieleut came yet a different voice. Revivalists from the KMB who spoke of an “assurance of salvation,” offered a “true” immersion rebaptism, and sang such lyrics of humility as “Oh, to be Nothing for my Lord.”<sup>52</sup> Prairieleut members often agonized over just which church was right – the Prairieleut, the KMB or the communalist Hutterites – and sought divine direction. John Tschetter found his answer when, while praying in “a dark cellar,” it suddenly became “lit up by the love of God”; Fred Waldner found his answer in a dream showing Jesus “slowly coming to life” in a home at Bon Homme Hutterite Colony.<sup>53</sup> For an understanding of local faith it mattered less what Tschetter and Waldner’s final decisions were, than the dynamic process by which they arrived at them.

Another local expression of faith was the almost frantic search for new sources of land on which to build communities of faith and secure a livelihood close to nature. This search affected most settlements, but can be seen most clearly in the Oklahoma Mennonite community. From the perspective of later decades this quest for land was a troubling one for it occurred on territory once legally granted by the United States government to Native Americans.

The first Mennonite attracted to Oklahoma was missionary Samuel S. Haury who spent the summer of 1877 at the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation. Three years later, he and his wife Susanna returned, opening “the first missionary outreach of any Mennonites in the U.S.”<sup>54</sup> But most Mennonites in Oklahoma arrived because of the Dawes Act of 1887 which dispossessed Native Americans of their Oklahoma territory and opened up the state for white settlers. In



The Magpie  
Family, early  
Southern  
Cheyenne  
Mennonites  
in  
Oklahoma,  
about 1890

1889 and 1893 the Mennonites were among the tens of thousands of settlers who joined in so-called land “Runs,” literally a dashing across the state border at a specified time and then a “Run” or race into the heart of the state to claim a “quarter section” of farm land at a nominal price.

These Runs seemed providential enough to the Mennonite settlers who chose Oklahoma. Here they saw an open plain for hardworking, poor, young families willing to farm an oftentimes inhospitable, even violent, frontier plain and willing to build a Mennonite community.<sup>55</sup>

The 1889 Run, for example, brought hope to the poor Kansas family of Kornelius and Aganetha (Ediger) Zielke and their two young children. After Kornelius and his brother-in-law, John Ediger, staked claims for their respective families, they returned to Kansas for their families, jubilant, rejoicing that the “good Lord had protected them.”<sup>56</sup>

Like many other Mennonite families, the Zielkes moved more than once, mostly for social reasons. In 1898 they gave up their initial claim on land that later proved to be oil rich, to relocate to the western Low German-speaking Mennonite community of Corn.<sup>57</sup> Over the years Oklahoma drew many more Mennonites, often acquiring earlier claims for very little money or answering calls from resident Mennonite missionaries for them to settle nearby.<sup>58</sup>

Local faith on the frontier was also affected by clashes that arose between the Mennonite community and values ascribed to the wider world. In Saskatchewan two conservative congregations transplanted from Manitoba – the “Saskatchewan Bergthaler” and the Old Colonists – negotiated their own land reserves at Swift Current and Hague, but their new-found isolation and closely-knit communities did not stem change.

One factor of change certainly was the settlement nearby of progressive Mennonites from West Prussia and others from the American Midwest who were key players in broadening the Mennonite community, seen especially in the role they played in the founding of the inclusive Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1903.<sup>59</sup> Early acts of co-operation suggested peace between the conservative and progressive groups, even the sharing of ministers. The Saskatchewan Bergthaler Mennonites, for example, at first relied on outside leaders for spring baptism, from fellow traditionalists from Manitoba like Bishop David Stoesz of the Chortitzer church, but also from the West Prussian Mennonite Bishop Peter Regier.<sup>60</sup>

The conservative Old Colony and Saskatchewan Bergthaler groups, however, also felt under siege from progressives on the Saskatchewan frontier, resulting in bitter conflict. In 1908, for example, conservative Bergthaler Bishop Kornelius Epp at Aberdeen was asked to marry a couple in which the “groom wore a tie and a white shirt, and the bride a fancy dress.” When Epp simply refused the overtly fashionable couple, the bishop felt such a rejection from his congregation that he moved his family to the newly-opened, even more remote Carrot River district north of the established Mennonite communities.<sup>61</sup>

That very year, merchant Johann Driedger of the village of Osler, and a member of the Old Colony church, was excommunicated for “lack of humility” and ignoring “the word of God.” His transgression was that he had accused his competitor of setting fire to his, Driedger’s, uninsured store. Driedger’s punishment was a painful shunning that left his store bankrupt, his family unwelcome in the old church and his reputation as a community leader shattered.<sup>62</sup> To paraphrase an oft quoted scripture passage, the land reserves in Saskatchewan, consisting of both farm villages and Mennonite-dominated service centers ensured that Mennonites were “not in the world,” but evidently they could still be “of it.”<sup>63</sup>

Similar cultural conflict dealing with lifestyle issues erupted on the Alberta frontier, a place described by an early church leader as one that drew an especially transient people, moving “to and fro across plains and foothill ... as restless as the waves of the sea.”<sup>64</sup> The comings and goings seem to have introduced a range of new ideas. Some of the most noted early settlers were strongly opinionated Holdeman and Bergthaler people from Manitoba who settled at Didsbury and Linden in 1905. But the very first (Old) Mennonite Church settlers



Delegates and visitors at Alexanderwhol Mennonite Church, Marion County, Kansas, in October 1896 for a continent-wide gathering of General Conference Mennonites.



who arrived from Ontario in 1889 and later from Iowa had their own set of ideas.

Certainly the frontier had its moments of peace. The young bishop-designate, S. F. Coffman arrived from eastern Canada in 1901<sup>65</sup> and wrote in romantic terms of his members “rounding up and branding cattle” and of himself walking the countryside “sketching ... and writing poetry.”<sup>66</sup> But he also wrote of a fragmented community, one in which “it seems sometimes that nearly everyone ha[s] his own way of looking at things.”<sup>67</sup>

The comment foreshadowed an upheaval that left Bishop Amos Bauman “silenced,” spurring him to leave the main Mennonite church and join with the revivalistic Mennonite Brethren in Christ. It all happened after Bauman publicly castigated women in his church for wearing such small white caps that they lured men into lust. At about the same time he criticized other members for refusing to adopt the non-traditional idea of a mystical “second birth of sanctification” after an initial conversion. Bauman was eventually defrocked by his fellow ministers, but his removal resulted in little peace, in part because his replacement, John K. Lehman, had been accused in the past of parading about in a “‘worldly’ horse and wagon outfit.”<sup>68</sup> Frontier members indeed seemed to have their “own way of looking at things.”

**Frontier members  
had their “own way  
of looking at things”**

New faith dynamics appeared in the Mennonite community in California. Historians have sometimes cast California as a place attractive for economic and physical reasons, exemplified in part by the identities of the very first Mennonites in the state, Johannes Dyck and Joseph Summers, who made it rich in the state’s famed gold rush of the 1840s and 50s.<sup>69</sup> Still the first Mennonite settlers came with firmly expressed religious ideas, quoting Scripture and biblical imagery to invite others to the west coast.

Historian Brian Froese writes that California’s vast, flat San Joaquin Valley, a terrain strange to Mennonites from the Midwest, was made to seem hospitable with religious vocabulary. In 1896, for example, GC leader David Goerz, described new-fangled irrigation systems with references to Isaiah 41, where God brought “pools of water” to the desert and turned “parched land into springs.”<sup>70</sup> And when the first settlers began to boast of “the California marvel” of fruit produc-

tion,<sup>71</sup> biblically based chiding soon followed. In a representative letter in 1909 easterner J. M. Brunk criticized the Californians for their “modern church-destroying spirit of restlessness and land craze about which we have been hearing so much the past few years.”<sup>72</sup>

Californians responded with an equal degree of piety: it was not wealth, but God-given weather that had attracted them to the west coast; indeed, the state’s “sunny climate offers you God’s beautiful nature.”<sup>73</sup> Numerous letters in the GC periodical *The Mennonite* echoed the idea. One by Sara Sprunger in January 1905 announced “warm sunny weather ... roses in bloom, children running barefoot, windows and doors open.”<sup>74</sup> Ordinary Mennonites could well thank God for nature, especially in North America’s most temperate climates.

### **Faith Tested by War and Patriotism**

Of all the events crucial in shaping the religious culture of Mennonites during the first two generations of their sojourn in the west, the First World War was without doubt the most important. Even though the War was staged in Europe it brought both Canada and the United States into a bloody conflict that claimed about 65,000 lives in Canada and almost twice that number in the United States. The conflicts were “total wars” or peoples’ wars, and as such all citizens were expected to pitch in. Young men were expected to answer a call to arms; all others were expected to contribute financially, with the purchase of war bonds or paying special war taxes.

Patriotic fervor developed in both countries. In Canada, pacifists were made to feel unwelcome soon after it declared war in 1914. In 1916, for example, the Brethren in Christ moved its annual bi-national conference, originally scheduled to take place north of the border, to the United States. They feared American delegates would cause trouble by making “indiscrete” statements supporting pacifism even though Canadian BIC leaders sternly warned the Americans against “thinking audibly” about the war in a context of mounting Canadian casualties.<sup>75</sup> In the United States, patriotic fervor lay behind its 1917 lurch from emphatic neutrality to exaggerated holy war against Germany. In the super-charged atmosphere on both sides of the border, both Canada and the United States passed military service laws in 1917. Mennonites who had been lauded as honest, hardworking frontier families, now suddenly became unpopular. The *Winnipeg Free Press* thundered that “people of ‘peculiar’ religion living in colonies and

clinging to an alien tongue ... are from every point of view undesirable. ... If this country is not good enough to fight for, it is not good enough to live in." And although Canada had the more open-ended military conscription policy – it simply exempted all Mennonites, either formally by law or informally by practice – still, in western Canada several provinces passed laws meant to assimilate Mennonites and other minorities to a British-Canadian culture. In the United States the 1917 Selective Service Law made provision for military exemption, but in an atmosphere of "patriotic frenzy ... religious pacifists were vulnerable and doubly so if their accents were German."<sup>76</sup>

Mennonite boys in the United States suffered in a special way. Especially in the western sections of the country, the government



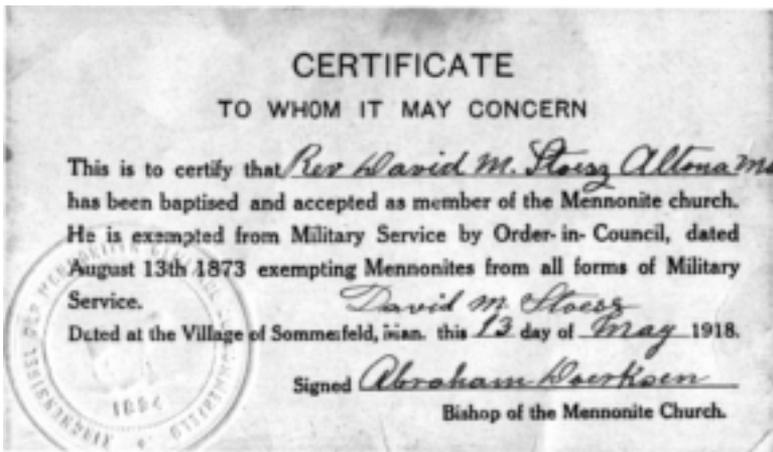
Mennonite conscientious objectors during the First World War, held at Detention Camp No. 1, Camp Funston, Kansas. Pictured are, left to right, Carl Schmidt, William P. Wiens, Pete Neufeld, Albert Unruh, John Andreas, and Paul Bartsch.

demanding that all draftees who were otherwise not exempted by virtue of farm leaves, must report to military training camps and there declare and defend their non-resistance. At the camps, military officers attempted to dissuade the Mennonite boys from their peace positions, but many of the young pacifists refused to listen, or indeed to don military uniforms or engage in work that could aid the war effort in any way. The situation was ripe for conflict. The Mennonite boys were subjected to widespread abuse. They suffered psychologi-

cally from taunting, jeering and threats of execution, and physically from repeated beatings, cold showers and imprisonment. Still some 2,000 U.S. Mennonites persisted in their conviction and declined any kind of military service.<sup>77</sup>

A number of the CO's wrote bravely of their camp experiences. Kansan Ura Hostetler, who was forced to leave his young bride, his "darling sweetheart" Delma Palmer, and report to Camp Funston, Kansas in May 1918 insisted that "only the [conscientious] objector's Christian witness could sustain the light of Christ in a darkened country, a light that ... provided more comfort and security than could any military effort."<sup>78</sup>

Others like John Neufeld, a young missionary who had worked in Oklahoma and Montana, were sentenced to prison for refusing to drill with regular soldiers. Neufeld recorded the ordeal upon arriving at Camp Cody, New Mexico on June 28, 1918: "we made known our stand to the several officers ... as soon as we could ... [One of the] officers told us that it was either for us to accept noncombatant work or go to the stockade... [W]e told them that we were willing to go to the stockade." Refusing military drills, Neufeld and 135 other Mennonite objectors were sentenced to prison for six months at Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>79</sup>



Canadian certificate attesting to David Stoesz's exemption from military service during the First World War

Historians agree that the First World War left a powerful impression on North American Mennonites. It made them even more wary of patriotism and civic involvement and focused on that “other citizenship which mattered even more – their place in the Kingdom of Christ.”<sup>80</sup> Historian James Juhnke writes that after the War, Mennonites in the United States became more involved in service projects, making non-resistance less of a private matter, and more a matter of spreading peace broadly. But another consequence of the First World War and its aftermath was a further scattering of Mennonites and other Anabaptist-related groups. Some 700 Mennonite conscientious objectors from the United States, often accompanied by their parents, took the opportunity of migrating north to Canada, joining relatives in Saskatchewan or Alberta who had migrated north in an earlier decade.

The single largest Anabaptist migration during the War itself was that of the Hutterites, mostly from South Dakota, to the Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Alberta. Hutterites, it seems, had been singled out for especially harsh treatment in the military training camps, as demonstrated by the deaths on November 29, 1918 of two of their young men, Joseph and Michael Hofer. Both were married and fathers of young children and both had been imprisoned at the infamous prison of Alcatraz, California, for refusing to wear the military uniform. After being transferred back to the Midwest, they died from beatings and exposure to the cold at the hands of the military.<sup>81</sup>

The torture and death of Joseph and Michael Hofer precipitated the historic migration north of the vast majority of communal Hutterites in 1918, leaving only Bon Homme Colony in South Dakota. So sudden was this migration that the Canadian government, which was lenient to its conscientious objectors, reacted negatively with an emergency Order-in-Council barring them, as well as Mennonites and other sects, “because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated.”<sup>82</sup>

The First World War and its aftermath had the effect of initiating other migrations in the west, especially in western Canada. There were immigrant newcomers, such as the 20,000 *Russländer* Mennonites who had fled the chaos, epidemic and famine that followed the Russian Revolution, itself set within the era of the First World War. Although these immigrants had usually lost most of their material wealth, they were welcomed by the Canadian government which readily altered the 1918 law barring Mennonites from entry. The fact

was that Canada still had thousands of acres of homestead land; just as the United States passed its Immigration Restriction Act of 1921, closing the door on potential immigrants, Canada opened its doors.

The *Russländer* were a good fit for Canada, immediately seeking “appropriate parcels of land” on which to rebuild rural Mennonite

**Just as Hutterites and  
*Russländer* Mennonites were  
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Canada, a large group of Men-  
nonites from Manitoba and  
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for their exodus from Canada**

communities.<sup>83</sup> Cited as newcomers with a relative “urbanity” and “cultural sophistication,” they still held to “the ‘Farmer-Mennonitenum,’ a Mennonite way of life rooted in the

soil.”<sup>84</sup> Although some of the newcomers settled in southern Ontario, on Pelee Island or at Vineland for example, most settled in western Canada.

In southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan they joined existing Mennonite communities, acquiring farms vacated by Mexico-bound Old Colony Mennonites, or they purchased farms in Anglo-Canadian districts, adding a list of new names to the lexicon of Mennonite places – Boissevain, Glenlea, Namaka, Starbuck, Oak Lake and dozens of other places. In northern Saskatchewan and Alberta the newcomers settled on homestead land, while in southern Alberta they turned to the irrigated lands near Coaldale. Even farther west, the Fraser River Valley of lower mainland British Columbia – Yarrow, Chilliwack, and Abbotsford – was a favorite spot for the newcomers, for its climate was more reminiscent of temperate Ukraine and its agricultural economy could sustain small householders.<sup>85</sup>

The farmers in the village of Yarrow, British Columbia illustrate the mindset of these post-war farm immigrants. Faith for them was interwoven into the community’s very social fabric. The first arrivals in 1928 depicted Yarrow as utopian, the ultimate point of an arduous journey from “bleak steppes and cold winters” in Russia and prairie Canada.<sup>86</sup> The trip westward through narrow mountain roads was described as “very treacherous,” but joy replaced fear once they could see “below them ... the ‘Promised Land’ of Yarrow,” a potential close-knit community of faith.<sup>87</sup> John Barga’s January 1928 prayer, “Our Father in Heaven, give your power and blessing to make this a Mennonite settlement,” foreshadowed an incipient community spirit,

leading the immigrants to give up an acre here or there to accommodate latecomers on tiny farms, and assisting them with temporary shelter.<sup>88</sup> Most villagers even worked together on nearby hops fields and each morning assembled to head out to work *en masse*, riding “their bicycles in a huge swarm.”<sup>89</sup>

Church life readily spilled over onto the streets. The preachers left their pulpits to ensure strict lifestyles, visiting fields in summer to stop tobacco growing, stopping by public schools in fall to insist on full length skirts for Mennonite girls, or making house-calls at New Year’s to reinforce ideas about the end times.<sup>90</sup> As economic fortunes improved, the language of faith was invoked again: Henry Janzen credited his farm’s survival to “a miracle”; Dietrich Rempel warned about good times producing “glib, habitual expressions.”<sup>91</sup> The very act of farming could lead to worship, or it could undermine it.

In a strange coincidence, just as Hutterites and *Russländer* Mennonites were finding refuge in post-war Canada, a large group of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan was preparing for their exodus from Canada. The 6,000 Canadian Mennonites who immigrated south to Mexico and the 1,800 more who headed for the Paraguayan Chaco between 1922 and 1928 constituted about a third of the so-called “Kanadier” Mennonites whose parents had arrived in Manitoba from Russia in the 1870s.<sup>92</sup> Their move was distinctive within the history of Mennonite migration because the aim was not to find a new source of land, nor were they fleeing from physical harm. The simple issue for them was religious freedom.

In 1916, during the highly patriotic days of the First World War, the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan had passed school legislation that mandated publicly-inspected, English-language schools. The law seemed to foreshadow the complete takeover of education by the government and the flying of the “militaristic” Union Jack over every schoolhouse. Walter Schmiedehaus, German consul in Chihuahua, described the newcomers to Mexico

**For the Mennonites, the move to Mexico was ultimately an act of faith**

as “not poor, afflicted or persecuted... Rather they are affluent, self-confident farmers who ... embarked on an eight-day journey as a closed community, in order to take up ... estates purchased in a foreign country with [their own] precious money.” Unlike other Mennonite

migrants, they received no aid, neither from railroad companies nor from other Mennonites.<sup>93</sup>

The Mexico-bound settlers boarded chartered trains that took them across the American Midwest to El Paso, Texas into Mexico where they made their way to land blocks in the semi-arid, mountain valleys of the eastern Sierra Madre in the Chihuahua and Durango states. The migration had been enabled by a generous offer from the Mexican government, secured by heartfelt and even tearful negotiation between Old Colony Mennonite leaders and Mexico's president, Álvaro Obregón, in his palace on 17 February 1921.

Mexico promised the Canadians complete autonomy over all matters of faith, including military service exemption, private church-run education, church marriage, gender-equal inheritance, admission of the handicapped, and local government.<sup>94</sup> The Mennonites' part of the deal was simply to come to Mexico to transplant their farming skills, abide by the laws of the land and help modernize Mexico's rural economy.



Old Colony Mennonite children at an adobe-brick school in Manitoba Colony, on the outskirts of Cuauhtémoc in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, about 1950. The ability to direct their own schools was one of the things that attracted conservative Mennonites to Mexico beginning in 1922.

For the Mennonites, the move was ultimately an act of faith. In his memoirs Isaac Dyck, an Old Colony minister, recalled that the migrants of 1922 were simple “followers of Jesus ... born into sorrow, suffering



and persecution” consisting of a church now tested “like gold in a fire, so that its ... steadfastness would be manifested to the whole world.”<sup>95</sup> Canadian wealth had seduced the Mennonites with the lure of “brightly painted houses” and “frenzied commerce,” necessitating the “learning of a nationalist language”<sup>96</sup> and only a painful physical separation from this lure could halt their assimilation to the world.

Still, the move was controversial. Many of the migrants returned to Canada, especially during the 1930s following a series of thefts, a drought and an epidemic. In 1936 the state government enforced Mexico’s constitution and temporarily closed the doors to the Mennonites’ German language schools. Now settlers considered resettlement in other places – Quebec, South Dakota, South Africa, Paraguay and even islands off the coast of Australia – that might grant complete freedom of education. Many others reasserted their religious commitment, concurring with the Old Colony minister who reasoned that “if it was right that we left Canada then, it cannot be right for us to return now.”<sup>97</sup>

An October 1945 letter by a “Frau Guenther” recalled the argument for remaining in Mexico: Guenther reflected on life back in Hague, Saskatchewan, when school officials had encouraged her father to send his gifted daughter away for “a town education.” She wrote that “I am so thankful to him and to God that he did not do so for what would have happened if I had gone? ... What kind of children would I have had; boys who joined the army, girls who would have mocked the old ways.”<sup>98</sup> Canada in the eyes of those who had settled in Mexico was a land of plenty, but one that made it difficult for true Anabaptist descendants to live out a life of humility and peace.

## **Conclusion**

Between the 1870s and the 1930s Mennonites in North America dispersed throughout the western portion of the continent. The diversity of religious thought was immense, but a common identity as Mennonites held as in each place they grappled with the meaning of being a follower of Christ in a strange new physical environment. Some communities emphasized an individual spiritual quest, striving for personal peace, forgiveness and grace, and guidance in life. Other communities strove for a separation from the wider world, a communitarian purity and non-conformity that directed them to increasingly isolated places of settlement.

In the pursuit of these aims Mennonites from eastern sections of North America, but especially from the Russian Empire, established new settlements in the west. The names of Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota and the Dakota territory in the United States and in Manitoba north of the border became part of the Mennonite lexicon. Secondary migrations that took them ever farther westward, to California, Oregon and British Columbia, and south as far as Texas and to Chihuahua and Durango states in Mexico were added to the list during the next generation.

In these places, often in wide open spaces and always as newcomers, they built close-knit rural communities, and articulated a desire to be a people of peace and humility. Modern technology, intrusive governments, and nationalistic and militaristic cultures challenged the integrity of these communities. The prosperity and war-time patriotism of the First World War, more than the actual pressure to render military service, challenged both the American and Canadian communities as the war brought the culture of the wider society to bear on the rural communities.

In the United States it was an incipient nationalism that critiqued pacifists as less-than-full citizens; in western Canada new education laws forced Mennonites to choose for or against a semblance of assimilation. In any case, this would be the last generation in which a vast majority of Mennonites in North America were able to build farm-centered, closely-knit rural worlds in which to live out their Anabaptist faith that answered the great questions about existence, but also provided guidance in their everyday lives.

# Struggling Stewards of the Earth

*In a February 1900 diary entry, 54-year-old David E. Bergey of Mannheim, Ontario recorded a payment to Menno M. Shantz, his brother-in-law, for one hundred acres of farmland. The event was significant for the middle-aged David. The Bergey family now farmed 182 acres, a truly substantial operation, first begun when David and his wife Louisa (Bowman) had moved from the town of Waterloo in 1878. David, a trained schoolteacher, had made good; he had secured a livelihood on the land. The Bergey farm had work enough for sons Gilbert, Milton, Ezra, and Herbert. And work they did: in February alone they cleaned stables, harvested logs, hauled wood, cleaned turnip seeds, milled corn and butchered pigs. Daughters Amelia, Eva and Ida earned livelihoods elsewhere, but wife Louisa worked the farm too, producing and marketing the legendary Bergey family cheese. David himself was active in the community, attending a local Farmers' Institute one day, collecting funds as church deacon and drawing up wills and land deeds for neighbors on other days. He frequented local businesses: Elias Snider's mill in St. Jacob's one day, and other businesses to have horses Dexter, Fan, Fly and Ab shod, to repair a corn cutter, tan a hide, or purchase building materials. He was also a man of the wider world, daily reading the Toronto Globe. But at the core he was a farmer who lived within nature and his faith was expressed in its symbols: on the 11th at the Blenheim church, for instance, he heard Josiah Nargang preach on sins being turned "white as snow" and obedience rewarded with "the best from the land."<sup>1</sup>*

*Fifty years later, in March 1949, the diary of 55-year-old Helena (Doerksen) Reimer of Meade County, Kansas, also revealed life on the farm. Her German-language diary was replete with entries about work: "I made butter, sewed and set 10 hens"; "I worked hard at 'keeping Saturday'"; "I worked hard at cleaning the chicken barn"; "I and [daughter] Helena sewed and did the chores." It was*

*a cycle of “hard” work on a typical Kansas Mennonite farm. On Mondays she chopped wood to heat water, then washed clothing, keeping the ironing for Tuesdays. “Keeping Saturday” included dusting, washing floors, and baking bread for the frequent Sunday guests. In the intervening days Helena patched, sewed, cooked, and quilted. Often she worked alone, but often too, her married daughter Helena came over to help. Her diary for the full year of 1949 tells of seasonal patterns: hogs butchered in the winter; the garden planted in spring; peaches, apples and other fruit canned in summer, green beans and cucumbers picked in mid-summer; potatoes dug in late summer; and meals prepared for the harvest workers in fall. Her husband Klaas spent much time on the road between Meade City, Fowler or Dodge City, working as a carpenter. But their teenaged sons – Bernard, Gerhard and Johann – worked at home on the farm, fencing, harvesting, planting wheat and sorghum, and “one-way” disking, all as the specific seasons demanded.<sup>2</sup>*

### **Farming as Divine Calling<sup>3</sup>**

David Bergey and Helena Reimer may have lived in different worlds – those of a man and a woman, a Canadian and an American, an easterner and a westerner, an early twentieth-century person and a mid-century one. Still, both David and Helena were Mennonites who lived on farms, and this fact linked their worlds. They worked alongside children, they ate what they grew, they marketed crops and farm products, and they participated in a local farm economy. Most importantly, perhaps, they lived outdoors, in nature, in the soil and on the land. And, as it was for other farmers on the North American continent, land for David and Helena was not a passive thing, but an entity that scholars describe as being in “ecological dialectic” with people who live on the land.<sup>4</sup>

As U.S. environmental historian Donald Worster writes, humans and the earth “trace upon each other” endless “lines and shapes.” The actual patterns the Mennonites of North America drew on the land – the roadways, furrows, fences, garden rows, farmsteads – corresponded to patterns they imagined as Mennonites and gave them a certain confidence as they related to the environment.<sup>5</sup> Faith and soil, values and land, memories and nature, were all inter-related.<sup>6</sup>

What was the North American Mennonite relationship to the land? Certainly, David and Helena’s lives reflected values applauded by observers of Mennonite society. In a 1952 essay, E. K. Francis,

a noted Catholic sociologist, argued that Mennonites thought “of farming as a way of life.” They found their joy, he wrote, in “work well done, from the improvement and increase of [their] holdings and herds, and from the knowledge of having provided for future generations.”<sup>7</sup> Mennonite sociologists agreed. In 1955 Winfield Fretz wrote that North American Mennonites, despite being scattered over an entire continent, had recreated “compact settlements in the best farm lands” and transplanted skills learned in Europe. In the interior plains Dutch-Russian Mennonites had introduced small grains, especially hard, red milling wheat. In the east “the Swiss Mennonites became noted for crop rotation employing legumes, manures and lime.” In most places Mennonites were reputedly “good farmers because they preserved the productive capacity of their soils for centuries on end.”<sup>8</sup>



Marie J. Regier churning butter near Whitewater, Kansas, 1920s. Farm women's labor was central to rural household production. (Several years after this photograph was taken, Regier embarked on a life of mission work in China, Paraguay, Taiwan, and Chicago, Illinois.)

But were Mennonites truly committed to nurturing the soil and living in harmony with nature? Did they achieve what Native American Mennonite leader Lawrence Hart described as the “Anabaptist tradition

of closeness to the land?"<sup>9</sup> The answer to these questions is complicated by the immense variety of natural environments in which North American Mennonites lived: the rich valley soils of central Pennsylvania and Virginia; the fertile rolling lands of southern Ontario;

**Mennonites were among the most committed farm people in North America**

the midwestern corn belt of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa; the black clay soils of southern Manitoba and eastern

North Dakota; the wind-prone plains of western Kansas and Texas and Saskatchewan; the vegetable gardens in British Columbia; the irrigated fruit lands of central California; the boreal forests of northern Alberta. The answer is also elusive because while some Mennonites were among the most traditionalist farmers on the continent, others were among the most advanced, often employing the very latest in technology and science.

Still, it seems that a uniquely sympathetic response to land existed among the Mennonites. Certainly they were among the most committed farm people in North America, staying on the farms in larger numbers for longer than almost any other group. In many ways Mennonites were also exceptional stewards of the land. Often the stewardship was pronounced, sometimes only echoed, and when it was compromised, leaders arose calling their people to agrarian recommitment or environmental consciousness.<sup>10</sup> In sum, for much of the twentieth century Mennonite farm families emphasized "rural life," a life fundamentally based on their faith and one meant to preserve that faith.

**Land as Instrument**

Patterns of that "Anabaptist tradition of closeness to the land" were evident well before the twentieth century. Amish communities in late nineteenth-century Iowa, for example, were known for embracing land stewardship even before they became famous for rejecting tractor power and electricity.<sup>11</sup> Census records illustrate that these farmer were committed to keeping their soils fertile with the use of manure, the practice of deep cultivation and the planting of legumes such as alfalfa. These practices reportedly were more successful and balanced than those of their neighbors.

The more modern Mennonites in late nineteenth-century Waterloo County, Ontario also thought about nature in a distinctive way. On the one hand they displayed typically mainstream Christian ideas of nature, but it mattered that these ideas corresponded to a commitment to nonviolence. As one 1868 Mennonite writer noted, God may have endowed humans with “authority to subdue the earth,” but this did not mean that “man was ... to ... have dominion over ... his own kind and brother.”<sup>12</sup> Then, too, the word “humility,” an imperative arising from a history of persecution and teachings on obedience to Christ, appeared numerous times in letters published in the Mennonite periodical, the *Herald of Truth*. This teaching warned that the latest technologies led to pride and counseled that things “created by the Lord” must not be used for “luxury and self indulgence.”<sup>13</sup> Indirectly, and perhaps only subtly, this sentiment placed a check on the temptation to exploit nature.<sup>14</sup>

Dutch-Russian Mennonites on the interior North American plains also expressed a particular closeness to the land. Land for them was not so much soil and fecundity, as territory and inheritance, a divine gift.<sup>15</sup> Letters in the Mennonite newspaper, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, by several Dutch-Russian prairie farm women in the United



Anna Barge, left, age fifteen, with her father, Witmer Barge, and younger sister, Elnora Mae, on their farm in Sterling, Illinois, 1924. With no brothers, Anna regularly donned coveralls and participated in all aspects of farm work. Decades later, at age 86, Anna recalled, “I remember this spring cultivating. Daddy and I did a sixty-four-acre field checkered-style. Oh, I loved that fieldwork!”

States reveal this importance of land and territory in everyday life. In a typical letter from 1905 Aganetha Harder of Rosehill, North Dakota, implored her sister and aged father to come from Russia, pointing out that with the Harders' "210 acres of land ... we could take good care" of them.<sup>16</sup> In 1906 Margaretha (Giesbrecht) Rahn, also of Rosehill, similarly sought to entice relatives in Russia: "here in America, it is easier for pioneers to find land," wrote Rahn; then, too, it was especially fertile, evidenced by the Rahns' "946 bushels of wheat, that is on the average 22 bushels per acre" with a "price that is good ... 93 to 98 cents" per bushel.<sup>17</sup> These women wove land and community well-being to a seamless web.

Dutch-Russian Mennonites generally expressed a love of the land. By 1900 many Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan still lived within their old world farm village system.<sup>18</sup> As the geographer John Warkentin has argued, this system had been "founded on the farmer's love for the soil, attachment for a certain locality, and belief that the land should be kept in the family if possible." And even then, as North American individualism eventually undermined the old village system, their commitment to the land sent the Mennonites spilling over initial settlement boundaries to acquire lands from French and Anglo-Canadian neighbors.<sup>19</sup>



An early photo of the Mennonite settlement at Yarrow, British Columbia, where families farmed small parcels of land, often devoted to raspberries, and centered their lives around the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren church.



In the Dutch-Russian Mennonite settlements of Kansas, where farmers were also forced to make radical physical adjustments, old agrarian ways, rural habits and worldviews still held sway in the early twentieth century. In geographer Aidan McQuillan's words, the Mennonites faced "trials of drought, prairie fires and grasshopper plagues ... intense heat and searing winds," but "their religious faith, the most powerful molding force," emphasized "a cheerful acceptance of stingy environmental setbacks as the will of God."<sup>20</sup>

Census records hint at this special commitment to farming. A comparison of central Kansas Mennonite farms with those of their close Swedish and French-Canadian neighbors suggests that between 1900 and 1925 Mennonite farms were consistently smaller than average, more carefully cultivated, more highly technologized, more highly valued and less prone to foreclosure.<sup>21</sup> The sum of it reflected a particular commitment to the land and to farming as a way of life.

**Immigrants from the Soviet Union expressed a strong love of land**

Even as new sources of farmland became more difficult to locate in the 1920s, Mennonites venerated rural life. Immigrants from the Soviet Union, the so-called *Russländer* people, often seen as the vanguard of urbanization among North America's Mennonites, expressed a strong love of land. Peter G. Epp, who immigrated in 1924 at age 36 and went on to teach at Bluffton College in Ohio, wrote about land as a symbol of peace and destiny. In Epp's novel, *Eine Mutter*, the elderly protagonist, Agatha, in Russia, decries the spiritual loss seen in land commodification. She bemoans the way in which entrepreneurial and short-sighted Mennonites "sold those beautiful fields, the fertile soil, those fields which would still be there at the end of time, which their children might have plowed and planted and harvested."<sup>22</sup>

It was no wonder that upon arrival in Canada, many *Russländer* immigrants reconnected to land as soon as possible. A sense of divine success often followed the bitter times. Farmer Nicholai Reimer of Yarrow, British Columbia, for example, wrote of successive failures in field peas and pole beans before he discovered that rhubarb thrived in cow-manure rich soil, that grafted fruit trees could blossom in British Columbia's temperate climate, and that rose bushes could be grown

for urban markets. He concluded by declaring his thankfulness that “God placed me into this vocation.”<sup>23</sup>

## Depression-Era Concerns with the Soil

If Mennonites seemed grateful for land, their sometimes reckless action on the land could bring a fierce reaction from it.<sup>24</sup> The Great Depression was a time of drought in North America leading to the “Dust Bowl” disaster in southern Alberta, Montana and especially western Kansas; it was a time when a view of the land as a divine gift was severely tested.

### **The Dust Bowl disaster had multifaceted consequences**

Personal writings from Kansas described the environmental disaster in various ways.

Mary Knackstadt Dyck, who with husband Henry settled with Hofnungsfeld Mennonites in far western Kansas early in the twentieth century, described the Dust Bowl in her diary in almost clinical terms: “17 February 1937 ... wind went to the north at night ... It’s now 9:30 no sign of letting up, it’s dark outside almost as night ... in the afternoon sun came out at 4:30 ... [still] the sky was full of dust [and] it was almost dark at 5 p.m. [when] the wind all let up.”<sup>25</sup>

Memoirs tell the story of the Dust Bowl with much more emotion. Garden City, Kansas resident Walter Friesen wrote of the blackest of stormy days, April 14, 1935, when sensing the coming of a massive storm, his family hurried home from the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren’s Sunday church service: “With a perceptible thud the full force of the storm slams into the house. Sand and gravel from the road pelt the house ... outside it is completely black.” Inside “dust infiltrates the house from everywhere. It is hard to breathe... We are all dark and soundless with awe ... [We] try to see, to call and to grope for each other until we are all connected.” Walter’s father prayed earnestly that “God in heaven ... save us. We are in your hands. If we die, take us to heaven. In the name of Jesus.” Meanwhile, Walter’s mother urgently furnished her children with wet rags to cover their faces; the children “take small comfort but recognize the desperation in her voice.” Only a full eight hours later did the storm subside.<sup>26</sup>

The consequence of this Dust Bowl disaster of the 1930s was multi-faceted. For many families it was time to get out. The families

of Helena and Jakob Koop, and Gerhard and Sara Doerksen, both of Haskell County, Kansas became widely known after a U.S. Department of Agriculture survey singled them out for being “diversified farm people – indeed, a most successful model of that declining agricultural order.”<sup>27</sup> But unbeknownst to rural officials, the extended Koop and Doerksen families fled soon after to the well-watered woodlands of southeastern Manitoba where simple, self-sufficient farming was much easier. Dry weather during the 1930s also led to the collapse of the once sizable Old Order Amish settlement in northern North Dakota, and sent its families migrating south and east to join relatives in less arid areas around the Great Lakes.<sup>28</sup>

Elsewhere Calvin Redekop’s Evangelical Mennonite Brethren family moved from “terrible fury” and unanswered prayer for rain in Montana to fertile Oregon. It was a move to the “West Coast, ‘where everything is green and it rains’” and where the family could “begin life anew on a little farm.”<sup>29</sup> Other families headed to California to work the fruit groves founded by Mennonites earlier in the century.<sup>30</sup> A visitor at the 1935 silver jubilee celebration of the GC Mennonite community in Upland, California noted later that he had long forgotten the “eloquent addresses” at the celebration, but would always remember the unlimited juice squeezed from oranges “trucked from groves ... nearby, a gift of a number of growers in the church.”<sup>31</sup>



Workers packing fruit at a Mennonite-owned fruit processing plant in Reedley, California, about 1950. The region’s agricultural possibilities, especially in citrus, grapes, peaches, and other fruit drew Mennonites in the early 1900s.

The reality of course was that orange orchards were out of reach of these immigrants: as a 1947 issue of *Mennonite Life* reported, it “requires men of no mean ability to bring a grove into production,” \$3,000 an acre for an orange grove, \$6,000 for a lemon grove.<sup>32</sup> The Dust Bowl migrants whose land had become worthless, saw the west coast as a reprieve from endless suffering, but acknowledged that the land had become unaffordable; some bitterly named it as the heartless tool of “American capitalist agriculture.”<sup>33</sup>

The depression-era breakdown of human/land relations in Mennonite communities led to a deep concern about land stewardship,

### **The Depression led to a deep concern about land stewardship**

leading to a new commitment to soil conservation. Environmental experts

and strong-willed leaders spoke out within the wider Mennonite community. A. D. Stoesz, a well-known University of Minnesota-trained botanist, wrote about “Mennonites and Soil Conservation,” arguing in Mennonite periodicals that “the soil is the life blood of any nation.” He advocated that Mennonite farmers should establish Soil Conservation Districts, tap available state funds for soil replenishment and create conservation plans.<sup>34</sup> A 1949 article by Stoesz in *Mennonite Life* featured photographs of Mennonites in action: one depicted “tree planting on steep slopes” on the J. J. R. Classen farm near Beatrice, Nebraska; another showed contour strips on the George B. Neufeld farm at Mountain Lake, Minnesota; a third portrayed a mix of sweet clover and oats on the A. H. Klassen farm in Whitewater, Kansas; a fourth illustrated grass planting into old alfalfa on the John M. Tschetter farm in Huron, South Dakota.<sup>35</sup>

There were similar efforts in Canada. In Manitoba J. J. Siemens of Altona proposed a round of far-reaching agricultural reforms, based on his favorite scripture: “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” Exclaiming that “we must learn how to learn and let learning stop only when life stops,” Siemens embarked on a crusade to discover suitable new plants to replace the old mainstay of soil-exhausting, market-driven wheat production.<sup>36</sup> Even as church leaders warned against the dangers of socialism, Siemens prophetically helped establish the Rhineland Consumers’ Co-operative, a model borrowed from outside the Mennonite community that would regenerate its economy.

Other accounts suggested a broad new concern with soil conservation on the eastern side of the continent. Unusual reports garnered special interest. A 1943 government study of Amish and Old Order Mennonites who farmed the limestone plains of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania lauded them for staying on the land, but also for acquiring additional lands from Lutheran and Reformed neighbors. The report credited the Anabaptist farmers' nineteenth century ancestors for developing a legacy as "small-farm-minded, avoiding plantations and large commercial farms ... and slavery completely." Now in the twentieth century, the Mennonites were resisting high school education, opting instead for an "agrarian philosophy" and "superior farming methods" that emphasized restoration of soil fertility. The result of this act of soil restoration was a doubling of land prices in six years, rising to \$500 an acre.<sup>37</sup>

In 1948 another report described the Mennonite miracle at the Warwick River plantation in Virginia's Southeastern Peninsula region. Here land, which was worn out, infertile tobacco land, was fetching \$1000 an acre. The reason was that Mennonite farmers, through hard work, lime and manure applications, deep plowing of clover and crop



Bernard F. Ensz of Beatrice, Nebraska, was recognized in 1938 by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service for his exemplary contour farming methods that reduced soil erosion and increased harvests. Ensz's contour fields yielded 13.6 bushels per acre more than his corn planted in conventional straight rows.

rotation, had restored the land's organic matter and turned it into a edenic place of orchards and green meadows with dairy cows of fine pedigree. According to the report, the farmers had invested little

capital, but given their common faith commitment they cooperated in exemplary ways. Most important was their belief that household-based farming, on small acreages, would eventually bring the mined soils back to fertility and production. Their efforts had even turned stinky tide-water streams into fish-spawning brooks where youth now fished, sailed and picnicked.<sup>38</sup>

Similar accounts praised Ohio's GC and MC communities. Pastor Bill Stauffer of the Sugarcreek Mennonite Church in Tuscarawas County, Ohio was especially lauded for his efforts at soil reclamation. In fact he preached on the "American sin of soil erosion." But he also purchased an old, now infertile 120 acre farm, overgrown with wild plants and shrubs and restored it to productivity by contouring the sloping fields and adding lime and natural fertilizers. He also built a pond with check dams stocked with his favorite fish, bass and blue gills. His concern was that "we Mennonites are in danger of losing one of our richest traditions, farming as a way of life" with young people who "don't want to farm" but only wish to "make money." So successful was Stauffer's pitch that in time the Ohio Farm Bureau hired him as an advocate on farm issues.<sup>39</sup>

In a different program in 1950, Ohio's Putman and Allan County Mennonite churches met to deal with inflated land prices of \$300-\$400 per acre. These prices, the result of "outsiders" encroaching on traditional Mennonite lands, had made it almost impossible for the youth to purchase land. As a result the Putman and Allan churches established an inter-congregational Mennonite Brotherhood Aid Association to help young families with housing, obtaining an education and "getting a start in farming." To meet its objectives, the Association asked all Mennonites wishing to sell land and all Mennonite youth planning to get married and in need of a farm to inform them.<sup>40</sup> Land was not going to pass on to the next generation without some assistance.

### **Post-war Colonization Programs**

Mennonites at mid-century not only defended their lands, they also developed an aggressive program of land acquisition and rigorously praised farm life over city living. During the 1940s, for example, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* published a number of pieces that highlighted a community approach to rural problems. An essay by historian and social ethicist Guy F. Hershberger in

1940, "Maintaining the Mennonite Rural Community," openly criticized urban life and venerated the rural. Hershberger asked "how can the Mennonite Church keep her primary group intimacy?" His answer was simple, "by keeping the church rooted in the rural soil." In his calculation, the soil was a metaphor for primary relationships. Here "a small group of people who live day by day in close association" could keep "selfish, lustful drives" in check; here they could fully develop "ideals of love, honesty, kindness and humility" and find relationships of good quality that are "intimate and personal."<sup>41</sup>

The fact was that by the mid-twentieth century agriculture no longer guaranteed a simple life. North American farms underwent fundamental changes after the Second World War. These included a number of unprecedented developments: mechanization now included electric and hydraulic

**Mennonites at mid-century praised farm life over city living**

systems; scientific discoveries introduced vaccines and herbicides; intrusive governments pushed for ever-increasing scales of economy; corporate vertical integration brought big business into the farmyard; and easy credit lured farmers to participate in full-scale farm commercialization. The U.S. agricultural historian John Shover dubbed the transformation as a time of the "Great Disjuncture," a sharp time of change when agriculture simply became "transmuted."<sup>42</sup>

In response to this rural revolution a new "Mennonite Community" movement arose. Its champion was sociologist Winfield Fretz who called Mennonite farmers to redouble efforts to keep the integrity of the farm community. Fretz hoped that mutual aid could be extended into "a rural virtue" and warned against close affiliations with government farm programs and a reliance on the welfare state. Such co-operation simply made it "difficult to maintain this sharp line of separation" between church and state; Mennonites must do things on their own.

The answer lay in what leaders called "colonization," the intentional founding of new Mennonite rural communities. To Fretz's mind, successful colonization was a multi-step process. First, religious values of non-conformity and harmonious community relations must replace values based on personal interest. Second, mutual aid must

change its aim from offering charity to encouraging rural economic cooperatives. And, colonization could not occur where Mennonites had lost their “we-feeling” and become secularized, or where sharp internal conflicts, lack of leadership or an “intelligent and concentrated Christianity” had failed to take root. Finally, Fretz was conscious that “colonization is difficult on soil that is infertile, or where rainfall is inadequate..., or where the vagaries of weather are ... unpredictable.”<sup>43</sup> With Fretz and others, Mennonite leaders were taking on new roles, encouraging farmers to maintain a close relationship with the environment.

If the mid-century agricultural revolution drove thousands of Mennonite farm families into towns and cities, ideas of colonization sent many other thousands into marginal and even uncharted lands throughout North America. In each of these places Mennonites cleared new land or took over failing farms. Many of these places were supported by local cooperatives and mutual aid societies, and all featured churches that extolled the virtues of rural existence.

For members of the large (Old) Mennonite Church, colonization was linked to evangelism. The group’s periodical for the Indiana and Michigan district was unambiguously titled the *Rural Evangel*, and its articles promoted rural colonization as the form of church extension work and home mission that was best suited to Mennonite culture and understanding of the gospel. During the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, hundreds of new rural congregations began under (Old) Mennonite



Mennonite farmers at Grassy Lake, Alberta at harvest in the 1950s, unloading their crop from their combine harvester into a truck. This Mennonite Brethren community was founded in 1926, a time when Mennonite farm families throughout North America were still searching for new opportunities to farm, often on marginal lands. During the 1950s most Mennonite farmers either modernized their farms by investing in new machinery, such as depicted in this photo, or they left the farm and moved into towns and cities.



auspices, in communities from Arkansas and Appalachia to northern Michigan and Alberta's Peace River Valley.<sup>44</sup>

Conservative Canadian Mennonites in the 1940s also embarked on colonization during these years, but were more concerned with preserving the church as a way of life than with establishing new settlements as beacons to attract the unsaved. Scanning the environment for new possibilities

### **Canadians at mid-century looked both southward and northward**

they looked far southward, appraising the Mennonite migrants of the 1920s who had moved to Mexico and struggled to survive the difficult 1930s, only to blossom in the 40s.

Some voices from the United States roundly criticized the Canadians in the south. Historian Harold S. Bender, for example, denounced the Old Colonists' intentional poverty and the rejection of rubber tires on tractors, electricity and cars as a form of "extreme introversion, regression and degeneration."<sup>45</sup> Others criticized their cultivation practices on fragile soils that led to irreparable erosion.<sup>46</sup> But historian Cornelius Krahn marvelled at the Old Colony Mennonites' ability to survive in northern Mexico and their successful cheese, oat and bean-producing agriculture and simple ways of life reminded him of Psalm 125:2: "as the mountains are round Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people."<sup>47</sup>

These virtues attracted about 2,500 Manitoba as well as some Saskatchewan Mennonites southward after the Second World War: about 600 Kleine Gemeinde and 250 Old Colony Mennonites settled in Chihuahua state and about 1,500 Chortitzer and Bergthaler Mennonites located in the rainforest of East Paraguay. Heading to Mexico offered an implicit rebuke to the technological advances in North America that helped commercial farmers succeed, but impeded the ways of the humble husbandman.

In his response to a local newspaper's enquiry in November 1948, Old Colony Bishop Johann M. Loepky of Osler, Saskatchewan, leading a small group of 25 families to settle at Los Jagueyes, Chihuahua, noted "the drought in Saskatchewan," but more importantly, "as old-fashioned Mennonites" he hoped his group could live undisturbed "in their way of life," one consisting of simplicity. "In western Chihuahua," he said in the simplest of terms, "two cows keep an average

family well supplied with the necessities of life.”<sup>48</sup> The simple rural life was a condition for true faith according to Loeppky.

Other Canadians at mid-century looked not southward but northward. Their gaze turned as far north as the boreal forest of La Crete, Alberta, just 150 kilometers (100 miles) south of Canada’s Northwest Territories boundary. The community had been founded in 1932 by a vanguard of three Old Colony Mennonite families from Saskatchewan, searching for land and isolation from an intrusive world and government.<sup>49</sup> During the 1950s and 60s many other conservative families joined them. Farming at the 58th latitude was possible because of the fertile silt and clay belt in the northern forest and the 18 hours of daily sunshine during the months of June and July.



La Crete Landing, 1943, near the Peace River in northern Alberta, the world’s most northerly Mennonite farm community. The boarded building is an early store owned by a Mennonite settler, David Dyck.

Indeed, during the late 1970s and 80s a continued high birth rate among conservative Mennonites compelled them to clear ever more forest. Farmer Martin Wieler noted in a 1976 application to government officials to turn forest into farmland that “if a hundred sections opened up ... there’d be applicants for all of them.” Another applicant noted his hope “to teach our children the value of farming and a life of farm satisfaction and the love for the land.” Ironically, between

1982 and 1986 this “love for land” turned into a massive forest-clearing project of about 10,000 acres per year.<sup>50</sup>

Other northern settlements were founded in British Columbia and Manitoba. In British Columbia, an Old Colony Mennonite farm settlement had been established between 1940 and 1943 in forests near Burns Lake.<sup>51</sup> By strange coincidence this “isolated” settlement was founded with aid from two provincial governments: Saskatchewan wished to help “distressed families” who had farming experience and “pioneering qualities,” and British Columbia was “desirous of increasing its northern population.”

During the 1950s and 60s other conservative Mennonites sought government land in neighboring districts to give their large families a chance to farm.<sup>52</sup> In Manitoba between 1948 and 1952 the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) began an active colonization program in western Manitoba as well as in the province’s north central Interlake area, tucked between the massive inland Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg, in parkland near Arborg and Riverton.<sup>53</sup> They debated the virtues of moving from established Mennonite communities; some argued that Christians were like coal, when spread out in the wider world they lost their glow, while others argued that they were like manure, useful only when spread out.

The debate was resolved when the idea of “colonization” seemed to answer both sets of concern: Mennonites could spread out and could do so in congregations, with enough critical mass to maintain their identities. In line with this thinking, several hundred southern Manitoba EMC people congregated in regions once dominated by Icelanders, Ukrainians and British Canadians in Manitoba’s Interlake district. There these new EMC communities drew in their Kliene Gemeinde Mennonite relatives who were returning to Canada from Chihuahua, Mexico.<sup>54</sup>

Groups in the United States were also on the outlook for new sources of land at mid-century. Unlike settlements on marginal soils in the early part of the century, many of these new settlements were on existing farmland. During the years of the First World War, for example, many Mennonite Brethren (MB) and Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman) farm families had unsuccessfully attempted to settle a section of western

**Many new settlements in the U.S. were on existing farmland**

Texas. Specifically they had sought to turn a corner of R.C. Rawling's massive, semi-arid, three million-acre ranch into a wheat farm community.<sup>55</sup>

Then in the 1970s another settlement scheme surfaced when hundreds of conservative Canadian-descendent Mennonites from Mexico arrived near Seminole, Texas, having been duped into purchasing infertile land and into believing that simple land possession could lead to United States citizenship. In 1979, in a remarkable act of compassion, Texas senator Lloyd Bentsen introduced a bill in the United States Senate to grant citizenship to 683 specifically-named Low German-speaking Mennonites from Mexico. The bill would not save most of them from farm bankruptcy, but it allowed them to move into towns and take up manual labor.<sup>56</sup> The plan for most of the Mexico Mennonites to farm in Texas failed, but it revealed an abiding and specific vision of Christian community.

More successful colonization schemes occurred in other parts of the United States. The Hutterite people, for example, were especially successful as they constantly pooled resources to found new colonies. Jamesville Colony in North Dakota, for example, was established as a daughter colony by Canadian Hutterites in 1937; in turn, Jamesville Hutterites founded new colonies in 1944, 1955 and 1970. According to one study, the process of dividing Hutterite colonies was simple enough as leaders took "age and family size into consideration so that the new community [was] similar in population structure and technical ability as the mother colony." This strategy, along with the ready acceptance of technological innovation in order to secure complete self sufficiency, worked to secure their inordinate degree of success as an agricultural people.<sup>57</sup>

In the 1960s and 70s Conservative Conference Mennonites and Amish in the United States also engaged in successful colonization schemes. They did so by expanding beyond traditional Anabaptist areas onto farmland deemed unprofitable by mainstream American farmers. Amish farm families from Iowa, for example, established a community in the 1960s near Vilonia, Arkansas after facing the problem of expensive land and high land taxes. Bishop Levi Bontrager recalled later how the Amish had discovered cheap lands in Arkansas by reading real estate brochures. The real estate agents remembered that when Amish delegates visited the state they revealed "a keen

sense of discrimination for good land.” Eventually the Amish settlement succeeded even though the Arkansas land was worn-out former cotton fields. Their Amish strategy followed a proven formula: replenish the soil with the application of lime, manure and plowed under clover.<sup>58</sup>



An Old Order Mennonite farmstead in Waterloo County, Ontario, is home to several generations who live and work together. Additions made to the house accommodate grandparents or the newly married.

In 1976 conservative Weaverland Conference Mennonites from Pennsylvania employed a similar strategy of settling outside familiar territory as they moved to sparsely populated regions of New York State, just south of Lake Ontario. These colonists, like others, knew that farming could “support their religious and social values.” As one minister stated, “our whole way of life depends on it... In Pennsylvania only 5 percent of the church is still farming. By coming to New York nearly all members have been able to get back into agriculture.” The plan of land acquisition was straight forward enough: purchase farms from dairy farmers who were going bankrupt and make the farms succeed by living simply. As one of the Weaverland colonists stated, “it’s not the so-called high cost of living, but the cost of living high” that poses problems for modern farm: “we keep things simple, that’s the key.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Technology and Persistent “Anabaptist” Values**

The availability of land was only one concern for Mennonites committed to agriculture; the other was modernization itself. The upheaval in

the countryside during the 1950s – with its new technologies, science, government intervention, and farm commercialization – was not only met by strong and prophetic voices, but by strong commitment to farming across the Mennonite community. The most obvious sign of this dedication was a 1975 statistic that showed Mennonites in North America as a disproportionately “rural” people, with as many as 33.6 percent of Mennonites from the most progressive churches still living on farms at a time when only 5 percent of the general population in the United States and only 6 percent in Canada did so.<sup>60</sup> Land may no longer have provided a geography for the “Kingdom of God,” the territory for a closely-knit congregational life, but it retained a sacredness in other ways. In general terms farmers valued the idea of bequeathing children with land, they spoke of land as a blessing from God and they frowned on increasing their land base for the singular sake of profit.<sup>61</sup>

During the 1970s and 80s, several studies of modern Mennonite farms pointed to more specific “Mennonite” characteristics of agriculture. One work compared the 1971 farm culture of Manitoba’s historic communities of the East Reserve (Hanover municipality) with that of the West Reserve (Stanley and Rhineland municipalities). It described how the East Reserve’s proximity to Winnipeg allowed it to play host to a densely populated network of dairy, hog and poultry farms, while the West Reserve’s fertile soils encouraged oil seed production and the growing of sugar beets.

These differences, however, veiled a common family-oriented strategy reflecting the Mennonites’ larger-than-average families (52 percent of Mennonite families had three or more children, compared to only 37 percent of their non-Mennonite neighbors). The consequence was that East Reserve Mennonite farms were worked with exceptional intensity: smaller-than-average in size for their region, but more quick to adopt technologies and build modern facilities that guaranteed more efficient production. On the West Reserve, Mennonite farmers readily adopted labor-intensive crops such as sunflowers, potatoes and sugar beets, especially when compared to their non-Mennonite neighbors who tended to produce less intensive flax and rapeseed (Canola) crops.<sup>62</sup> It was not

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what Mennonites grew that distinguished them, it was the approach they took to the land.

A Kansas study of almost 500 GC and MB Mennonite households in Marion, McPherson and Harvey counties during the 1980s also reported on specific "Mennonite Values and Farming Practice." Those values included accountability among neighbors, cohesive community networks, a commitment to generational succession, sustainable agriculture, and a check on limitless growth. The study revealed that in many ways Mennonites managed their land in similar fashion to other Kansas farmers: they listened to county agents for advice and rarely brought a farm issue to the church.

Nevertheless, the Mennonites were distinctive in other ways: they infrequently rented extra land to rationalize the use of large equipment and other technology and they resonated strongly with the "Mennonite Statement on Farming" agreed on in November 1984 by a group of family farmers who gathered at Laurelville Mennonite Church Centre in western Pennsylvania. The Laurelville statement called for a separation from mainstream America, idealized farming as "a commitment to obedience, faith and simplicity," and committed itself to the very existence of the family farm. The statement further called Mennonites to be "responsible stewards of the land," and saw in the conservation of "natural and other resources ... the basis of good agricultural practices." Most importantly it heralded "farming ... as a way of life as opposed to just a business."<sup>63</sup> The Laurelville group may have been small, but their articulation of farm values seemed to reflect the viewpoints of a much wider community.

Compared to the Old Order groups, of course, these progressive Mennonites had softened their religiously-conditioned farm approaches. This tendency was especially apparent as mainstream media and scholars praised the stubborn and "exceptional" anti-modernity of Old Order groups such as the Amish in the United States and Canada.<sup>64</sup> John A. Hostetler's 1963 best seller, *Amish Society*, a standard account of Amish agriculture, noted that "soil has for the Amish a spiritual significance," directing them in similar fashion to Adam and Eve "to keep the garden, protecting it from harm through the use of [their] labor and oversight" and "looking after it on behalf of God."<sup>65</sup>



During the second half of the twentieth century Amish farmers, with few exceptions, rejected tractors and extensive mechanization in favor of horse-drawn equipment and small-scale farms

Personal accounts echoed this harmony between the Amish and the land. Amish Bishop David Kline's *Great Possessions* (1990) was strongly endorsed by national newspapers, and in particular by the renowned environmental advocate Wendell Berry, who described the Amish approach as a "kind of farming that has been proven to preserve communities and land." Kline himself spoke of a chemical-less "rotation of our field crops which in eastern Ohio works so well it's seldom questioned." His recipe for a thriving rural enterprise was a corn-oats-wheat-legume rotation with no more than horse hoof compaction on the soil. He envisaged a sensuous agriculture, featuring the rich aroma of newly turned soil, exploding with "changing colors and designs," and filled with the sounds of the "bobolink, the meadowlark and the vesper sparrow in the twilight." This particular approach to farming could "preserve communities" and ensure that "land is ecologically and spiritually sound..."<sup>66</sup>

Old Order Mennonites also received laudatory notes. One study from the early 1970s documented Old Order Mennonites near the southeastern Pennsylvania community of Kutztown, Berks County. At the time 46 of 56 household heads were farming. Although tobacco was still the main cash crop, all families had their fattening pens for hogs and beef, and a dairy stall for one or two cows. Two factors in particular singled out the Old Order Mennonite farms from their



neighbors: their farms were below-average in size, 74 acres to the county average of 123 acres, and they had a firm commitment to placing children on farms of their own. The small farms and large families worked in concert to enable farms to function without modern machinery or chemicals. Thus all tasks – steam killing weeds, planting seedlings, hoeing and topping, picking tobacco, drying and turning the harvested leaves, and finally baling – were done by hand or horse-drawn power.

Strict social boundary control and social equality marked other consequences of anti-modernity. As one member noted, generally “we don’t know who is really rich and who is really poor unless we live [as] close neighbors.” Even the bishop obtained his authority only as one chosen by the “Holy Spirit” and “by virtue of his farming occupation.” As another member put it: “there are much more important things to talk about than how much I have; I can go so quick ... so why feel big about it?”<sup>67</sup>

Other studies more specifically emphasized the spiritual quality of Old Order farms. One argued that farming for the Old Orders was nothing less than the guarantee of spiritual humility. Indeed, the art that some produced suggested that they thought of farming as a “spiritual state of blessedness,” a *Gottseiligkeit*, and that they saw their farmsteads as a spiritual haven in a hostile world.<sup>68</sup> In 1979 Old Order Mennonite farmer Isaac Horst of Ontario also highlighted landscape as a metaphor to explain the practices of Old Order life. Only outsiders, wrote Horst, were unable to see Old Order Mennonite “guidelines



Mennonite farm women selling chicken, eggs, and other goods at Southern Market, in the city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1941. Women’s market sales provided important income for farm households and represented vital connections between rural and urban worlds.

as a fence around the oasis"; indeed, those not able to appreciate the close-knit features of Old Order farm life feared "the close confines of its welcome greenery" and to their detriment demanded "the privilege to dash out into the burning desert" whenever they wished.<sup>69</sup> As Horst saw it, a simple rural life was imbued with a spiritual quality.

During the last third of the twentieth century Mennonite scholars, in particular, called on all Mennonite farmers to embrace this truth. In a groundbreaking anthology, *Creation and the Environment* (2000),

**Writers in the year  
2000 called for a more  
assertive Anabaptist  
environmental ethic**

a dozen Anabaptist scholars discussed the Mennonite stance on the issue of a sustainable natural world. In the introduction, editor Calvin Redekop recalled his boyhood in Montana's dust bowl, an

environmental condition resulting from "terrible sins committed by my parents' generation."<sup>70</sup> They had violated the Anabaptists' "unique ... philosophical and ethical position regarding the creation."<sup>71</sup>

Economists James Harder and Karen Klassen Harder argued more generally that "the drive for unrestrained economic growth itself had become the most important problem facing humanity."<sup>72</sup> Walter Klaassen was especially critical: "as far as I am aware, we [as Mennonites] have done *no* thinking about the resources of our tradition of nonviolence in the human war against mother nature" and even in history "it was the need to survive and not love of the land that produced the expertise and care of the land for which Mennonites became famous."<sup>73</sup>

Only a few writers came to the defence of Mennonite farmers, with Michael Yoder, for one, pointing out that "some modern Mennonite farmers" were "learning to reduce trips over the field, saving labor, fuel ... and soil tilth" or were employing zero tillage farming, thus increasing "crop residues left on the soil ... saving both soil and moisture."<sup>74</sup> Most writers echoed Redekop's criticism and Klaassen's call for a much more assertive "Anabaptist environmental ethic" that realized that "the kingdom of God means a redeemed earth."<sup>75</sup>

Many lay Mennonites seemed to agree with these scholars. One especially articulate call for the linkage of humility and peace was Mil Penner's *Section 27* (2002). After a career as the owner of a heavy equipment earth moving business, and following a frightening heart attack, Penner experienced an ecological epiphany. He confessed

his own part in environmentally damaging action, reflected on the Psalmist's place "beside the still waters" and warned against "making conquest the only value." He declared a connection between his commitment to "rebuild my spiritual life" and the idea that the "real meaning of dominion over the land meant stewardship and included restoration."<sup>76</sup> Mennonites may have strayed from environmental stewardship, but their Anabaptist "memory" could guide them back to the fold.

## **Conclusion**

Twentieth-century Mennonite farmers in North America made up a profoundly diverse faith group for they were scattered on disparate geographies and approached change with significantly different strategies. Despite their differences, however, they shared a particular relationship to the land. Old Order Mennonites and the Amish expressed a very clear culture of anti-modernity, informed by faith teachings on simplicity, humility and non-violence.

Similar principles, however, were echoed among progressive or modern Mennonites, albeit in a different tone. They cultivated a strong sense of community cohesiveness and saw in land a divine "promise," especially in the first half of the twentieth century. These ideas evolved into an expressed commitment to soil conservation and especially farm colonization in the middle decades. Finally a commitment to farm support networks and indeed to farming itself remained in place in the last decades of the twentieth century.

During a time when more modern Mennonites appeared to veer from "farming as a way of life," prophetic voices arose to remind them of the virtues of rural life. They outlined the moral benefits of farm life at mid-century and decried the loss of true Anabaptist values at the end of the century. Certainly Mennonites were not at every turn better environmental stewards than their non-Mennonite neighbors. Sometimes in fact their strong commitment to rural life – at La Crete, Alberta or Meade, Kansas – destroyed forests or the plowing of semi-arid land resulted in irreparable soil erosion.

Still, the highly diverse community of North American Mennonites approached land with a particular set of faith teachings that emphasized community life, humility in the face of natural forces and a degree of self-sufficiency. Historian Simon Schama has suggested that of all peoples of the past rooted in nature, the twentieth century Men-

nonite farmer's approach to the land was "built from a rich deposit of myths, memories and obsessions ... alive and well and all about [them]...."<sup>77</sup> It seemed that the disproportionate presence of Mennonites on the land in North America was infused with a common memory that reminded them of the ethos of humility and gratitude that had shaped an Anabaptist approach to land over the centuries.

# Mennonites in Town and City

*In 1936 Liese Pauls left her job at the home of Dr. R. H. MacDonald in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and returned to the countryside to marry. Her suitor was a widower, Rev. Heinrich Klaassen of the rural Eigenheim Mennonite Church, who evidently had no misgivings about finding his bride in the city. Indeed, Liese had proven herself a good Mennonite in the city. As one of hundreds of rural “girls” who had worked in Saskatoon to help her immigrant parents from the Soviet Union pay off the family’s Reiseschuld (travel debt) she had added to the Mennonites’ “reputation for being conscientious, modest and dependable workers.” She had also found a good moral anchoring at the city’s Mennonite Mädchenheim (girls’ home) where, on Thursday evenings, “maids’ day off,” she interacted with other young Mennonite women. They “chatted about the experience of the last week,” heard the girls’ home director J. J. Thiessen’s kindly German devotional, ate the Platz baked by Mrs. Thiessen, and sang by the piano. These young women also maintained close ties to their rural churches and communities, returning to them with newly discovered city etiquette, but also doing their part to attract rural Mennonite males to visit the city, to attend the weekly city choir practice, to date and to play “circle games” at a rented school. The city, according to Director Thiessen, was a safe place for Mennonites; his only counsel was, “go wherever you want to, but always go with Jesus,” the inference being that Jesus did not attend pool halls or the movies. Often, these young people married and joined a city church, the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church founded in 1927 or the General Conference (GC) congregation started three years later.<sup>1</sup>*

*Many other young Mennonites first came to the city not to work but with a specific mission. In the summer of 1950, for example, five young men, students at Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Virginia, piled into their late-model Studebaker sedan and headed into New York City. They were good*

*Pennsylvania and Virginia Mennonite boys – Roy Kreider, Paul Swarr, Aaron King, Eugene Souder, and Earl Witmer – who didn't look like they belonged in the city. But for five months their quartet, "Crusaders for Christ," served New York. With the words "Jesus Saves" painted on the back of the car, and two loudspeakers affixed to the car's roof, they set out to "sing and speak the message of salvation to New Yorkers." They sang in the Bronx, in Central Park, on Wall Street, and, on Saturday nights, even in Times Square. Other mission-minded Mennonites employed different methods. In 1950, for instance, two students from Bluffton College, Ohio, Joanna Bowen and Esther Berky, joined Ernest Goertzen of Bethel College, Kansas, in New York's East Harlem. Their focus was an African American neighborhood – an easy fit for Esther who had participated in "sit-ins" in Washington at the White House to fight segregation, but a more difficult one for Ernest who felt "like a shy Kansas farm boy in a big city." In any case, the threesome reached out to New Yorkers "on the street, on door steps, in vacant lots," ministering with a message of "spiritual discipline" to drug addicts, prostitutes, gang members, and children.<sup>2</sup>*

## **Mennonite Cityscapes**

These accounts of Mennonite youth in Saskatoon and in New York City introduce a fundamental aspect of Mennonite life in North America during the twentieth century, the challenge of the city. Although some North American Mennonites lived in towns and cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the vast majority were rural, people of farms and small villages. But this tendency towards rural life was fundamentally redefined during the course of the twentieth century as North American Mennonites joined the rest of the globe and in large numbers left the farms for urban worlds. For "80 per cent of humanity the Middle Ages ended suddenly in the 1950s," observed historian Eric Hobsbawm. As country folk looked to the city for work they were surprised with its "lasting transformation" on their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1930 and 1980 fully 80 percent of all American and Canadian farm families moved off the farm, and although Mennonites were late in coming to town and city, they came too. By 1972 fully a third of Mennonites in North America lived in places with populations of 2,500 or more, and two thirds no longer lived on farms. Mennonites, fresh from the farm, began to ask how their faith could be meaningful in these new urban settings. In the process their churches expanded

to include new people with deeper urban roots. For all of them, here was a new “emergent identity,” a reinvention of what it meant to be Mennonite.<sup>4</sup>

The new social reality of the city was stark. Urban Mennonite families dispersed each day, with men and women going their separate ways, before reconvening after the day’s work for supper. And most Mennonite breadwinners and children crossed lines of religion, class and race in new ways. The city also introduced them to industrial society. It rewarded individualism, not conformity; it demanded mastery of skill, not cooperation of spirit; it promised upward mobility, not communal harmony. Some urban Mennonites recalled their “innocent” farm pasts with deep nostalgia. Others felt relief that a rural parochialism marked a bygone era. Some accepted the city as a necessary evil to secure a livelihood and sought safety in familiar Mennonite-linked institutions or, in sociological parlance, within an “ethno-religious canopy.”



The Crusader Quartet – (left to right) Roy Kreider, Eugene Souder, Paul Swarr, and Aaron King – stand with Earl Witmer and his car, outfitted with loudspeakers, ready for a summer of street evangelism in New York City in 1950.

Many others saw in the city a godsend, a chance to re-embrace an urban “Anabaptist Vision,” a hopeful social critique abandoned 400 years earlier when Anabaptists fled such cities as Zurich and Antwerp for quiet country life. Others saw in the city an opportunity to

pursue a tradition-free, evangelical joyfulness. Yet others perceived the opportunity quite differently – a chance to leave the Mennonite fold entirely, to assimilate into the city, leave religion altogether or stay with Christianity but within a new denomination, sometimes a formal liturgical one, at other times one more charismatic or evangelistic. Whatever the motive, a new set of hybrid outlooks created a fragmented set of new Mennonites.

Adding to this fragmentation was the dispersion of Mennonites in cities across the continent. Relatively few entered the great North American megalopolises or the national capitals – New York, Toronto, Washington, Ottawa. True, individual Mennonites went into the large cities early as missions workers – Philadelphia (1866), Chicago (1893), Los Angeles (1909), Minneapolis (1909) – but when Mennonites considered the city as a place of residence, most preferred smaller places.

In Canada, Mennonites were especially drawn to the medium-sized regional cities. In 1981 Winnipeg, with a general population of almost 600,000, had the most Mennonites, about 19,000. This was followed by the smaller cities of Saskatoon and Kitchener-Waterloo, each with about 10,000 Mennonites, about the same number as lived in the large city of Vancouver. Even smaller cities like St. Catherines, Ontario and Abbotsford, British Columbia each had several thousand



Street scene of Rosthern, Saskatchewan around 1906. Rosthern became an important service center of central Saskatchewan Mennonites and home to Rosthern Junior College, a private Mennonite high school.



Mennonites, that is, as many Mennonites as lived in the larger cities of Calgary, Toronto and Edmonton.<sup>5</sup> But many Canadian Mennonites lived in towns: Steinbach, Altona and Winkler in Manitoba were predominantly “Mennonite” towns, and hundreds of others – Joliette, Leamington, Elmira, Rosthern, Swift Current, Coaldale, La Crete, Chilliwack, Yarrow, spread from Ontario to British Columbia – were linked to the Mennonite story.

In the United States, Mennonites were also usually scattered in the in-between places, in large towns and small cities, miles from America’s sprawling metropolises. In fact, although as many Canadian as American Mennonites lived on farms in 1970, a much higher percentage of Americans (18 percent compared to 8 percent) lived in small towns of under 2,500 people, while twice as many Canadians as Americans (34 percent versus 15 percent) lived in cities of more than 25,000.<sup>6</sup>

The towns of Newton, Kansas and Akron, Pennsylvania held few Mennonites per se, but set within rural Mennonite hinterlands they became the sites of Mennonite institutional headquarters. Other small cities and towns – Harrisonburg, Bluffton, Elkhart, Goshen, Hillsboro, Hesston, and Fresno, spread along the way from Virginia to California – held such distinctions too. In addition hundreds of other towns – Archbold, Millersville, Berne, Kalona, Freeman, Mountain Lake, Wichita, Henderson, Meno, Reedley, Dallas and many others – were Mennonite household names and created an imagined continental geography of Mennonite space.<sup>7</sup>

### **Routes into the City**

Mennonites took dramatically different routes into town and city. Usually they entered urban gates knowing they opened to paths of new ways of living. The newcomers marveled at the city’s strange energy. When Abraham Welk visited New York in 1893 he wrote that “I felt almost like the Queen of [Sheba] as she saw the wonders of Solomon ... and said, ‘I have not been told the half of all your wisdom.’” When David Harms visited Edmonton in 1909 he saw “a romantic city on the Saskatchewan River ... [with] so many interesting things and sights” that he confessed, not only the Lord but “the resourcefulness of man must also be greatly admired.”<sup>8</sup>

But urban life also gave Mennonites pause. According to historian Hans Werner, even small trade centers such as Winkler, Manitoba,

founded on the Pembina Branch of the Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1893, “represented danger to a people who wanted to be separate.”

**Some Mennonites  
claimed the possibility  
of being urban without  
losing Anabaptist values**

Winkler was a place where “Jewish merchants and German ... grain buyers” mediated “between the world of the market and the ... Mennonite village family.”<sup>9</sup> Railway towns

such as Jansen, Nebraska, home in 1910 to thirty-seven Mennonite families as well as to several saloons, a theatre, literary societies, and patriotic festivities, were seen as places of assimilation. Referring to Jansen, one observer wrote in 1908 that “it is sad to see so many who call themselves Mennonites ... no longer following the teachings of Jesus and Menno and in the process have done a great disservice to Christianity.”<sup>10</sup>

Many Mennonites saw the city as a place of moral pitfall, but many others claimed the possibility of being urban without losing Anabaptist values. In 1892 when Menno C. Cressman announced plans to open a dry goods store in Berlin, Ontario, he envisaged one without “fine, fancy and fashionable goods” of which “our church does not approve.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Samuel S. Wenger, the first lawyer in the (Old) Mennonite Church, avoided litigation, divorce proceedings, and the like, in favor of congenial business and probate law. In 1934 when Wenger, a member of the tradition-minded Lancaster Mennonite Conference, left school teaching to enroll in law school in Philadelphia, the influential Mennonite editor Daniel Kauffman, a friend of the Wenger family, warned that practicing law was “getting pretty close to the border.” Undeterred and convinced that his practice would be “Anabaptist,” Wenger opened his office in Lancaster City.<sup>12</sup>

Many others were drawn to the city with the idea of mission. Ann J. Allebach, the first North American Mennonite woman to be ordained, was attracted to the city, leaving Schwenksville, Pennsylvania for a suburb of New York City in 1893 at age 19 to teach. Then in 1907, as a Columbia University student she began assisting the poor in the Upper West Side of Manhattan under Presbyterian and Reformed auspices. In 1908 Susanna Redekop of Kirk, Colorado, who had worked as a teacher to help carry her large farm family through the storm of her father’s untimely death, felt compelled “to go and help in a city mission in Wisconsin.” Later she transferred to a Minneapolis

mission where she toiled “caring for suffering [families], children’s meetings, helping girls and women with problems of body and soul,” and always praising “the Lord for his leading.”<sup>13</sup>



Mennonite Brethren church workers Anna Thiessen and Mary Schroeder with a group of children at North End Chapel in Winnipeg sometime after Anna arrived on the scene in 1915. The Winnipeg “North End” consisted mostly of poor immigrants from Eastern Europe. The North End Chapel had been established in 1907 as an urban mission outreach by rural Mennonites from Winkler, Manitoba.

With time an increasing number of rural Mennonites ventured into strange towns and far away cities. It was a worrisome dispersion for many. Mennonite Brethren minister J. H. Voth wrote in 1926 that because of the “strong pull towards the cities ... we are losing our own brothers and sisters all over in Detroit, Lansing, Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis and other places where they are scattered.”<sup>14</sup> But those same families oftentimes became a beachhead for the MB urban congregation.

Nowhere was this more true than on the west coast. The first MB church in San Jose, California was founded in 1926 by several Mid-western Mennonite families who had moved there to work in fruit canneries. They described wage labor as work with “a taste of slavery” amidst rough and lewd co-workers. But, with the help of German-speaking ministers from Kansas, they also founded a congregation that grew to 300 by 1956. Similar circumstances spawned California’s Fresno MB Church in 1942. Its forty-seven charter members were migrants from the Midwest who had come west to work in the retail

or construction sectors.<sup>15</sup> With the establishment of the MB Pacific Bible Institute in 1944 and the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in 1955, membership in the Fresno congregation rose to 400.

Ambivalence towards the concept of an urban MB presence lingered. In 1942 MB missionary Jacob G. Thiessen in Vancouver wrote that he regretted “the influx of young men, and many families, attracted by available jobs in shipyards, sawmills, etc,” for they “gamble with the future of their children.” He hoped for the time “when none of our people can be found in Vancouver ... except for a few missionary companions.”<sup>16</sup> Still in 1953 the Pacific MB conference officially embraced a program to create “new indigenous churches in our rapidly expanding suburban area” in which “many of our MB young couples find themselves.”<sup>17</sup>

The scattered remnant within the large city was only one sign of urban Mennonite culture. Sometimes small groupings of Mennonites settled near cities, entering them each day for work, thus seeking livelihoods with minimal effect on old rural lifestyles. Olga Regehr recalled her girlhood in the 1930s in the “Chicken and Garden Village” in North Kildonan, Manitoba, just north of the city of Winnipeg. Here two Mennonite land agents had turned a large rural property into twenty-acre plots of land. Olga’s parents founded a small farm on one of the lots and here her mother managed the household and



Sisters-in-law Gertie (Klassen) Loewen and Elisabeth Loewen (later Dueck) from the rural Manitoba community of Blumenort spend a day shopping in Winnipeg in 1949. In the background is the famous Eaton’s department store, the basement of which became a meeting place for rural Mennonites.

the family's small chicken barn, while her father took the tram each day to work in the city's power plants. By 1938 ninety-two Mennonite households were at home in North Kildonan, a district quickly evolving into an important Winnipeg suburb. Following the Second World War, Mennonite refugees from Europe, and then hundreds more from Paraguay, settled in North Kildonan, which began to attain new status as a recognized urban Mennonite place.<sup>18</sup>

A similar "Mennonite" suburb, Martensville, arose just north of Saskatoon in 1953 after a Mennonite entrepreneur began dividing lots on the open prairie. Its residents had earlier left the Saskatchewan countryside, moved into Saskatoon and then, suffering "cultural shock" in the city, retreated to Martensville. Here parents could keep children

**Over time, Mennonite farm families moved to the city to embrace opportunities**

away from the city's worldliness, yet access city jobs. By 1968, 90 percent of Martensville's population were active Bergthaler and General Conference Mennonites, and almost all were wage laborers in Saskatoon. Their children usually dropped out of high school and followed their parents into unskilled jobs in the city.<sup>19</sup>

Most often, however, farm folks who could not or chose not to farm, moved directly into a nearby town. Unusual circumstances generated the move in the early part of the twentieth century for some Mennonites. Susannah Betzner Cressman sold her farm after her husband Ephraim died in 1911; "deep in grief," she moved to nearby Berlin (now Kitchener) to be with her daughters Laura and Florence, who were attending business college. Here, "Susannah threw herself into 'duty' by looking after her family and attending to her church and community."<sup>20</sup>

Over time, however, Mennonite farm families moved to the city simply to embrace economic and even cultural opportunity. Peter Dick, who arrived in Kitchener with his family in 1941, recalled that "the Chicopee farm was good ... but [we] felt that our children must have the best in school and a close relationship to the church."<sup>21</sup> Wife Anna in particular "loved the city – the sense of immediacy and convenience, the proximity to mother and sisters ... and a widening circle of friends, the vibrancy of church life with its varied activities."<sup>22</sup> As Peter saw it, the only social problem was the effort it took for the German-speaking, refugee Dick family to overcome the "barrier

between themselves and *die Hiesegen*," that is, neighbors who were "English and ... anybody who spoke English."<sup>23</sup>

If many rural Mennonites moved into towns near their farmsteads, many others moved to regional towns and cities farther afield. The history of the rural district of East Freeman, South Dakota, tells this story. In the years after the Second World War a number of elderly couples moved from rural East Freeman to nearby towns, returning to the old farmsteads regularly to help their adult children with farm chores.<sup>24</sup> Then during the 1960s and 70s another wave of Mennonites left East

**Many young Mennonites found that urban life threatened old faith ties**

Freeman; this time it was young people and their destination was the more distant regional city. Seeking education beyond the offerings of Freeman Junior

College or emboldened by national MCC programs for conscientious objectors, they departed for a dozen different towns and small cities in the Midwest – Sioux Falls, Beatrice, Hesston, Newton, Mountain Lake, Bluffton.

Many of these young Mennonites found that urban life threatened old faith ties. At least a third married non-Mennonites and no longer considered themselves to be Mennonite, and only about half eventually linked up with a Mennonite congregation. Some now looked upon rural East Freeman as "cliquish and gossipy" and "sheltered," a place in which social contacts "were almost all with Mennonite people." Others expressed nostalgia for the close-knit community and equated their own lives in the city with self-centeredness and materialism. These urban dwellers felt, in particular, that rural Mennonites were more supportive of programs such as Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) and Voluntary Service (VS).<sup>25</sup> Clearly, physical moves in some instances seemed to approximate cultural shift.

Often war-time conscientious objector (CO) service opened paths into larger cities, such as Indianapolis or Kansas City. Alternative service in city hospitals in particular initiated farm boys to urban ways, and many never left the city. COs helped spur on the long decade of urban church growth, 1956 to 1968, a surge discussed in the newsletter *The Mennonite Church in the City*.

In a representative case, Ben Janzen of Meade County, Kansas, went to Denver in 1952 as a CO, working as an orderly in St. Luke's General Hospital, while his wife Nancy Friesen, also of Meade,

worked as a ward clerk. Urban life was amenable; the young couple lived with several Kansas boys and felt welcomed at the First Mennonite Church. After Ben's CO term ended, they moved to Hutchinson, Kansas and then to Dinuba, California, each time attending a Mennonite church. In 1957 the couple considered returning to Meade County to try their hand at farming, but land was scarce and instead they chose to return to familiar Denver. At first Ben hauled farm products for a Mennonite firm, but eventually he certified in refrigeration maintenance. Meanwhile Nancy raised four suburban children and the family attended the dynamic Garden Park MB church. After many years the Janzens left Garden Park. Fearing a "cultural gap between the Mennonites and the average English speaker" and seeing the alternative GC church as "very liberal," they joined a nearby Baptist congregation in 1974.

Still Ben and Nancy cultivated a Mennonite identity that was becoming more common with urbanization. Ben remained a pacifist, having "too much Mennonite blood for the M1 rifle to ever be my best friend" and over time volunteered for MDS, purchased insurance from Mennonite Mutual Aid, and returned to Meade County for holidays, funerals and weddings, with the words, "let's go home."<sup>26</sup> Ben and Nancy had officially become members of a Baptist church, but at heart they remained Mennonites.

Increasingly young Mennonite families made for the North American city because their professions took them there. Stories abound of Mennonites who gained prominence in a chosen field of work, moved to the big city and assimilated into the wider world. But many other Mennonites succeeded materially without losing their Mennonite ties. Universities in both Canada and the United States, for example, were home to scholars with membership in Mennonite churches.

**Universities in both countries were home to Mennonite scholars**

Harvard University, for example, drew a number of Mennonite scholars of national prominence to pursue brilliant careers in such fields as astronomy, theology, philosophy, music, physics, medicine and law. In 1962 they also founded the Mennonite Congregation of Boston. As a house-church it intentionally sought to be liberal, engaging and inclusive. Erwin Hiebert, a Harvard scientist, recalled that the church's founders were "all ... interested in intellectual matters, in

music, in politics." Elfrieda Franz Hiebert, a musician, remembered fondly that "we were able to carve out our own theological stance" in the congregation and that "no one was going to judge us."<sup>27</sup> True, the group struggled "to discover and preserve the relevance of their heritage," especially during the Vietnam War. But they were committed to "raise issues and speak freely as Mennonites." They read widely – from Menno Simons to John Howard Yoder – to inform their debates on issues "relevant in Boston ... women's liberation, abortion [and] civil rights."<sup>28</sup>

Lendrum MB church in Edmonton was a parallel urban church in Canada. Founded in 1956 by University of Alberta students from the rural district of Coaldale and led by a youthful Peter Bargaen, the congregation insisted on a worldview that embraced the city. Bargaen recalled how he raised concern among rural elders by insisting that an old "sacred-secular distinction [was] not supported in scripture" and arguing that if God was that "dimension which enters into every sphere of the Christian life ... there is nothing secular for the Christian."<sup>29</sup> Certainly, Mennonitism survived a transplantation to the city, but not without alteration.

In some cities the rise of an intricate network of Mennonite institutions resulted in an "institutional completeness" that made the city seem culturally safe. Among such urban centers was North Newton, Kansas, incorporated as a town in 1935 to support the Bethel College campus. Newton and North Newton soon became GC Mennonite hubs, home to the U.S. headquarters of the GC Mennonite branch, its Faith and Life Press, the Bethel Deaconess Hospital and Home for Aged, an MCC regional office, all of which were located in what has been described as "the largest Mennonite concentration in the United States west of the Mississippi River."<sup>30</sup>

Other urban Mennonite concentrations rose within the context of multiple Mennonite denominations. In 1955 the city of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, for example, had seven Mennonite churches, two private high schools, a book store and a branch of the Mennonite Publishing House, all set within Waterloo County, "one of the largest compact urban-rural Mennonite communities in North America."<sup>31</sup>

Of all North American cities, Winnipeg was perhaps the most "Mennonite," home by 1985 to a constellation of Mennonite institutions: "two colleges, two high schools, MCC headquarters for Canada, a hospital, many homes for the elderly, several credit unions, 44



churches, six newspapers, several musical and drama societies, two national conference offices (GC and MB), three Mennonite archives and scores of Mennonite businesses and companies.<sup>32</sup> And they were all within an hour or two of a large concentration of Mennonites in southern Manitoba. By the 1980s a vibrant Mennonite life had become rooted in North American cities.

### **Change in the City**

The North American city catapulted Mennonites into an “emergent” set of identities, dynamic and kaleidoscopic in nature. Becoming urban was not simply a matter of creating city networks for newcomers from the countryside. The city presented Mennonites with new fundamental choices and concerns. Of special importance were issues of race, ethnicity, class and gender.



The sign at Gladstone Mennonite Church in Cleveland, Ohio announced that this urban congregation was “Biblical, Interracial, Evangelical.” Begun as a Sunday school mission in 1948, the building was erected in 1953. By 1960 the entire Gladstone neighborhood had been leveled as part of an urban renewal program, which dispersed lower-income and minority populated sections of the city. Some Gladstone members became involved in Lee Heights Community Church, a Mennonite-affiliated congregation in another section of Cleveland.

The question of race was foremost among those social pressures that led the Mennonites to change. European-descended Mennonites had encountered racialized populations throughout North America,

including African Americans in Virginia and Pennsylvania, Aboriginal Canadians in Saskatchewan, Asian North Americans in British Columbia, Latinos in south Texas, and other groups in many other places. Often acts of overt racism marked these relationships. In their own ways Mennonite churches facilitated racial segregation in Virginia and California, while Mennonite farmers took advantage of dislocated Japanese Canadians in British Columbia and Latino migrants in California. Mission programs, and especially city-based initiatives, attempted to make amends, though these efforts were rarely free of paternalism.<sup>33</sup>

After 1949 a half dozen Mennonite churches had been started in Harlem and the Bronx, attracting African-American residents and Puerto Rican nationals, but less quickly promoting such folk into leadership. In 1966, when a

**The question of race was foremost among the social pressures that led Mennonites to change**

New York City Mennonite Administrative Council met for the first time, only one of its ten members, Richard Pannell, an African American, was

a native New Yorker.<sup>34</sup> During the 1970s the situation began to change as leadership moved into local hands. In 1978, for example, Michael Banks, who had spent his boyhood in the Bronx, supported the Black Power movement, fought in the Vietnam War, and attended a Nation of Islam mosque, “experienced a dramatic conversion” and joined Burnside Mennonite Church. Together with his wife Addie, they led an after-school program, initiated an evangelistic program with an aim to turn New York “block by block for Christ,” and eventually took over the leadership of the church.<sup>35</sup>

The route to racial integration in the city was arduous. Mennonites had been unsure of the best approach to dealing with racism when it became a prominent issue during the middle decades of the century. In Los Angeles, for example, MB leader A. W. Friesen noted in 1945 that it was “difficult to harmonize the many nationalities that attend[ed]” City Terrace mission. With an increasing number of “colored people” he wrote, “many of the white people object[ed] and [kept] their children at home.” The best temporary solution in 1947 seemed to be “separate Sunday School and vacation Bible schools for the white and ‘colored’ children.”<sup>36</sup>

During the 1960s Mennonite churches in and around Chicago experienced acutely the rising tension associated with integration

and economic power. Pastor Larry Voth had encouraged an “open door policy” at Community Mennonite Church in the Chicago suburb of Markham, nudging parishioners to welcome African-Americans who had begun moving into the neighborhood over the objections of white property owners. But the congregation’s 1963 Christmas pageant created uproar when its live nativity featured an interracial holy family. The chairman of the church board resigned and left the church, as did some other white members.

Not many miles away Woodlawn Mennonite Church had taken a more active approach to neighborhood civil rights issues, hosting and marching with Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson. In fact, after 1966 Woodlawn’s pastor was Curtis Burrell, a black man from St. Louis who had attended Ontario Mennonite Bible Institute, Hesston and Goshen colleges, and Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and who had married a woman from an old-line Mennonite family. At first GC Mennonite publications celebrated Burrell, holding him up as an example of Mennonite progress on racial issues. But as he began to promote “black self-determination” and told the national GC assembly in 1968 that “The black man is better equipped [than white people] to lead mankind morally,” support cooled. Eventually, the conference cut off his salary and in 1971 Woodlawn closed.<sup>37</sup>

Other instances of racial integration seemed easier. After the Vietnam War, in particular, numerous Asian Mennonite congregations – Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Lao, and Hmong – emerged. Both GC and MB Asian Mennonite churches were founded in various cities. Unlike African-American churches, the Asian churches often took the name “Mennonite” as a way of integrating into North American society.

Hmong immigrants in St. Catherines, Ontario, for instance, were said to have become Mennonites out of profound gratitude to their Mennonite hosts and sponsors. They also saw the Mennonite “emphasis on community solidarity, family values ... and mutual aid” as compatible with their traditional Laotian outlook and values.<sup>38</sup> Kuaying Teng, pastor of the Lao Mennonite Church in St. Catherines, put it bluntly: “for many [refugee] people, their sponsors were Mennonite, so they were Mennonite” even though “30 percent of the lay leaders [didn’t] know what a Mennonite” was.<sup>39</sup>

Chinese Mennonites in several cities similarly emphasized evangelical outreach over traditional Mennonite values. Rev. Enoch Wong of Vancouver, sometimes said to be the “pope of the Chinese Mennonite

Brethren churches” in British Columbia, was described in 2005 as a “godly” man who was an especially committed evangelical, a “man with a frail back and big smile [who] has won so many hearts to Christ.”<sup>40</sup>



Prominent MB leaders Enoch Wong (Wong Cheung Ho) and Grace Wong (Wong Chan Wing Han) at a retirement celebration in 2005 honoring their many years of church work. For more than a quarter century, they had pioneered Cantonese, Mandarin, and English ministries, principally in British Columbia, but also in Venezuela.

Related to the question of racial boundaries was a second concern, that of ethnicity. As time passed, urban churches also attracted significant numbers of white members from non-Mennonite backgrounds. Until urbanization occurred, ethno-religious barriers, undergirded by custom and dialect, had discouraged even white non-Mennonites from considering joining Mennonite churches. But city living quickened linguistic assimilation and spurred congregations to become more open to newcomers. Increasingly, non-Mennonite Canadian and American middle-class families were drawn to neighborhood Mennonite churches, sometimes for their historic peace stance, sometimes for old fashioned biblicism, sometimes because of geographic proximity.

In many regions of North America the MB congregations led the way to bridging old, ethnic boundaries. In Winnipeg, for example, the loss of the German language among Soviet Mennonites who immigrated during the 1920s and 1940s opened up congregations to non-Mennonites. By the 1950s the MB youth in Winnipeg had adopted English as the language of “piety and mission,” and by the 1960s such churches as the Elmwood MB in Winnipeg faced pressure to create two worship services, one in German for the elderly members and another in English so that “community people could be integrated into” the congregation.<sup>41</sup> Throughout Canada such strategies worked, attracting non-Mennonites from the neighborhood. By 1986, 55 percent of urban MB members were of non-German, Swiss or Dutch descent.

At the other end of the language spectrum, the willingness of Dutch-Russian MBs to master French and begin mission efforts in Quebec in 1961 created a network of French-Canadian Mennonite churches in and around Montréal. The resulting churches, bearing variations of the name, *Église des Frères Mennonites*, made for a distinctive North American phenomenon. Jean Raymond Thérét, once a young agnostic, joined the MB church in St. Thérèse after he was attracted to its evangelistic message, “the talk about Jesus.” But he was especially “impressed by the change in their lives; they had a sense that they knew God.” Indeed, he discovered that “the ‘Mennonite’ in Mennonite Brethren put them on the left side of evangelicals” in Quebec and led to an “emphasis on community, justice, relief work, peace work.” In time Thérét became an associate pastor and began to identify as an Anabaptist, one who had “something to say to our society” with a socially balanced theology that did “not seek growth for the sake of growth.”<sup>42</sup>

Class division was a third significant issue for Mennonites in twentieth century North American towns and cities. Rural Mennonites had always had their rich and their poor, but urban life changed the notion of class in fundamental ways. Class divisions seemed to have an impact on church membership, as both the very rich and the very poor often fell away from congregational life. Stories abound of wealthy former-Mennonites: of the Kaufmanns of Kitchener-Waterloo whose rubber factory employed thousands and whose company officials were said to counsel employees on the use of condoms; of the Leiseys of Cleveland who became rich from brewing beer and who lived in a 26-room mansion; of the Philadelphia Bechtels whose construction company built Pennsylvania’s state capitol, lavish homes for the titans of industry, and a wide assortment of university halls, including Harvard’s Weidner Library. In historian James Juhnke’s words, these folks, having “moved to high places in the community or nation ... were ... the *Abgefallene* (the fallen-off) – persons who had left the Mennonite ways.”<sup>43</sup>

**Class division was also a significant issue for Mennonites**

But the very poorest could leave the fold as well, driven by a sense that the church simply did not address their concerns. The Low German-speaking Mennonites from Mexico working as factory or commercial farm workers and living in small towns in southern Ontario, for example, often dissociated themselves from formal congregational

life.<sup>44</sup> They were an uprooted people who were either shunned by their congregations in Mexico for migrating to Canada or they sensed that existing Canadian churches did not empathize with the difficult economic situations experienced by the migrants.

An increasing acceptance of upward mobility also affected class division. Mennonites within urban churches were especially affected

**The twentieth century  
brought the current  
fads into Mennonite  
farm communities**

when a rise in wages and salaries led to increased consumption and to new markers of material success. Mennonites in rural North America traditionally had guarded against any form of “conspicuous

consumption.” The city seemed to increase the temptation to acquire the latest fashion and thus to undermine the Mennonites’ traditional belief in the simplicity of Christ.

During the twentieth century towns and nearby cities brought the current fads into the lap of Mennonite farm communities. Certainly some frugal Mennonites during the mid-twentieth century years had no trouble keeping the world at bay. Ellis Kroeker of western Kansas recalled that “when going to Hutchinson for shopping ... mom filled a quart jar with cold coffee. They bought a pound of bologna and a loaf of bread and we ate lunch in the car.”<sup>45</sup>

But for others the visit to the city was just the beginning point of a move from old fashioned self-sufficiency to consumerism. Indeed, the middle decades of the century introduced a series of temptations for Mennonites in many places, including those within “Mennonite” towns. Main Street businesses in Steinbach, Manitoba during the 1950s, for example, were said by one visiting sociologist to be “equipped with large show windows and neon signs,” signalling that there “was nothing provincial about” the town.<sup>46</sup> The local newspaper, *The Carillon News*, drew attention to an overt ethos of consumerism: in 1957 Steinbachers swooned over the \$1,900 microwave oven on display at the Penner Electric store and during the same year hundreds filed “through the J. R. Friesen [Ford] showroom ... viewing the new Edsel cars.”<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps these particular technologies were ultimately ignored even by non-Mennonites, but other statistics show a penchant among Mennonites to spending money on new lifestyles during the 1950s. In 1951 southeastern Manitoba residents spent over \$13 million in

the retail sector, six times the amount they spent in 1941.<sup>48</sup> And much of the money spent in Steinbach went toward purchases of household appliances, cars and new bungalows, as well as toward a range of utility services and insurance schemes. From 1950 to 1953, for example, southeastern Manitoba's electricity payments rose by 58.4 percent, automobile insurance payments by 171.6 percent, and telephone costs by 177.6 percent.<sup>49</sup>

If Mennonites became consumers in "Mennonite" places, they also embraced upward mobility within urban Mennonite circles. One study of the Los Angeles MB church notes that it closed down in 1957 after 23 years because the church's location in poverty-stricken South Central Los Angeles made it unattractive to Mennonites. The explanation for the church's closure was stark enough: as an "increasing number of minority groups came into the area, most middle class elites retreated to outlying suburban areas" and included "in this 'white flight' were many" Mennonites.<sup>50</sup>

In the early twentieth century First Mennonite Church of Philadelphia had boasted 470 members and represented a vanguard of urban, middle-class GC Mennonites. By 1957, however, membership had dwindled to 173 as whites fled the racialized inner city, and by 1965 the congregation decamped to a northern suburb and became First Mennonite Church of Huntingdon Valley.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, a Winnipeg study noted that although many early Mennonite migrants to the city settled in working-class central Winnipeg in the 1930s and 40s, a generation later many followed Anglo-Canadians in avoiding "contact with 'foreigners' by withdrawing [ever] further into a solid, isolated group in the city's south and west ends."<sup>52</sup> Canadian Mennonite Bible College, founded on the inner-city Furby Street in 1947, for example, relocated to highbrow Wellington Crescent in 1949, and then in 1957 even farther south onto a spacious campus in the well-heeled Tuxedo suburb. A number of Winnipeg churches followed similar patterns and established themselves in the suburban middle class communities of East Kildonan, Fort Garry and St. James.<sup>53</sup>

Gender was a fourth issue that urban Mennonites found especially challenging. Urban worlds challenged old patterns of rural patriarchy. Town and city women in particular seemed to want the freedom to discard old symbols of female subordination and even serve in leadership positions. The discarding of plain dress was a highly symbolic first

step for many urban women. Single Mennonite women in Kitchener, Ontario, were among the first to simply refuse to wear old fashioned bonnets as a sign of anti-modernity. In 1921 Rev. Urias Weber of the city's First Mennonite church supported the cause of urban Mennonite women by arguing that "as a city church ... we cannot keep our girls under ... a ruling [that they must wear bonnets or prayer veils] for the reasons that most of them are working in factories, etc." He continued that "most of them are good Christian girls" who were being driven by unyieldingly conservative Mennonite leaders "to go elsewhere to find a church home."<sup>54</sup>



The choir of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Plum Coulee, Manitoba in 1902. While many church groups in North America at the time avoided fashionable dress, others accepted urban fashions. Plum Coulee was one of several small railroad-based towns that served to modernize the so-called West Reserve Mennonite settlement in south central Manitoba.

In much smaller Croghan, New York, an almost identical story played itself out in 1941. Here, young female factory workers from the local Conservative Mennonite Conference church refused to wear the cape dress to work, an act said to have precipitated a painful church schism.<sup>55</sup> Distinctive dress codes were even difficult on young girls. Esther Royer who grew up in an Old Order Mennonite family near Columbiana, Ohio, recalls how, dressed in black stockings, plain dress and long braids, she envied the non-Mennonite girls at school: "how I longed to be like the other girls ... I admired their trendy fashion... their brightly colored, flowered dresses ... skirts short enough to bare the knees." Esther later rejoiced when her family moved to the small



city of Akron, Ohio and joined a more progressive Mennonite group with less stringent dress standards. Taking her first job as a secretary at B. F. Goodrich Tire Company, Royer “was determined to dress and behave” like her co-workers.<sup>56</sup>

The town and city did more than allow women to remove old gendered garb, it also allowed them to become more involved in church. City life, though, did not spell automatic gender equality. In Canadian circles many of the household heads of the 8,000-person, post-Second World War immigrant group from the Soviet Union were women. Many had lost their husbands to Joseph Stalin’s Communist regime or to the horrors of war with either the Russian or German armies, or both. Male Mennonite church elders expressed concern about these immigrant women’s liberal lifestyles, their highly personal religious beliefs, and even their roles as worship leaders during their exodus from the Soviet Union.<sup>57</sup>

Still their very presence in the congregations helped generate a debate that ultimately garnered a right for women to vote in church membership meetings: in 1951 in Abbotsford and in 1964 in Saskatoon’s First Mennonite Church. In the United States the impetus for women’s leadership was often based on urban ministry and missions. In

**In the 1970s, MC and GC conferences began ordaining women on a regular basis**

In 1973 and 1975, respectively, MC and GC conferences began ordaining women on a regular basis. The first congregations to welcome these female pastors were located in Lombard, Illinois (a Chicago suburb) and in Arvada, Colorado (a suburb of Denver).<sup>58</sup>

Women in other urban churches fared less well. During the middle decades MB women sought meaningful leadership roles within the church, first by creating sewing circles and missions organizations or auxiliaries, and then slowly requesting leading roles within the church structure. According to historian Gloria Redekop, MB congregations from the 1960s to the 1990s changed their stance on the issue, from a “consensus that women’s place [was] one of submission to an ever so slow transition to freedom for women to take church leadership positions.”<sup>59</sup>

Even then, as historian Marlene Epp has pointed out, the first female ministers often served without conference sanction, and invariably they stemmed from urban churches. In Ottawa, for exam-

ple, Alma Coffman preached in her GC church well before the first GC female minister was officially ordained by her conference in 1979, and in Winnipeg Ardith Frey served as pastor in an Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) church in the 1990s without official conference approval. In similar fashion, Karen Heidebrecht Thiessen of Winnipeg pastored her MB church at a time during the 1990s when her conference refused to recognize women pastors.<sup>60</sup>

A fifth significant challenge facing urban Mennonites was ideological or political in nature, pitting Mennonites who embraced participation in politics against those who insisted on the old value of being

**Mennonites faced the challenge of whether or not to participate in politics**

the “quiet in the land.” In part this conflict stemmed from the pressing issues of race, class and gender in the city, and in part from the physical separation of urban residents from their rural elders. Fred Kniss

has shown that rural and urban churches in eastern United States often were at loggerheads in the post Second World War era, creating an impression of Mennonites as the “disquiet in the land.”

A 1963 comparative study of white Mennonites in New York City with their counterparts in their old rural Pennsylvania churches revealed striking differences. The New York Mennonites “were nearly unanimous in agreeing that Christians have a responsibility to speak out on political issues,” while their rural counterparts “were much more diffident.” Two thirds of the urbanites expected to vote in the presidential election, while the same portion in the rural districts “said they would not vote in any election.” Not surprisingly then, Mennonite congregations in New York applied for (and received) federal grant money to run Head Start preschools for low-income children almost as soon as such funding was available after 1965.<sup>61</sup>

During these same years, James Urry has shown, Winnipeg politics introduced an historical shift away from Mennonite support for the middle-of-the-road Liberal Party, to a more polarized political landscape. During the 1960s and 70s the most educated Mennonites offered unprecedented support to the left-leaning New Democratic Party (NDP), while the wealthiest Mennonites turned to the Conservative Party in large numbers. In one election, Mennonite labour organizer Harry Schellenberg ran for the NDP against Harry Enns, a Conservative from a prominent Mennonite family of entrepreneurs.

This split was not based on age, income, or class, but on education and wealth, setting professionals against entrepreneurs.<sup>62</sup>



Jake Epp was a Mennonite Brethren school teacher in southeastern Manitoba when he was elected to Parliament as a Conservative in 1972. He served 21 years, including 12 as a cabinet minister

This ideological change was apparent on several other fronts, including city-based intellectual circles. In the United States a loosely structured group of academics known as the Concern Movement and led by theologian John Howard Yoder articulated a “politics of Jesus” and gave the words “lordship of Christ” new political meaning. A cacophony of radical voices in Canada joined in. An especially pointed social critic, Frank H. Epp wrote in his 1969 *The Glory and the Shame* that it is a “distorted gospel [that] can’t call leaders of [the] state to refrain from killing.”<sup>63</sup>

Broad sociological surveys attempted to show the shift in general terms, outlining the process by which a new class of quickly ascending urban professionals, sometimes called Muppies (Mennonite Urban Professionals), withstood pressures of secularization that came with professional wages, codes of conduct and close-knit work cultures.<sup>64</sup> A 1989 study suggested that Mennonite urban professionals were still Mennonite, albeit in new ways. They were less concerned than their rural counterparts with private issues of morality, less repulsed by gambling, smoking, remarriage, dancing, masturbation and divorce. And by ratios of 43 percent to 20 percent they favored women leadership, 42 percent to 23 percent racial integration, and 24 percent to 18

percent MCC's social programs.<sup>65</sup> By the 1980s the majority of rural American Mennonites had thrown their support to the Republican party and the vast majority of rural Canadians to the Conservative party, but in both countries the majority of urban professionals gave their support to the more activist parties.

### **Mennonite "Villages" in the City**

The Mennonites' transition from farm to town and city reflected their penchant for institution building. Mennonites constructed a network of familiar social institutions that offered guidance throughout a person's entire life. Indeed urban Mennonites often lived in virtual Mennonite villages that sheltered residents from cradle to grave. Institutional histories outline the intricate network of Men-

#### **The most dynamic urban institution was the school**

nonite hospitals in which infants might be born, and then the sequence of elementary and high schools, colleges, churches, insurance agencies, credit unions, foundations, history societies, senior citizens homes, and funeral chapels that related to various stages in a person's life.

Without a doubt the single most dynamic urban institution was the school. Although hundreds of Mennonite, Amish, Hutterite and Brethren in Christ elementary schools dotted the countryside by the 1970s, dozens of Mennonite high schools and colleges had taken root as well, mostly in towns and cities, and with the promise to shepherd young people into the heart of urban life.

The trend of increased public high school or regional college attendance among post-Second World War Mennonite youth created a particular set of challenges. As the history of Iowa Mennonite School puts it, "Mennonite leaders who were suspicious of education, and of public education in particular, feared this trend."<sup>66</sup> The response to this challenge from various quarters in North America differed in some important aspects. Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in the United States established liberal arts colleges between 1893 and 1917, while Canadian groups tended to embrace academic Bible schools until the 1960s and 70s when they turned to public university-affiliated Mennonite colleges.<sup>67</sup>

At the high school level, however, consensus reigned, with surprisingly parallel histories even among far-flung schools. They all

seemed to share an attempt to protect the Mennonite students from harmful influences in town or city. Most schools also agreed that with an appropriate shield of protection in place, young Mennonites could enter the city as relevant, upright citizens, able to contribute to the well being of the wider society. Rosthern Junior College in Saskatchewan and Lancaster Mennonite School in Pennsylvania, two remarkably different schools in some respects, illustrate these common approaches to education.



Bethany Christian School, begun in 1954 in the town of Goshen, Indiana, sought both to reinforce traditional Mennonite values and expose students to broader ideas. Here members of a government class, taught by Leonard Gross, debate international human rights in 1962. Student Wayne Risser (in hat) played the role of contemporary Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, whose policies the other students were subjecting to scrutiny.

The history of Rosthern Junior College in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, notes that it was founded in 1910 because community parents feared a “loss of Mennonite identity” in a modernizing world. The school’s founders responded with a three-pronged approach – the teaching of German, the awakening of “a deeper understanding for the truths of salvation,” and the production of public elementary school teachers. The strategy of increasing core identities and then engaging the wider public worked.

Still Rosthern changed in time from a school known for its cultural and even ethnic distinctions to one of academic excellence. One student remembered that the very words “Going to Rosthern”

sounded as sweet to him as "Going up to Oxford" and by the 1940s Rosthern could claim a high level of social and cultural engagement: here teachers "discuss[ed] movies with students," students sang in a "Mendelssohn Choir," and debating teams exchanged arguments on current issues. So confident did Rosthern become that in time its board increased academic standards "so as to achieve affiliation at the earliest possible date" with the University of Saskatchewan.<sup>68</sup>

The Lancaster Mennonite School (LMS) opened in 1942 with a similar long-term goal of confronting the wider world, articulated as "the relentless forces of industrialization" generally, and the cultural threat of public school consolidation in particular. A private high school, argued Henry Garber of the local Mennonite mission board, would allow "our own brethren" to "instruct and guide our youth to safeguard them from an apostate and pleasure loving world." Initially the school emphasized two goals, evangelistic outreach beyond the Mennonite community on the one hand and a reinforced Mennonite identity on the other.

To reach the second of these goals the school enforced a strict dress code, for the girls a "two-piece cape dress" and "a prayer veiling large enough to fully serve its purpose," and for the boys a "taboo list" that included "long neckties, gaudy hats, [and] ... vividly colored sweaters and sport shirts." The school also emphasized a uniquely Mennonite philosophy of education. As Principal J. Paul Graybill reminded students, "Mennonites from the Bible teach self-denial; world educators teach self-assertion ... and train ... people to demand their rights to rule." Like Rosthern, however, LMS changed over time, and by the 1970s was de-emphasizing old cultural traits and exuding self-confidence under the slogan "Training Youth in Academic Excellence" and adapting to the fact that almost half of its students "aspired to professional jobs."<sup>69</sup>

A greater diversity to education was apparent in the various colleges and universities founded by Mennonites during the twentieth century. The long list of Mennonite educational institutions in North America is testimony to the remarkably different ways post-secondary education was meant to serve as an avenue into city life. At one end of the spectrum were the Mennonite liberal arts colleges. Founded in 1893, Bethel College had provided the newly-arrived Mennonites from Russia a way to stay separate from American culture, but borrowed American ways to do so. Along with other colleges, it was a

“crucible ... of contradiction” standing between German Mennonite culture and Anglo American culture and between farm and town, but in the end it created a “middle class culture of professionalization.”<sup>70</sup>

Two generations later, this formula still held sway among U.S. Mennonite colleges. When Elfrieda Dick went to study at Tabor College in Hillsboro during the 1950s, she did so for “the express purpose of experiencing one year of college in a Mennonite Brethren setting.” She also learned from Professor Frank C. Peters, for “the first time in my life,” a pride for “my heritage,” a lesson that “we were placed on this earth to minister and to serve, to make a difference.”<sup>71</sup> In this respect little changed over time; a Mennonite liberal arts education could simultaneously safeguard an old culture and equip youth for life in a new society.

**Mennonite liberal arts colleges experienced significant upheavals**

Charting the path of a liberal arts college in North America, however, was never that simple. Colleges experienced significant upheavals along the way. In 1923 theological conservatives in the (Old) Mennonite Church forced Goshen College to close for a year and re-open on more culturally cautious grounds. But subsequent students and faculty, with other aims, undermined the traditionalists’ triumph. No event symbolized those aims more than a boisterous parade through the town of Goshen in March 1941 by students who learned that the college had won coveted accreditation from the North Central Association of Universities and Colleges (NCA), marking Goshen’s full acceptance by its academic peers. The students met President Ernest E. Miller, returning from the NCA meeting in Chicago, with a brass band, and then “lighted bonfires and staged snake dances” on campus that lasted well into the night. Miller, noted for a well-honed urbanity, would go on to lead Goshen’s participation in the NCA’s Committee on the Liberal Arts and urge women faculty to pursue graduate study despite churchly misgivings.<sup>72</sup>

About the same time that Goshen was chasing approval from academic accreditors, a different Mennonite constituency set its sights on another goal. In 1943 Oklahoma Bible Academy, a GC high school at Meno, staged a “week long prophetic conference” featuring Dr. C. H. Suckau of Berne, Indiana, “pastor of the largest GC church in the nation.” Suckau met with a group of men committed to “rebuild the

walls of Jerusalem ... in light of rampant liberalism,” and to do so within an American city.

Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska, would be “true to the Word, loyal to the Mennonite faith and hav[e] as its purpose the training of young people for Christian service at home and abroad.” This school sought to reclaim Mennonite students enrolled at “various non-Mennonite Bible Schools,” and insisted that they abstain from alcohol, tobacco, card-playing, dancing, and movie watching and uphold selected Anabaptist teachings on swearing of oaths, court action, and divorce, although not the historic teaching on pacifism or nonresistance. The school emphasized friendship, peace and joy, but it also openly expressed the stark “premillennialist” idea that those who “reject Jesus Christ ... will after the thousand years be raised from the dead, and throughout eternity exist in a state of ... endless torment.” It was a strict approach, but by 1977, on its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Grace was not only a nationally recognized evangelical college, but claimed an alumni body of 5,240 persons.<sup>73</sup>

Yet another approach to higher education emerged in Canada. Of special importance were Conrad Grebel College, established on the campus of the University of Waterloo in 1964, and Menno Simons College, founded on the campus of the University of Winnipeg in 1980. Grebel’s vision stemmed from a 1959 inter-Mennonite (MB, GC, MC) ministers’ fellowship that sought affiliation with the



Aerial photo of Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) in 1991, located in southwestern Winnipeg next to the city’s Assiniboine Forest. In 2000 CMBC became one of three founding institutions of Canadian Mennonite University and the site depicted here became the South Campus of the new university. The triangular shaped building, top right, serves as the entrance to the Mennonite Heritage Centre, one of Canada’s central Mennonite archives.



newly-founded University of Waterloo, joining other denominations – Anglican, Catholic, and United Church – by intentionally locating a denominational school on the grounds of a secular university. Grebel's promotional literature in 1964 was unequivocal: here was "a home for students away from home and a living Christian community of university students having the common objective of a university education and the experience of living in a religious community."<sup>74</sup>

Conrad Grebel College set "a pattern later emulated in Winnipeg at Menno Simons College in the University of Winnipeg which already had a chair of Mennonite studies."<sup>75</sup> Founded in 1978 and funded in part by the Canadian government and Winnipeg entrepreneur David Friesen, the Chair in Mennonite Studies held an optimistic view of the city; its program sought to "probe, interpret and discuss freely the good and the bad in Mennonite history, faith and life."<sup>76</sup>

This vision became the guiding force too of Menno Simons College, founded first as a Mennonite Studies Centre and then in 1989 as a College offering credit courses. The college's ethos was to provide "education flowing from Anabaptist Mennonite understandings of faith, peace, and justice while engaging other religious traditions and intellectual perspectives."<sup>77</sup> Even after 2000, when the two Bible colleges in Winnipeg and Menno Simons College amalgamated to form Canadian Mennonite University, the unique affiliation with the public University of Winnipeg remained. The history of close co-operation between Mennonite and public universities in Canada signaled a somewhat different approach from that of the more independent Mennonite colleges and universities in the United States.

## **Conclusion**

The town and city represented a new reality for Mennonites in North America during the twentieth century. But if this century marked their migration from farm community to urban center, the route into urbanity was multi-faceted. With shifting economic tides many Mennonites found life on the farm onerous and headed for nearby or regional towns to pursue professional or waged labor. Dozens of towns boasted a critical mass of Mennonites and, despite their relatively small sizes, they became known throughout the continental Mennonite community.

Other Mennonites moved farther afield to small cities where they formed urban lives centered in their particular congregations. A few, mostly the most adventurous professionals and wage earners, as well as missionaries, made their home in one of North America's great metropolises – Chicago, New York and Los Angeles in the United States, Toronto or Vancouver in Canada.

Urban life certainly changed the North American Mennonites. The city introduced them in large numbers to African Americans, Asian Canadian, Latinos and other racialized minority groups. In the city too, old lines of ethnicity disappeared and people ranging from Anglo-Americans who joined existing Mennonite churches to French Canadians who created their own Mennonite congregations, joined the Anabaptist family.

Other traditional social practices, from rural-based gendered roles to old ideological and political lines, were tested in the city. The question of how to manage these changes perplexed Mennonite leaders. One response was to establish a network of institutions that guided Mennonites along more urban pathways from cradle to grave. Of particular importance was the private school, whether elementary, high school, Bible school or liberal arts college. Mennonites exhibited different ways of entering the city, and they would show dramatically different approaches to using knowledge to encounter the wider world.

Although Mennonites lacked a common approach to the city, what was certain was that the city had radically affected old ways of being Anabaptist in North America.

# Midcentury Faith Journeys

*Growing up in La Grulla, Texas, during the 1930s and 1940s, Yolanda Villareal “struggled with various types of illnesses” and often visited curanderos (folk healers), who her widowed father hoped would restore her to health. On one occasion a curandero told Yolanda to go and read from el libro negro (the black book) as part of a healing ritual. Yolanda “began searching for the book without really knowing what she was looking for,” until one day when her cousin invited her to visit a Mennonite Brethren (MB) mission. Despite her initial unease at attending a Protestant church – “I asked the saints for forgiveness” she recalled – “it was there that I first saw the black book, la Biblia (the Bible).” She asked missionary Rueben Wedel for a copy of the black book and “he responded by saying that the book cost one dollar and that he could get her a copy if she really wanted one.” Yolanda began to read the Bible, though she also prayed for assurance that the Virgin of Guadalupe “was going to be okay with this.” Soon thereafter, in 1948, she and her sister Carmen and two other women became the first members of the MB mission in La Grulla, which was soon “the largest MB church in south Texas.” Yolanda and other Mexican-American women formed the core of the new church. They “met weekly to pray, organize church events, distribute and sell used clothing, and sew and make quilts.” For Yolanda, the church was a place to “worship God and help each other with needs that we had.”<sup>1</sup>*

*At the same time that Yolanda Villareal was crossing boundaries to join a new faith community in south Texas, religious conviction was propelling Isaac P. Loewen across national borders as he prepared to leave his long-established church community. Loewen was among several hundred members of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite Church undertaking a costly migration from Canada to Mexico because they feared that the church in Canada was becoming worldly. In Manitoba they saw economic prosperity, the advent of mass communication*

and higher education, and the desire of church members to make private, individual decisions about faith as developments that undercut the community's ability to embody a nonconformed and nonresistant life. "Yes, great advances are being made [in Canada], as in highways, hydro electricity, hospitals, etc.," Loewen conceded in September 1948, and "these are all very useful. But do we too eagerly partake of this, to try it out? My thinking is not that we should suppress these things, but if we take part in them so completely, will we not too easily [be tempted to] fight for the government of this world." About eighty-five families, including Loewen's, "loaded trucks with farm machinery and cars with personal effects and headed south" to Chihuahua State where they had purchased a ranch known as Los Jagueyes (the place of springs), to which they gave an equivalent German name, Quellen Kolonie (springs colony). Turning their backs on middle class consumerism, they believed that here, in this new place, they could more faithfully live "an old communitarian religious faith that emphasized Christian discipleship."<sup>2</sup>

### Forming and reforming communities of faith

Yolanda Villareal and Isaac Loewen had embarked on serious spiritual journeys, journeys that led Villareal to break with her inherited tradition and Loewen to go to great lengths to reconstruct his. For both of them, their journeys into new communities and relationships had clear spiritual intentions that were as complex as they were compelling. In Villareal's case, for example, embracing evangelical faith also provided her, a motherless child, with a new, surrogate family.

For their part, Loewen and the Mennonites bound for Mexico would find that managing change in *Quellen Kolonie* posed greater challenges than they had expected, and a decade later half the group would move yet again, to create another Old Order world in the jungle of British Honduras (Belize). But no matter their successes or limitations, Mennonites were motivated by faith, even as their choices also involved negotiating ethnicity, economics, and family and gender roles.

Mennonites were a deeply religious people who had long sought to apply their faith broadly and in practical ways. Yet the decades of the mid-twentieth century were a particularly dynamic time in their spiritual lives. Their increasing integration into North American society placed them in a wider North American religious landscape, one that was sometimes foreign, but increasingly familiar as most of them became comfortable speaking English. The move to towns and cities,

the mechanization and prosperity of the farm, and the advance of radio communication – Mennonites responded religiously to all these changes and, in turn, these influences shaped Mennonite faith.

Practical though they were, Mennonites had never dismissed formal theology as unimportant. They turned to early Anabaptist and Mennonite confessions of faith for instructing young people prior to baptism, and during the early twentieth century they started a number of seasonal Bible schools to provide additional teaching. And sometimes theological disputes captured Mennonite attention. In the 1940s, for example, the leadership of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada was embroiled in debate over the alleged universalism of Johann H. Enns, the *Ältester* (bishop) of Schoenwieser Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.<sup>3</sup> Yet Mennonite faith rarely focused on abstract matters. Instead, Mennonite spirituality and Mennonite responses to the theological currents of the day were governed largely by a desire for tangible integrity of faith and life.



Brethren in Christ women preparing tables for a love feast – the BIC service that recalls the Last Supper by combining a simple meal with communion and footwashing – in 1911 at Highland BIC church near West Milton, Ohio. The women, from left to right, Mary Dohner, Emma Thuma Bechtel, Cora Harshberger, Anna Moist Cassel, Lida Moist, Mary Hershey Hoover, Elizabeth Engle Moist, and Ella Hershey Lewis. During the early 1900s the religious lives of Mennonites and BIC centered on concrete expression of faith, such as baptism, communion, or plain dress, rather than on the abstract doctrinal debates that stirred the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy.

## Engaging North American Christianity

Mennonites had not, of course, been religiously isolated before the middle decades of the twentieth century. German-speaking Mennonites had read Pietist sources in Russia and shared meetinghouses with Lutherans in Pennsylvania. In the 1800s, Wesleyan-inspired

Holiness theology – sometimes conveyed through German-speaking evangelical itinerants – had appealed to certain Mennonite quarters and had sparked the formation of the revivalistic Mennonite Brethren in Christ in Ontario, Pennsylvania, and the American Midwest.

Although most Mennonites accepted the widespread belief among Protestants at the time that Roman Catholics hardly qualified as Christians, there were examples of warm relationships across that confessional line, too. After 1850 in Waterloo County, Ontario, Amish Bishop Peter Litwiller was “known to frequently engage in religious discussions” with Catholic priest Eugene Funcken. The two men became good friends, and Father Funcken tolled his church’s bell when Litwiller died and then penned an appreciative obituary for the local newspaper.<sup>4</sup>

After 1900, Mennonite knowledge of and interaction with a wider religious world intensified. Some of that shift was the result of linguistic change. In Kansas, for example, the impressive German-language interpretations of Mennonite history and theology that Cornelius H. Wedel had written during his turn-of-the-century presidency of Bethel College faded in influence as Mennonites there switched to English after the First World War.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, English-speaking Protestants offered sophisticated and spiritually winsome overtures, even to Mennonites who still felt at home with German, such as the Mennonite Brethren who emigrated in the 1920s from the Soviet Union to western Canada. Non-Mennonite schools such as Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta, Briercrest Bible Institute in Caronport, Saskatchewan, and Winnipeg Bible Institute offered places for young people to become familiar with English variations on the themes of conversion and foreign missions that Mennonite Brethren had long hummed in a German key. In turn, recruiters and evangelists tied to these schools itinerated in Mennonite circles, preaching in German as necessary.<sup>6</sup>

These schools, and their equivalents in the United States, represented but one part of the North American Protestant scene in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, the North American Anglo-Protestant world that many Mennonites were coming to encounter was a fractured one. In the early 1900s, North American Protestantism, or at least its large, British-rooted denominations, often seemed divided into two camps, Modernist and Fundamentalist, and each represented different responses to growing societal pluralism.

For Modernists, a desire to maintain Protestantism's leading role in societies being reshaped by immigration and intellectual inquiry led them to redefine beliefs in more generic terms with which few people would disagree. For those who came to be known as Fundamentalists the crisis created by pluralism and their impending sense of becoming religious and cultural minorities, engendered a militant style of conservative theology defined in ever more specific terms, and often matched by an impassioned defense of traditional morals.<sup>7</sup>

Almost no Mennonites were attracted to Modernism. To be sure, there was a strain of self-consciously progressive thought, especially among some GC Mennonites and a handful of (Old) Mennonites in the United States. Progressives were optimistic about the compatibility of Mennonite and American values, such as freedom of conscience and separation of church and state.

In 1907 C. Henry Smith, a professor at Goshen and later Bluffton colleges, and who that year became the first Mennonite to earn a Ph.D. degree from a North American university, argued that Mennonites had been the “pioneers” of progressive values, and that international disarmament treaties then being negotiated demonstrated that Men-

**Mennonites who championed biblical inerrancy did so often to bolster a commitment to biblical nonconformity**

nonites' “position on warfare is sound and that their ideal is gradually becoming a [global] reality.” For Smith, the church could safely embrace the refinement and good taste that progressives believed characterized modern society.<sup>8</sup> But even among such progressives, there was little interest in theological Modernism. In fact, some progressive-minded churches were among those most open to considering theological ideas coming from Fundamentalist quarters.

Fundamentalism gained more traction in Mennonite circles than did Modernism. But even so the result was often a particularly Mennonite expression that placed an accent on practical living. Mennonites who championed the Fundamentalist language of the Bible's “inerrancy,” for example, did so often to bolster their people's commitment to biblical nonconformity, which they feared was eroding. For example, S. F. Coffman, an Ontario (Old) Mennonite bishop, had attended Fundamentalist-leaning Moody Bible Institute in the early 1900s and agreed with Fundamentalists in many respects, but he shared none of the wider

movement's militant attitude and he included nonresistance in the list of biblical fundamentals that were non-negotiable.

One area in which Fundamentalism provoked theological controversy among Mennonites was dispensationalism, a view of eschatology put forward by certain Fundamentalists. Dispensationalism made sense of perplexing and apparently contradictory sections of the Bible by explaining that God related to humans in a different way during each period of history. Since the Bible was a witness to God's covenant faithfulness across all of these periods, it included material that did not apply, in direct ways, to contemporary Christians. Jesus's teaching about the Kingdom of God, for example, was intended for a future, millennial era rather than for the church in this age.

A good number of Mennonite leaders and lay members objected, believing that projecting Jesus' teaching into the future shortchanged obedience. Nevertheless, dispensationalism was taught at schools that attracted Mennonite students, such as Moody Bible Institute and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, and it was central to the curriculum of Grace Bible Institute, a school established in 1943 in Omaha, Nebraska, by a group of GC Mennonites disenchanted with Bible teaching in existing Mennonite colleges.<sup>9</sup>

Although Mennonite reactions to theological disputes in wider North American society were not insignificant, these fierce debates did not define the spiritual journeys of most midcentury Mennonites. The Modernist-Fundamentalist "controversies were too distinctly North American to cause serious new divisions among the most recent immigrants" from the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> And for a good many others, including English-speakers in the United States and eastern Canada, Mennonite convictions, interests, and concerns did not match the arguments playing out around them. That fact did not mean that ordinary Mennonites' religious lives were static or isolated. They embraced, borrowed, adopted, adapted, and rejected things from North America's religious marketplace. A few Mennonites were swallowed by secularism and others took paths that led them into other denominational folds. But, broadly speaking, North American Mennonite faith journeys proceeded in one of three modes: evangelical, neo-Anabaptist, or Old Order.

### **Mennonites and Evangelicalism**

The Mennonite journey with evangelicalism was perhaps the most complex because evangelicalism itself was such a diverse religious



movement. In the nineteenth century evangelicalism in North America and Great Britain was a broad stream of popular Protestant orthodoxy that stood for the authority of the Bible, the necessity of conversion, and the importance of Christ's death on the cross. Following the bruising battles of the Modernist-Fundamentalist debates, however, the term "evangelical" acquired a new connotation. Beginning in the 1940s *evangelical* became the label claimed by conservative Protestants who wished both to distance themselves from the combative style of Fundamentalism and yet uphold traditional orthodoxy.



Noted evangelist Billy Graham (right) stands with Brethren in Christ leaders C. N. Hostetter (front left) and Arthur Climenhaga (second from right) and two other men at the 1967 convention of the National Association of Evangelicals. Climenhaga was NAE's executive secretary and Hostetter was chair of the NAE World Relief Commission.

Under this banner a whole series of new institutions took shape or were infused with new energy, including Fuller Theological Seminary in California and Toronto Bible College (later Tyndale Seminary) in Ontario, World Vision, *Christianity Today*, and a string of Christian radio stations begun by Percy Crawford, the Canadian-born Youth for Christ evangelist who rose to prominence in the United States in the wake of revivalist Billy Graham. Some Mennonites were eager to connect with this set of evangelical institutions.<sup>11</sup> During the 1960s, for example, Brethren in Christ educator Arthur M. Climenhaga was the executive director of the U.S.-based National Association of Evangelicals and later, MB member Harold Jantz served as the founding editor

of *Christian Week*, a Canadian evangelical periodical. In fact, it would be “difficult to imagine a host of evangelical agencies” without the personal and financial support they received from Mennonites.<sup>12</sup>

For most evangelicals, however, evangelicalism remained first and foremost a compelling spirituality, rather than a set of institutions. Evangelicalism was a personal yet socially-disciplined style of faith that combined biblical authority, a personal relationship with Jesus that was marked by joy, and a sense that faith should make a difference in society through evangelism or social reform, or a combination of both.

These evangelical themes surfaced in the words of Anna Beiler, a young Amish woman from Virginia who attended a Mennonite-linked

**Evangelicalism  
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socially-disciplined  
style of faith**

mission conference in the summer of 1950. “It was,” she told a friend, “like a hilltop experience,” as she listened to speaker after speaker expound on “our duty ... to go in the valley and work for the Lord whatever He leads

us to do.” Beiler had recognized that “When one gives himself up to testify for Christ, it brings unspeakable joy to the heart.” At the conference she heard an “invitation for consecrations” and another speaker underscored that salvation is “not by the good works we do. *That will not save us.*” Now Beiler was “asking for [God’s] help and guidance by praying earnestly” as she sensed that her future might lie beyond the community in which she had been raised. Until that calling became clear, she would simply “praise His Holy Name and be ever thankful for the love, grace, and mercy He daily showers upon us.”<sup>13</sup>

In Beiler’s case, her evangelical fervor would eventually carry her out of her Amish church, where a communal and understated spirituality rested in uneasy contrast with her exuberant piety. Indeed, some Mennonites came to view evangelicalism as a theological threat to Mennonite faithfulness. In this view, evangelicalism was a one-way street, a journey that entailed shedding Mennonite convictions – especially peace and nonresistance – and resulted in “Leaving Anabaptism,” the stark phrase Calvin W. Redekop used to describe the evolution of the Bruderthaler Mennonites into the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren in 1937, and then into the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches in 1987.<sup>14</sup> Or, as MB academic Delbert Wiens lamented, “In becoming evangelical we are exchanging our Mennonite birthright for a mess of pottage.”<sup>15</sup>

This narrative of evangelicalism as replacing, rather than complementing, Anabaptism was not limited to Mennonites bemoaning inroads of evangelicalism, but was championed just as often by ex-Mennonite evangelicals, such as the dozen Old Colony Mennonite families near Osler, Saskatchewan, who in 1974 organized Osler Mission Chapel, embraced assurance of salvation, and celebrated evangelicalism as liberation from deadening Mennonite tradition.<sup>16</sup>

The journey of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBIC) embodies some of the subtleties of this interpretation of evangelicalism's impact on Mennonites. The MBIC had emerged in the mid-1800s as (Old) Mennonite and Brethren in Christ revivalists blended emphases of nonconformity and nonresistance with a Holiness spirituality that sought "entire sanctification." For several generations MBIC leaders maintained relationships with other Mennonite groups – supporting Bluffton College, for example – but also cultivated close relationships with a wide array of evangelicals who gathered at Holiness camp meetings.



Evangelical fervor propelled church planting and outreach ministries for children, such as this Sunday school in the northwestern Manitoba community of Mafeking. Western Gospel Mission, sponsored by members of Evangelical Mennonite Conference and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, had begun work in Mafeking in 1954 and in 1961, when this photo was taken, Mafeking Mennonite Church joined the EMC.

Along the way, the MBIC engaged in vigorous evangelism that gathered thousands of converts and more than a few disaffected mem-

bers of other Mennonite branches who found the MBIC emphasis on divine sanctification a refreshing reprieve from the churches of their upbringing. During the 1950s, for example, an MBIC executive, Kenneth E. Geiger, spoke frequently and with deep emotion of how, as a child growing up in a GC Mennonite Church near Pandora, Ohio, he had never heard the gospel of grace, but only a message of ethical obligations to be met by trying hard to please God.<sup>17</sup>

During the Second World War, as other Mennonites found their energy absorbed in negotiating and funding alternative service programs for conscientious objectors (COs), their priorities and agendas diverged from those of the MBIC. The MBIC had never repudiated nonresistance, but often interpreted peace as an inner experience that one gained from knowing Jesus as savior; by the 1940s few MBIC men were COs. Then, too, the MBIC was impressed with the post-war missionary thrust of evangelical mission agencies that seemed bold and creative. In 1947, having decided that “the name Mennonite [is] ... becoming a great barrier” to “aggressive evangelism,” and hoping to “lay aside every weight” that hindered mission, the MBIC changed its name to United Missionary Church.<sup>18</sup> Soon thereafter the group withdrew from active participation in MCC. Several realignments later, including a merger with the Amish-rooted Missionary Church Association, the heirs of the MBIC had become the Missionary Church, the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada, and the Bible Fellowship Church. In other parts of the world, notably India, the United Missionary Church retained close ties to other Mennonite bodies. But in Canada and the United States that has not been the case.

The MBIC journey also illustrates the varied and dynamic character of North American evangelicalism. In the 1880s, influenced by Holiness teaching that the Spirit empowered all believers for ministry, MBIC pioneered the formal ministry of Mennonite women. Starting in 1884, when Ontario-born Janet Douglas became pastor of an MBIC mission in Grand Rapids, Michigan, MBIC conferences licensed and approved some 500 women as pastors and church planters in Canada and the United States, and many more for overseas work. By the 1950s, however, as leadership of North American evangelical seminaries and journals increasingly fell into theologically Calvinist hands, the Holiness-inspired justification of women’s ordination fell out of favor. Mid-century evangelicals became known for their opposition to women in the pulpit, and the United Mis-

sionary Church followed suit. By the 1970s few women pastors remained in the denominations descended from the MBIC.<sup>19</sup>

### **Evangelicalism and Mennonite Renewal**

For most North American Mennonites, however, the relationship with evangelicalism did not involve rejecting the Mennonite name or the doctrine of nonresistance. Instead, evangelicalism was an ally on a journey of Mennonite renewal. Evangelicalism critiqued tradition, emphasized personal commitment, and prompted members to match the outreach and mission activities of other churches. Evangelicalism also provided theological tools for Mennonites beginning to grapple with how to communicate their faith in the modern world. From the 1930s through the 1960s dozens of Mennonite theology students found a congenial home at Biblical Seminary in New York, an evangelical graduate school known for teaching “inductive Bible study” and for upholding biblical authority without recourse to inerrancy or reference to dispensationalism. At one point twenty-two Mennonites, representing various conferences, were enrolled at the same time, comprising a sizable portion of the school’s roughly 150-member student body. During the middle decades of the twentieth century it is likely that no single graduate seminary attracted more Mennonites, and from 1943 to 1968 the school’s trustees included MCC administrator Orie O. Miller.<sup>20</sup>

**For most North American Mennonites evangelicalism was an ally on a journey of Mennonite renewal**

What Mennonites found at Biblical Seminary was an evangelical theology that gave them a vocabulary to articulate their own tradition. To be sure, Mennonites had been biblicists, but they lacked a well-formed theology of biblical authority or a systematic approach to the Bible. At Biblical Seminary in New York, Mennonites absorbed not only an inductive method of study, but also an evangelical explanation of “the instrumental worth of holy Scripture in forming responsible Christian character.” Mennonite students were impressed by Biblical Seminary’s commitment to teach “in such a way as to avoid provoking the spirit of controversy and to foster unity among all students.” Stanley C. Shenk, for one, found that “the seminary was conservative in interpretation and doctrine – and yet relaxed and tolerant.”<sup>21</sup> Biblical Seminary was also known for its openness to female faculty and students and the

generation of Mennonites who attended Biblical Seminary warmed to women's leadership in its evangelical atmosphere.

In 1945 and 1946, when American and Canadian GC Mennonite and (Old) Mennonite conferences launched their own seminaries, in Chicago and in Goshen, Indiana respectively, they modeled their curricula on Biblical Seminary in New York. That similarity in structure helped pave the way for the two schools' later consolidation as Associated

**Evangelicalism  
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tool to critique  
things Mennonite**

Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana. Remarkably, AMBS's first generation of faculty included no less than ten members with strong ties to the evangelical seminary in New York,

including Erland Waltner, Howard Charles, and Gertrude Wiebe Roten.

If evangelicals in New York City had provided theological resources that the Mennonite tradition lacked, evangelicalism could also be a tool to critique things that were present in Mennonite communities, including ethnic traditions and rural patterns of church life. For Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites who had moved to the Manitoba town of Steinbach, evangelicalism allowed them to draw "new cultural and moral boundaries in the unfamiliar territory of Canadian culture."<sup>22</sup>

In 1952 the Steinbach congregation changed its name to Evangelical Mennonite Church, purchased a piano, and ceased shunning and other forms of church discipline that civic-minded lay members took to be negative expressions of church life, in favor of positive evangelism and planting a new church in the city of Winnipeg. But Steinbach EMC intended no retreat from Mennonitism. In 1957 when it joined other town-based Mennonite congregations in the region – MB, EMB, and Conference of Mennonites in Canada – to light "revival fire" in members' hearts, the planners turned not to any noted British-Canadian preacher, but to Virginia Mennonite evangelist George R. Brunk II. Brunk's four-community, English-language preaching campaign employed a sophisticated system of tents, trucks, and amplification that mimicked, on a much smaller scale, the methods that Billy Graham had catapulted to prominence in 1949.<sup>23</sup>

In June Brunk's tent went up for three weeks in Steinbach, then moved on for similar periods in Winker, Altona, and Winnipeg. Night after night, he offered an English message of "severe criticism" of churches "trapped in linguistic, social, cultural, and religious traditions." A sympathetic newspaper reporter, Frank H. Epp, summarized



An audience gathered to hear evangelist George R. Brunk II in Chilliwack, British Columbia, June 1958. Brunk's tent went up here and in Abbotsford and Vancouver that summer, at the invitation of the Fraser Valley's General Conference, Mennonite Brethren, and Evangelical Mennonite Brethren churches.

a key feature of Brunk's preaching as "faith superseding tradition." "Tradition can be either master or servant to the Christian faith," the journalist explained, and "In the lives of many Mennonites in southern Manitoba tradition was definitely assuming the master role. ... That the mission of the church was cultural, rather than spiritual, was the opinion of others. The practices of the past were authority enough for the individual, said some." But now, "In all of the campaigns these falsehoods were exposed. The exposure struck deep into the heart of a formalistic and traditionalistic Mennonite community life, but thus became part of the ongoing revival," which promised to burn away both sin and the husks of ethnicity. Organizers were heartened by the "Scores of lost [people who] found forgiveness of sin and peace for their souls, as they ... surrendered to the Lord," and in the reported conversions (approximately 1000) and renewed commitments (at least 1600).

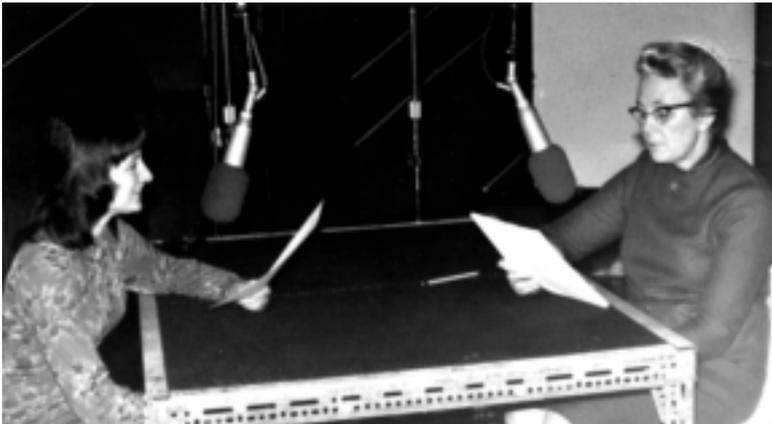
Significant, too, was the role that town-based Mennonite businessmen had taken in promoting the revival through advertising sponsorship, strategic use of Mennonite-owned CFAM radio, and revival program booklets that emphasized that "the Southern Manitoba Men-

nonite community is progressive and fast developing in the economic, educational, and cultural areas."<sup>24</sup>

Modern media was also central to the appeal of evangelicalism in Pennsylvania. There evangelical radio broadcasts allowed ordinary Mennonites to take greater charge of their spiritual diet and broaden the style of music and preaching to which they listened without leaving their home congregations.

Bishops in the Lancaster Conference, a regional body of (Old) Mennonites, had stoutly opposed radio as a source of secular music and drama. A conference discipline from 1954 intoned that "the influence of the use of the radio ... is not conducive to the spiritual upbuilding of the Christian home and church," and the Conference forbade ordained ministers from having radios in their homes. Radio ownership was not a "test of membership" for lay people, but in most congregations a radio listener would not be trusted to be a Sunday school teacher or hold any significant position of influence.<sup>25</sup>

Then in late 1959, Percy Crawford launched a Christian radio station, WDAC, in the heart of Lancaster Conference. "This posed a real dilemma for the bishops," recalled one Mennonite with close ties to the station. The presumption against radio had been its secular influence, "but here was a station that broadcast hymns and gospel



Diane Zimmerman Umble and Ella May Miller record an episode of "Heart to Heart," a Mennonite-produced radio program originating in Virginia and aimed at homemakers. Miller was the broadcast's principal speaker from 1958 to 1977, and followed Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus who had launched "Heart to Heart" in 1950.



preaching,” including “Back to the Bible,” a nationally-syndicated program featuring Mennonite Theodore H. Epp that originated in Lincoln, Nebraska. WDAC was a commercial station, but did not run advertisements on Sundays, and its announcers frequently included words of scripture along with station identification.<sup>26</sup> The station also hired several Mennonite staff members, including John Eby, who eventually became a long-time program director.

Understanding that Mennonites were a large share of the station’s potential market, and that Mennonite leaders might reasonably fear that if they endorsed WDAC members would soon be scanning the entire radio dial, station management “bought and distributed several thousand fixed-tuned radios which

**Evangelicalism represented opportunity for women to take on new roles**

could pull in only WDAC’s 94.5 FM signal.” Mennonites snapped up the receivers that appeared to answer the bishops’ argument that radio could be a source of secularism and simultaneously created a remarkably loyal Mennonite audience that gave the station one of the largest listener bases of any Christian station in the nation.<sup>27</sup>

Some bishops continued to complain that the station’s line-up of evangelical speakers included dispensationalists who preached a message that the Lancaster Conference firmly rejected. Such voices would now have a direct and private channel into members’ homes. But if some bishops were cool to WDAC, lay members may have been all the more ready to tune in, since the evangelical station empowered ordinary Mennonites to broaden and deepen their devotional lives. This was especially true – here and across the continent – for homemakers and rural farm families, for whom the radio was a daily companion and who often had less access to diverse devotional resources.

The personal message of evangelicalism as empowerment was also apparent among those new to the Mennonite family. In south Texas, where Yolanda Villareal had met and worked with MB missionary Annie Dyck, evangelicalism represented freedom from inherited religious traditions and old community hierarchies, as well as opportunity for women converts to take on new roles. As Villareal “worked in conjunction with many white MB missionaries, both male and female,” in evangelism and church development, it was clear to her that the personal message of evangelical spirituality had social consequences. The church “provided a space for women to gather and

support one another,” in the words of historian Felipe Hinojosa, who interviewed Villareal. “For example, the quilts the women sewed were sold along with used clothing from the north at prices community people could afford. This brought income to the church and helped provide resources for the community,” enabling Mexican-American women to be “active agents in creating community and negotiating practical resources for their families.”<sup>28</sup>

Evangelical spirituality had also inspired Mennonite missionaries to take personal risks in the cause of sharing a message of joy and salvation with others. Single women, such as Anna Buckwalter who moved to an apartment in the Bronx section of New York City in 1950 to anchor the Fox Street Mission, took on responsibilities that surely would have been unavailable to them in the rural communities of their youth. Buckwalter organized the mission’s day-to-day work and developed deep affection for the African-American and Puerto Rican “children who come into her home to listen to her play records and read [them] books.”<sup>29</sup>

During the later 1960s and early 1970s fires destroyed virtually all the buildings around Fox Street, often started by landlords seeking insurance money or individuals with addictions trying to stay warm. When a fire gutted a building three doors from her home, Buckwalter took in the remaining residents, an eighty-nine-year-old man and his eighteen-year-old grandson. In 1969 *The New York Times* described the area as “a total breakdown of services, looting is rampant, fires are everywhere.” But Buckwalter remained, noting with considerable understatement in one her mission reports that “it is dangerous living here.” She persisted, believing that all will be well if “we ... keep our eyes on Christ in the midst of violence and destruction.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Claiming Anabaptism**

In December 1943, in a very different part of New York City – the Columbia University Men’s Faculty Club on Manhattan’s west side – Harold S. Bender presided over the annual meeting of the American Society of Church History. Bender, who was the academic dean and a professor of church history at Goshen College in Indiana, had been chosen president of the Society by respected non-Mennonite academic peers. For several decades Bender had been at the forefront of research into sixteenth-century Anabaptist origins and especially of the Swiss Brethren in and around Zurich, Switzerland. He had pub-

lished numerous articles, encouraged Mennonite students to pursue Anabaptist research, and interacted with scholars such as professor Roland Bainton of Yale University and the Austrian Jewish-Christian émigré, Robert Friedmann.<sup>31</sup>



Elizabeth Horsch Bender and Harold S. Bender aboard ship, on their way to Europe in 1920 to conduct research. Harold's work helped renew interest in Anabaptism among North American Mennonites. A scholar in her own right, Elizabeth wrote on Mennonite themes in literature, among other topics.

At the Society of Church History's annual meeting in 1943 Bender delivered the presidential address under the title "The Anabaptist Vision." The lecture was a distillation of Bender's twenty years of work. On the one hand he argued against a view of the Anabaptists as a renegade or fringe element of the Protestant Reformation. Rather, Anabaptism was "the culmination of the Reformation, the fulfillment of the original vision of [Martin] Luther and [Ulrich] Zwingli, and thus makes it a consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromise the original New Testament church."

But Anabaptist respectability was not the only concern Bender had. He also presented, in three points, an interpretation of Anabaptist theology that was aimed at fellow Mennonites more than at the academics

gathered at Columbia University. First, Bender emphasized an understanding of Christianity as discipleship, “a concept which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ.” The second point concerned the nature of the church and its “voluntary ... membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living.”

Finally, Bender highlighted an ethic of love and nonresistance that applied “to all human relationships.” The Anabaptists, Bender told his audience, believed “that Jesus intended that the Kingdom of God should be set in the midst of the earth, here and now, and this they

**The “Anabaptist Vision”  
was a major development  
in Mennonite spiritual life**

proposed to do forthwith. We shall not believe, they said, that the Sermon on the Mount or any other vision that He had is only a heav-

enly vision meant but to keep his followers in tension until the last great day, but we shall practice what He taught, believing that where He walked we can by His grace follow His steps.”<sup>32</sup>

Having presented his lecture, Bender dashed off from New York and in a matter of hours was in Chicago attending a Mennonite Central Committee board meeting and dealing with issues related to war-time conscientious objection. Indeed, Bender seemed to have been much more at home in the MCC board room than among the scholarly Society of Church History crowd, and his historical essay was a contemporary theological manifesto.

In the years that followed, historians took issue with certain aspects of Bender’s thesis, and even in 1943 the swell of interest in sixteenth-century Anabaptism was much larger than Harold Bender, and included scholars such as Cornelius Krahn at Bethel College in Kansas. Nevertheless, the term “Anabaptist Vision” and in at least a rough way, the triptych of discipleship, community, and peace represented a major mid-century development in Mennonite spiritual life. Neo-Anabaptism charted the path of a spiritual journey that would excite and energize a large number of North American Mennonites.

Unlike the optimistic Mennonite progressives of the early 1900s, a neo-Anabaptist approach to faith did not assume that Mennonite values were consonant with wider social norms, but expected that Mennonites would stand in some tension with a world of individualism,

mainline Christianity, and militaristic nationalism. Yet the Anabaptist vision did not locate these tensions with society in the same places that Fundamentalism had. By starting with sixteenth-century stories, the Anabaptist vision bypassed many of the divisive issues of the 1910s and 1920s – or at least it did not begin with those issues.

As a spirituality, neo-Anabaptism was activist, and unsatisfied with the tradition-guided definitions of church found among Old Order Mennonites and Amish. But neo-Anabaptism differed in perceptible ways from the spirituality of evangelicalism, as well. Bender himself appreciated evangelicals, particularly the irenic ones at the new Fuller Theological Seminary.<sup>33</sup> But Bender had been clear that for the Anabaptists, the “focus of the Christian life was not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct.”<sup>34</sup> This affirmation suggested that a personal, joy-filled relationship with Jesus – so closely associated with evangelical revivalism and mission during these years – was insufficient in itself.

Neo-Anabaptism captured the imagination of a significant slice of the North American Mennonite world. Canadian MB leader John A. Toews wrote his 1950 bachelor’s thesis on “The Anabaptist Concept of the Church,” and his master’s thesis and doctoral dissertation also explored sixteenth-century theological themes with an eye to their twentieth-century relevance.

Students at Mennonite Brethren Bible College, opened in Winnipeg in 1944, “gained an appreciation for Anabaptism”

**Neo-Anabaptism differed from the spirituality of evangelicalism**

from Frank C. Peters, who “frequently lectured and preached on Anabaptism-related themes.” The English-language periodical *Canadian Mennonite*, launched in 1953, “increasingly adopted Anabaptist vision language” to express Mennonite spirituality in an English idiom.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps nowhere was the effect of claiming Anabaptism as a spiritual lode-star more dramatic than at Pacific Bible College, the MB school in Fresno, California. Begun in 1944 as Pacific Bible Institute, the school had been a bastion of MB fundamentalism and even dispensational teaching. In 1960, however, Arthur J. Wiebe became president and recruited faculty committed to neo-Anabaptism. His “determination to give the fledgling college an Anabaptist cast” included establishing a Mennonite historical library on campus and giving college buildings sixteenth-century names such as “Sat-

tlar, Marpeck, Witmarsum [and] Strasbourg – previously unknown in the MB religious lexicon.” By 1964 J. B. Toews, the new president of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, which shared the Fresno campus, declared that “the Seminary holds to the Anabaptist view of the church” and soon the seminary dean A. J. Klassen, who had been a student of Bender, introduced a required course in Anabaptist theology.<sup>36</sup>

A rising generation of Mennonites, studying at Fresno and elsewhere, encountered the most sophisticated expressions of Anabaptist theology in the writings of John Howard Yoder, a theological ethicist who

**John Howard Yoder argued that Jesus was “a model of radical political action”**

taught at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries and later at the University of Notre Dame. Best known was Yoder’s 1972 book *The*

*Politics of Jesus*, in which Yoder argued that the life of Jesus was “a model of radical political action” and engagement in societal affairs. But, as Yoder explained it, Jesus’s “social ethic” refused “to take control of history by violent means,” and unlike the mainline reformers of the sixteenth century – or the God-and-country wing of conservative North American Protestantism – the church for Yoder would transform culture by “being the church” and employing servanthood, forgiveness, and “divine love.”<sup>37</sup> Widely-read in the broader Christian world, Yoder’s work made *Anabaptism* a recognized, and often respected, theological category. Around the same time, Canadian historian Walter Klaassen published *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic Nor Protestant*, a book that presented Anabaptism as a serious alternative to major Christian traditions.<sup>38</sup>

Impressive as Anabaptist theology may have been in the academic world, neo-Anabaptism was appealing to ordinary Mennonites primarily because it, like evangelicalism, offered an attractive spirituality – a way of understanding God’s will and expressing faith in everyday ways. Like contemporary evangelicalism, neo-Anabaptism offered a clear critique of Mennonite ethnicity. For neo-Anabaptists, placing spiritual stock in family lineage was a pale substitute for rugged discipleship, and Mennonite ethnic enclaves seemed like places of retreat from the world rather than sites of engagement. John Howard Yoder himself had compared “Anabaptist vision and Mennonite reality” and found the latter wanting. Instead of the medieval synthesis of church and state – the so-called *Corpus Christianum* – Yoder contended that traditional Men-

nonitism had produced ingrown communities that might be termed “Christian corpuscles” and that were “not like the Anabaptists.”<sup>39</sup>

In 1978, Canadian student Travis Kroeker, who had been raised in the Evangelical Mennonite Church, mused on the “appellation ‘Mennonite.’” For Kroeker, the “conclusive definition of what it means to be a Mennonite” was theological alignment with “the sixteenth-century Anabaptists” who presented “a prophetic lifestyle” that could not be contained in the quietism of ethnic enclaves. Instead, Kroeker reinterpreted Mennonitism as a faith that “attempts to come to grips with the inequalities, injustices, and ills of our world.”<sup>40</sup>

As Kroeker suggested, neo-Anabaptism offered a “prophetic” spirituality, and one that had seemed especially relevant during the 1960s and 1970s amid civil rights tension and a widening American war in Vietnam. Ontario native Arnold W. Cressman summed up the activist impulse toward social involvement: “Ask someone in your congregation what peace means. Ask yourself. You will likely get a string of non answers – like noninvolvement, nonparticipation, nonresistance.



Tim Beachy and Jon Lind, two of the young men who asked delegates at the (Old) Mennonite biennial conference to endorse draft resistance, talk with conference participant Sam Janzen at their Mennonite Draft Resisters booth at Turner, Oregon, 1969.

... We must get the wall-breaking action-oriented word for peace into our vocabularies and into our blood."<sup>41</sup>

In 1962 African-American Mennonite civil rights leader, Vincent Harding, invoked "our persecuted Anabaptist forefathers" when he called white Mennonites to act for racial justice. Anabaptists, too, he reminded his audience, had been "a minority, forever in danger of their lives, always threatened with swift destruction of their property."<sup>42</sup> In 1969 at the (Old) Mennonite denominational conference at Turner, Oregon, a group of young adults asked delegates for church support in resisting military conscription by refusing any cooperation with local draft boards. Supportive comments from the delegate floor appealed to the sixteenth-century: "Our Anabaptist tradition was based very solidly on taking seriously the commands of Jesus Christ and radical discipleship," pastor Don Blosser asserted. Appeasing the state "is not what Conrad Grebel and his men started out to do," while supporting the draft resisters would "clearly say we believe Jesus is Lord for us today just as clearly as He was Lord of those who started our church."<sup>43</sup> And a decade later, when MB students at Fresno Pacific College organized Operation Good Samaritan to sponsor refugees fleeing violence in southeast Asia, one explained it as an opportunity to "flex my Anabaptist muscles."<sup>44</sup>

### **Expressing the Old Order**

The personal joy of evangelicalism and the activist muscle of neo-Anabaptism were not the only spiritualities at play among North American Mennonites, although they may have been the most articulate. A sizable – and quietly growing – segment of the Mennonite family was to be found in self-consciously Old Order communities, including Old Order Mennonites, Old Colony Mennonites, Reinland Mennonites, Old Order Amish, and traditional Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, and Saskatchewan Bergthaler Mennonite groups. These churches also possessed a vital spirituality, though it was one that emphasized humility and quiet self-effacement, and was rarely verbalized.

An identifiable Old Order had emerged among North American Mennonites and Amish in the mid-1800s (chapter 2) when some churches had resisted the novelty and innovation of Sunday schools, denominational bureaucracy, and English-language revivalism in favor of traditional patterns of church life. With the advent of telephones and automobiles in the early 1900s, Old Order churches further set



themselves apart by restricting members' use or ownership of many household and consumer technologies that promised to empower the individual and bolster personal autonomy.

Certainly the conservative wing of the Mennonite world was dynamic, and in the first half of the twentieth century new expressions of tradition-minded Mennonite and Amish faith emerged, often aimed at some balance of evangelical piety and clear communal constraints.

After 1927, for example, a loose network of so-called Beachy Amish Mennonites (named for an early leader, Moses Beachy) permitted

**Old Order spirituality was a communal approach to faith**

members to own cars and gradually began adopting English-language preaching. During the 1950s, Beachy Amish members, who remained visually distinct in their "plain" garb, began to engage in verbal, one-on-one evangelism in North America and overseas, sponsoring missionaries through Amish Mennonite Aid, organized in 1955.

Similarly, the so-called Holdeman Mennonites – formally known as the Church of God in Christ Mennonites – combined firm adherence to plain dress and restrictions on mass media with revivalistic piety and vigorous mission work. Nor were the groups that remained decidedly Old Order entirely uniform in their understanding of what separation from the world entailed. Varied decisions about how to express faith in everyday life resulted in a range of choices over whether to accept rubber tires on farm equipment, permit store-bought clothing, or allow central heating in homes – the latter choice having the practical effect of disbursing family members in many rooms instead of encouraging them to remain together around the kitchen cook stove. There were Old Colony Mennonites who drove pickup trucks and "New Order" Amish who experimented with Sunday schools, and also "Stauffer" Mennonites and "Swartzentruber" Amish who refused all of these things.

Despite the diversity in the details of their daily lives, Old Order church members expressed a remarkably similar spirituality. And like evangelicals and neo-Anabaptists, that theological core guided their spiritual journey in the modern world. Old Order spirituality was, first of all, a communal approach to faith, one that understood God working through the church and that perceived group discipline as strengthening, rather than hindering, an individual's relationship with God. Outsiders might see the *Ordnung* – the discipline and col-

lective wisdom of the church – as “impractical,” “an outdated thing,” “bondage,” or “a man-made law,” one Old Order writer conceded. But “it is only a person who has learned to love and live a respected church *Ordnung* who can ever fully appreciate its values. It gives freedom of heart, peace of mind, and a clear conscience. A person inside the church actually has more freedom, more liberty, and more privilege than those who are bound to the outside [world].” Discipline “generates peace, love, contentment, equality, and unity.”<sup>45</sup>



Old Order Amish father and son at a horse auction in northern Indiana. Old Order understandings of Christian faithfulness place a high value on devotion to family.

A Kleine Gemeinde deacon whose parents had immigrated to Mexico in the 1940s agreed. In 1973 as Jacob Kornelsen looked back on that decision he knew that progressive Mennonites might not understand why his parents had left just “as things began to be easier in Canada and the world began ... to offer many ... opportunities.” But Kornelsen was grateful that his forebears had “made the difficult journey” to maintain a disciplined life. “Our ... fathers, who at that time attended school there, recall how they had been compelled to practice wholeheartedly, learn and sing ‘O Canada’ and ‘God Save Our King,’” which were “earthly patriotic song[s] in which they freely ... were saying that they wished to give their lives for others in war.”<sup>46</sup>

Old Order faith was also measured in terms of its positive attention to extended family, in sharp contrast to evangelicalism and neo-Anabaptism that often saw ethnic attachments as a problem to be solved.

“Perhaps one of the greatest spiritual teachings” we receive from our parents and grandparents, decided Samuel Stoltzfus, an Old Order Amish farmer who raised horseradish near Gordonville, Pennsylvania, was how those generations “cared for their elderly parents.” His grandparents had “provided living quarters for both [great-grandmothers] in their house and faithfully cared for them till they died in 1942 and 1946 at age 93 and 102.” And then “we saw Dad’s care for [our] grandparents” as they “cleaned grandparents’ houses twice a year, cared for their gardens, did some of their sewing, got the estates ready for auction, repaired their broken furniture, and whatever, and read the Bible to them on Sundays.”<sup>47</sup> These things were all spiritual activities of great worth.

Indeed, this commitment to the aged was the corollary of Old Order concern for maintaining spiritual fidelity with the past. Where others saw empty tradition or a lack of verbally articulated faith, those who followed the Old Order way saw faithfulness embodied. Elders “didn’t just tell us their actions, they showed us,” Stoltzfus explained. “I can well recall Mother making a hearty meal for [homeless] road walkers who came to our house. Many times we saw Dad rush off to barn raisings, or take his team [of horses] to go plow for a sick neighbor. How Dad would always give generously” to “fire companies, MCC [fundraising] drives, etc. Then we saw how Dad got alms moneys ready before going to communion, and how we were instructed to give alms when we went to communion.”<sup>48</sup>

**Where others saw empty tradition those who followed the Old Order saw faithfulness embodied**

And always there was intergenerational singing and prayer. “Starting the day with one of those precious German hymns does something to the whole family,” wrote a mother in *Family Life*, an Old Order periodical published in Aylmer, Ontario, and “the bonds within a family are made stronger while singing.” As she listened to her three-year-old sing “so earnestly” even though he “cannot understand the whole meaning,” she knew “it is enough for him to know he is singing about Jesus.” Grandmother had taught this “hymn to our oldest son” and “it keeps being passed down to our babies, one by one, as soon as they are old enough to lisp the words.”<sup>49</sup>

Devotional rituals left deep impressions. “There was always prayer, from infant age on,” a grandfather recalled of his childhood in the 1950s. “Our parents taught us to put our hands under the table and

pray a silent table prayer six times a day, before and after each meal. Then there was the evening prayer. Dad would read for the whole family just before bedtime" from the German prayer book. "There was a secure feeling in our hearts when we would go upstairs to our beds. We felt protected all night long."<sup>50</sup>

Practicing such spirituality in North America, where cultural norms were soaked in individualism and frenzied consumer pursuits, was no easy thing. For many Old Colony, Sommerfelder, and other tradition-minded Mennonites of Dutch-North German ethnicity, surrounding society seemed so hostile to Old Order values that "migration and diaspora" became central experiences and the key to maintaining their witness against worldly depravity.

During the 1930s, Old Colony Mennonite families, "disturbed by what they saw as increasing worldliness around them" in Saskatchewan, sought a more isolated existence in the Peace River Valley of northern Alberta, and from there some moved on to British Columbia.<sup>51</sup> In the 1920s, and then again in 1948, whole communities left Canada to start new homes in Mexico and Paraguay. Later, those Mexican colonies spawned settlements in Belize, Bolivia, and Argentina, as Old Orders of Dutch-North German descent traveled "to the elusive ends of the earth" to "walk with Christ in simplicity and peace."<sup>52</sup>

So-called "Swiss" Old Order Mennonites and Old Order Amish chose to remain in Canada and the United States but resist legal pressures to make their communities conform to mainstream ways. The most prominent confrontations were a series of conflicts during the 1950s and 1960s with public school administrators who were determined to see Old Order children attend high school as Old Order parents were committed to shielding their offspring from "a worldly environment" where they "are taught by men and women not of our faith six hours a day, five days a week, for the greater part of the year."<sup>53</sup> Dozens of fathers went to jail rather than surrender to truancy laws until in 1972 the U.S. Supreme Court sided with Old Orders and granted them the right to end formal schooling after the eighth grade. In the spirit of humble resignation Old Order parents had submitted to imprisonment, but academic and religious activists, led by a Lutheran clergyman and supported by neo-Anabaptists at MCC, had taken the government to court.

By the late twentieth century, academics and activists were not the only people paying attention to the ways in which North American



Amish men ascend the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1972 as the court considered Old Order objections to compulsory high school attendance in the case *Wisconsin v. Yoder*.

Old Order communities stood against the tide of modernity. In all the unsought attention a few discerned a larger purpose. “The Mennonites and Amish did not migrate to America to spread the gospel,” Old Order Mennonite writer Isaac R. Horst, of Mount Forest, Ontario, decided. “Yet when the tourists flock to Amish and Mennonite areas to see the phenomenon [of Old Order life], they are subjected to a faith and doctrine that ‘shall not return to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I propose’ (Isaiah 55:11).”<sup>54</sup>

Evangelical observers might consider Horst’s assessment of mission disappointingly weak, and neo-Anabaptists might find it too quietist. For their part, Old Order church members would recognize a spirituality that reflected personal humility and a profound sense of divine providence.

## Conclusion

Twentieth-century Mennonites had familial, business, and civic concerns. But they were deeply spiritual people and they viewed their opportunities, choices, and changes through a lens of faith. As older

patterns of making spiritual sense of the world shifted in the early 1900s, especially as German gave way to English religious vocabularies and Mennonite interaction with Protestant neighbors and religious media increased, Mennonites engaged new theologies and definitions of Christian faithfulness. A few Mennonites may have chosen secularism and some joined other denominations, but many expressed Mennonite spirituality in terms of evangelicalism, neo-Anabaptism, the Old Order way, or some combination of these.

Evangelicalism promised a personal religiosity, but could also supplement and enliven Mennonite life in fresh ways. Evangelicalism pushed Mennonite ethnic boundaries, encouraged reaching out to people of other backgrounds, and empowered ordinary Mennonites to take more responsibility for their devotional lives.

Neo-Anabaptism provided a spirituality of discipleship and community that stood in conscious tension with dominant political norms and grounded its spiritual identity in a centuries-old narrative of suffering forebears whose witness cried out for action on behalf of the oppressed today.

In a quite different way, Old Order spirituality also stood against the tenor of the times by seeking God's will through quiet submission and, often, voluntary exile. Old Order sensibilities were not well suited for modern strategies of mission, which emphasized verbal witness, cultural adaptation of the message, and individual conversion. But here again, Old Orders were in the minority, since most North American Mennonites in the mid-twentieth century were coming to understand their calling as one that involved an active program of mission, service, and peacemaking. As we shall see in the next chapter, that spiritual journey would prove transformative in unexpected ways.

# Transformed through Mission and Peace

*In summer 1943, as thousands of Canadian troops participated in the bloody invasion of Sicily, Herbert J. Brandt, a Mennonite Brethren young man from Winkler, Manitoba, was drafted. As a Christian conscientious objector, Brandt was committed to civilian Alternative Service instead of joining the military. He met with a “very friendly” official who “informed me that ... I could go to a forest camp, a mine, or to a mental hospital. I did not hesitate for a moment and said that I would choose to work in the hospital. After some simple paper work I was assigned to the Brandon [Manitoba] Mental Hospital and told when to report. The interview and the assignment took only a few minutes.” As smooth as the assignment process was, Brandt quickly discovered that “I was certainly not prepared for what I encountered.” Years later he recalled in sharp detail his first day in Brandon. “The man who directed me used a big key to open the door to let me in and then he locked it again behind me. With this I was introduced to an entirely new phase of my life. I was an orderly shoved into a world of men with mental illness. ... Here was a ward of 150 men, crowded into a relatively small space. ... Although it was daytime, the ward was only dimly lit. The odor was strong... But I knew that I was there to stay, even though I had a key to open the door and leave.” During the next three years Brandt had both meaningful interaction with patients and stultifying night shifts. He faced hard questions about the use of violent force to restrain patients and received training in psychiatric nursing, all of which pushed him well beyond the boundaries of his rather sheltered upbringing. The experience, he decided, “helped me to mature in many ways and equipped me for life and service in the years to come. Over the years my understanding and conviction of the peace position has been strengthened.”<sup>1</sup>*

*As a woman, Elsie C. Bechtel of Canton, Ohio, was not subject to military conscription. Still, in the context of national mobilization during the*

*Second World War, she considered how she, as a 32-year-old Brethren in Christ schoolteacher, might apply her peace convictions in a suffering world. In 1945, awaiting departure to join a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) relief unit in France, she wrote "Curing hate by love may seem like a wintry task, but we can pour on love as recklessly and with as great abandon as the geranium pours out color and brightness, for our God is a God of love and there is no limit to His supply." Elsie directed a home for displaced children in Lacercantière, France. Her diary reports her "unpacking and distributing relief clothing; sewing and ironing; gathering, salvaging, and shopping for food; cleaning; bathing the small children and caring for sick ones; planning programs and dramas for the children to present to villagers; building fires and sawing wood; purchasing goods; writing reports; overseeing staff and construction projects and vehicles; meeting with the government officials; writing promotional materials for MCC; teaching religious sessions; corresponding with administrators; attending MCC unit meetings; dealing with villagers angry at the children; and, last but not least, battling with American and French coworkers." Her diary also recorded the ways her years in war-ravaged Europe changed her outlook, including her appraisal of her church back home: "I find it so silly that the church [in Ohio] should fight about neck-ties and covering strings when there are things so much more real to think about." After returning home she resumed school teaching and was active at Valley Chapel Brethren in Christ Church. In 1974 she "still remember[ed] the feeling of spiritual gratitude I had of belonging to a Christian group who had service as a strong tenet."<sup>2</sup>*

## Lives of Service

During the middle decades of the twentieth century North America's Mennonites were transformed through mission and service.<sup>3</sup> The process had begun fifty years earlier as interest in foreign missions emerged in many quarters of the church and women's relief organizations rolled miles of bandages for leprosy clinics and war sufferers. In the aftermath of the First World War, Mennonites contributed to the relief efforts of the American Friends Service Committee, and commissioned a small number of their own relief workers to Syria and the Soviet Union – in the latter case through the new (1920) MCC, an organization that would soon become a major institutional force in Mennonite life. Then, during the mid-twentieth century, North American Mennonite mission at home and abroad mushroomed, with



scores of “mission outposts” in Canada and the United States and dozens of new “mission fields” around the globe.

Meanwhile, Mennonites’ commitment to the gospel of peace also made the 1940s-1970s especially pivotal years for cross-cultural and international interaction. For generations Mennonites in North America had sought exemption from military service as an expression of their Christian peace convictions. But after 1940 Mennonites and Brethren in Christ embraced alternative civilian service as their wartime duty.

If mission work had involved a high-profile minority of church members, the broad-based nature of military conscription, which persisted in the United States through 1972, meant that humanitarian service would be an experience directly touching a vast majority of families and congregations as thousands of young men, and many women, were thrust into new settings far from home that few would have chosen but many found life-changing. Paradoxically separation from popular patriotic sentiments during the Second World War, and the Cold War that followed, enlivened new forms of Mennonite engagement and moved Mennonites along a path from quietist non-resistance to activist peacemaking and work for social justice.

### **“Foreign” Mission at Home**

For nineteenth-century Mennonites, mission most often meant sponsoring an itinerant preacher (*Reiseprediger*) to visit scattered Mennonite families bereft of organized worship, in order to provide baptismal instruction for their children. Cross-cultural ministry, aimed at winning converts from among the un-churched or other-than Protestant populations, emerged among Mennonites in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, often inspired by the writings and examples of North American and European evangelicals. Given the popular assumptions of the day among white Christians, early mission boards labeled interactions with Native or Aboriginal American and African-American peoples as “foreign” missions because they considered racial boundaries akin to political borders. The earliest cross-cultural encounters were in the United States, but they anticipated those that followed in Canada.

In 1880 General Conference Mennonites Samuel and Susanna (Hirshler) Haury began mission work in “Indian Territory,” later called Oklahoma. Samuel had attended the Mission Training School in Barmer, Germany, and was conversant with the leading missiology of the

day. That training also prepared him to act as a government agent on the reservation and to promote assimilation policies tied to education. In any case, the school for Arapaho children that the Haurys began with GC Mennonite backing was the first organized mission of any North American Mennonite group.

In 1892 when the U.S. government opened Oklahoma to white settlement, the Cheyenne and Arapaho were forced onto small household land allotments. John Peak Hart, one of the Southern Cheyenne's Principal Chiefs, and his wife, Corn Stalk, "chose an allotment five miles north of Hammon," which was near the Mennonite mission. Although Hart was, for much of his life, a leader in the Native American Church (condemned by missionaries as "peyote religion"), his son, Homer Hart – who had been baptized by Methodists while at a government boarding school – and his grandson, Lawrence Hart, both joined the Mennonite church, and became ministers. Lawrence, later a noted leader in GC Mennonite circles, combined his Mennonite faith with a deep respect for his grandfather and the Cheyenne "peace chief" tradition, "holding the tribe together in Cheyenne and Mennonite ceremonies."<sup>4</sup>



Southern Cheyenne Mennonite leaders, gathered at Clinton, Oklahoma, in the 1930s, from left, Willie Meeks, Robert Hamilton, Albert Hamilton, Homer Hart, Kaes, and Harvey Whiteshield.

The Harts were not alone. Harvey Whiteshield became a teacher at a mission school near Cantonment, Oklahoma. He and John Heap of Birds wrote hymns using traditional Cheyenne melodies, including

“Father God, you are holy” and “Jesus Lord, how joyful you have made us.” In 1992 the GC and MC branches of Mennonites included these hymns in a new hymnal they produced together.<sup>5</sup> By that time there were numerous, though often small, Aboriginal Mennonite congregations across the continent, including Sioux and Cree Mennonites in Manitoba, Ojibway in Ontario, Creek and Choctaw in Alabama, and a Brethren in Christ Navajo mission in New Mexico.

If Mennonite missions initially reinforced government Indian policy in Oklahoma, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB) missionaries in Elk Park, North Carolina, existed after 1900 in some tension with the racial segregation that existed in the American South at the time. The mission faced stiff opposition from local whites who resented the Kansans and Californians who arrived to start a school for black children and then began an integrated church. The evangelistic fervor of Peter H. Siemens, a graduate of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and Moody Bible Institute, helped launch eleven KMB churches under local African-American leaders, including the indefatigable Rondo Horton. Ordained in 1933, Horton was “a real Mennonite; true to God, a good speaker and a Bible scholar,” who served as moderator for the North Carolina MB district for most years between 1956 and 1986. As the owner of an ice and coal business in the town of Boone, Horton was praised as a man who “took care of coal for everyone, black and white. No one went without fuel in the winter.”<sup>6</sup>

Different dynamics colored the Mennonite Brethren mission in south Texas, where “*los Menonitas*” were “prominent figures in Protestant circles,” helping found the Rio Grande Bible Institute in Edinburg, starting eight churches, and beginning a school in Sullivan City. In 1947 Ricardo Peña became the church’s first full-time Mexican-American evangelist, though he was paid considerably less than his white colleagues.

### **The young Hispanic church faced cultural boundaries**

The young Hispanic church there faced cultural boundaries on several fronts. On the one hand, early converts, such as Marta Espinoza, broke with family and tradition by rejecting Roman Catholicism. Espinoza reportedly told her parish priest that Catholic devotional rituals “are dead and they cannot help me anymore,” adding “now I am going to get me a Bible and read it and find out for myself God’s plan of salvation for my soul and how to get rid of burdens.” At the same time,

Latino Mennonites in Texas also engaged in “small, everyday forms of resistance” to the Mennonite missionaries’ earnest attempts to stamp out “the dance, the bingo, the lottery, the dice, horse race, and what not” that were integral parts of Mexican-American social life.<sup>7</sup>



Sunday school teacher Maria Peña and her class, in an undated photo from the Mennonite Brethren mission in south Texas.

Not all white Mennonites immediately embraced formal mission work, often because they were skeptical of the institutions and solicitation of funds that such efforts brought in their wake. “After a while you won’t be able to go to church without taking your pocket book along,” some grumbled.<sup>8</sup> But by the 1930s, mission work had gained wide support in all but Old Order circles. Under the banner “Every congregation an outpost!” Mennonite conferences launched a campaign of rural church planting, often targeting communities that were predominately white and economically disadvantaged. “A strong religious life [must] be established” in rural communities “to save the North American nations from moral decay,” warned Ontario minister L. J. Burkholder.<sup>9</sup>

Mennonites across the continent responded to such summons. Beginning in 1948, for example, Western Gospel Mission, supported by Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) churches and, later, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC), undertook an aggressive program in rural Saskatchewan. Using Bible school classes,

street meetings, cottage meetings, Sunday schools, and “any other legitimate means of spreading the Gospel that they could employ,” tireless church workers gained converts from British Canadian and Eastern European immigrant households and brought new names and faces into the EMC and EMMC, which “would never be the same again.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the zeal of converts often fueled new mission outposts. Bernard Kautz, a Hungarian Jew who joined the Mellinger Mennonite Church near Lancaster, Pennsylvania about 1914, was later instrumental in establishing that congregation’s outpost in the Chester County village of Andrew’s Bridge. The Andrew’s Bridge mission, in turn, attracted African-American teenagers, including Gerald Hughes, who in the late 1960s and early 1970s would go on to chair the (Old) Mennonite’s Urban-Racial Council and to hold other denominational posts.<sup>11</sup>



Sunday evening gathering at the Mennonite Pioneer Mission outpost in Pauingassi, Manitoba, 1959. Along with evangelistic work, MPM workers opened the first school in the area and assisted in improving local housing. MPM was founded in 1945 as the mission arm of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba.

Urban mission was also part of the mix, especially after 1950 and, as noted in chapter 5, it often involved interracial proselytism. In New York City such efforts centered in African-American and Afro-Puerto Rican neighborhoods in Spanish Harlem and the Bronx. Years later Nef-

tali Torres recalled how the folks at Glad Tidings Mennonite Church, a mix of off-the-farm young families and middle-aged single women from Pennsylvania, caught his attention. As a boy Neftali had emigrated from Puerto Rico. He had gotten involved with street gangs, despite his mother's prayers and pleading, and was cynical about church until he met John I. Smucker and John Freed. It wasn't that Smucker, Freed, and the others were always culturally sensitive. "But they were different," Neftali noticed. It was more what they did than what they said, and the fact that they walked around in coveralls, fixed leaking pipes, and joined a coalition for affordable housing. Neftali joined their church and by 1969 he and his wife Gracie were living in Chicago, as pastors of Lawndale Mennonite Church in that city.<sup>12</sup>

By far the most common cross-cultural encounter during these years was the "Fresh Air" program which, between 1950 and 1971, brought thousands of African-American youth to live for several weeks on Mennonite farms, mostly in Pennsylvania and Kansas. Patterned on programs pioneered by secular social workers, the Fresh Air programs initiated by (Old) Mennonites and General Conference Mennonites focused on African-American youth from New York City and Gulfport, Mississippi. Direct proselytism was not a stated goal. Instead, white Mennonites had faith in the purifying power of rural life. Participating children recalled their weeks among the Mennonites as a mix of picnics, farm animals, and general fun, along with prying questions about their home life, personal cleanliness, and their par-



Boys at Camp Ebenezer, near Millersburg, Ohio, late 1940s. The camp, begun by Hesston College student Tillie Yoder, served children from Chicago and Cleveland who were associated with Mennonite churches in those cities.

ents' marital status. Through their very presence, the children "defied racial stereotypes" and raised Mennonite consciousness.

For Mennonite hosts the experience was formative. By 1970 fewer than sixty U.S. Mennonite churches had African-American members, "but hundreds of congregations and thousands of individuals had hosted African-American Fresh Air children" and were able to "express their commitment to racial justice" on their own terms and turf.<sup>13</sup> In 1963 when the GC Mennonite Board of Christian Service decided to lobby publicly in favor of civil rights legislation, chairman Henry A. Fast of Newton, Kansas, credited the influence of Fresh Air children with prompting the move.

Even as Fast was recognizing that the foreign could become familiar, the lines separating *foreign* and *home* mission seemed somewhat artificial as international students, global migration, and missionaries themselves moved in an increasingly interconnected world. In 1961, for example, MB missionaries, fleeing a civil war that had erupted in Congo (today, Democratic Republic of Congo), moved to Franco-phone and Roman Catholic Quebec with the aim of planting churches in a province Mennonites had long considered "a major foreign mission field ... [and] one of the neediest in the world." Ernest and Lydia Dyck, later joined by other former Congo missionaries, established a mission 48 kilometers (30 miles) north of Montreal. They emphasized personal evangelism coupled with extensive French-language evangelical radio broadcasts, "with funds coming from [the] Canadian MB youth organization." A self-standing church was organized in 1964, and twenty years later there were eleven congregations and a Bible school, the *Institut Biblique Laval*.<sup>14</sup>

### **Into all the World**

The global connections represented by the Dycks were relatively slow to develop since North American Mennonites had been late-comers to the Anglo-American foreign mission enterprise. That larger Protestant movement had gained steam in the early 1800s, and by the 1870s it included dozens of denominational and para-church boards sponsoring thousands of missionaries around the globe. The first Mennonite missionary to leave North America was Eusebius Hershey, a member of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (today, the Missionary Church) from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Hershey sailed for Liberia in 1890, but died soon after arriving in Africa.

Like Hershey, most of the early Mennonite overseas missionaries acted independently or signed on with the mission arms of other denominations. William Shantz of Breslau, Ontario, for example, went to China in 1895 under Christian and Missionary Alliance auspices.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, in spite of the advent of Mennonite mission boards and programs, a steady stream of Mennonites continued to serve internationally through groups such as Wycliffe Bible Translators, New Tribes Mission, Youth with a Mission, and numerous other agencies. In 2004, for example, when Iowa native Dwight Swartzentruber retired after more than fifty years in international church work, a press release noted that his ministry as a Mennonite had mostly been with Church World Service, World Vision, and Lutheran World Relief.<sup>16</sup>

The first North America Brethren in Christ and Mennonite denominationally-sponsored forays into foreign mission were in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) by the Brethren in Christ in 1898, and in India, where Mennonite Brethren, (Old) Mennonites, and General Conference Mennonites all sent workers in 1899 and 1900.<sup>17</sup> Both “fields” attracted a gifted cohort of women and men committed to spreading the gospel and

**International mission  
profoundly shaped the  
Mennonite world**

offering medical care and famine relief. The piety and fearlessness of Hannah Frances Davidson made her something of a spiritual celebrity among BICs back home, and

missionary stories from India, reported by Crissie Yoder Shank in her 1924 book for Sunday school pupils, *Letters from Mary*, inspired North American children to give money and, perhaps, dedicate themselves to the cause of world mission.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, international mission profoundly shaped the North American Mennonite world. Sometimes it encouraged ecumenical cooperation, as Mennonites worked with other Christians in a common cause. Congo Inland Mission (CIM), for instance, organized in 1912 by members of the Defenseless Mennonites and Central Conference of Mennonites, was animated in its early years by the energy of Alma Doering, a missionary of Lutheran background.

Of equal importance was the way foreign mission simply opened new vistas for Mennonites who never left North America. Stories from mission “fields” in Argentina, China, Congo, India, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and beyond filled church periodicals during the first half of the twen-



tieth century. Especially for many rural readers, these accounts provided novel, detailed information about the larger world, and invited them to publicly align themselves with the missionary cause.

In February 1934, for example, 451 black-vested and bonneted (Old) Mennonites from Pennsylvania and Virginia poured into New York City, braving unusually harsh winter weather, to bid farewell to three of the first Mennonite missionaries to Tanganyika (now Tanzania). "In the [New York train] station we saw many faces turned our way," remembered Anna Zimmerman, who was part of the sending group. "I imagine they wondered where we all came from." All the major city newspapers reported the visit, impressed with the Mennonites' earnest support for missions. The group held a two-and-a half hour prayer and hymn service in a Fifth Avenue restaurant "without interrupting the regular flow of patrons in and out of the eating place."<sup>19</sup> For years thereafter they and others followed closely any mission news



Bishop Thompson Mpongwana Adonis, leader of Reformed Church of Christ, an African-Initiated Church, meeting with North Americans Gary and Jean (Kliever) Isaac, who worked in South Africa from 1986 to 1999 with Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission. Bishop Adonis had founded Bethany Bible School near Mthatha, South Africa, to serve AIC students. From 1984 onward the school regularly made use of Mennonite teachers from North America. AICs are indigenous churches that are not part of Western denominations and often minister to the poorest members of their societies.

from East Africa, circulated missionary letters, and prayed for church members halfway around the globe.

In time, the news from Tanzania would influence and disrupt Mennonite religious life back home. It turned out that the missionaries had become deeply involved in a Keswick-Holiness renewal movement called the East Africa revival. Keswick emphasized sanctification through the Holy Spirit, victory over sin, and called into question older religious boundaries and hierarchies. When missionaries shared their new insights and spiritual experience through letters and reports to congregations while on home leave, it sparked a grassroots revival and a sharp critique of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference's requirement that its members adhere to prescribed "plain dress." Similarly, Nelson and Ada Litwiller, Ontario Mennonites who served as long-time missionaries in Argentina, would return to North America and be at the center of a 1970s charismatic movement that also refused to be corralled by traditional Mennonite theology or patterns of worship. Despite such unpredictable results, support for missions did not wane.

Although Mennonite and Brethren in Christ involvement in overseas mission had lagged behind that of most other Protestants in the 1800s and early 1900s, after 1945 volunteers and money flowed steadily into Mennonite and BIC mission agencies. Mennonite churches took up "large collections at their annual harvest thanksgiving and mis-

### **During the 1970s, Mennonite overseas mission programs contracted**

sions festivals," and the number of missionaries and the number of countries to which they went, swelled. By one count, Mennonite mission agencies established ninety-nine new overseas missions between 1944 and 1976. By 1979 some 493 missionaries were in seventy-six nations.<sup>20</sup> These included missions supported by more traditional groups, such as the Church of God in Christ (Holdeman Mennonites), who went to Haiti in 1960, to Nigeria three years later, and to a number of other places.

Then, during the 1970s, Mennonite overseas mission programs contracted, sometimes purposefully, sometimes painfully. In a wave of post-colonial political agitation, Indigenous churches took charge of missionary-established schools, hospitals, and church programs. By 1993 the number of long-term workers under mission boards associated with the three largest bodies – Mennonite Church, General Conference, and Mennonite Brethren – had shrunk to 355.<sup>21</sup> North American Mennonite

missionaries did initiate new, cutting-edge work with African-Initiated Churches during these years, but such work was often little understood or appreciated by church members back in Canada and the United States.

Instead, during the 1980s “short-term” mission programs, typically involving terms of nine to eighteen months, emerged as a phenomenon. Among the prominent short-term programs was Pennsylvania-based Youth Evangelism Service (YES), which in the thirty years after 1980 sent 524 teams, involving almost 2,000 young adults to 61 countries. YES, in turn, spawned a parallel program in British Columbia, known as YADA! (Young Adult Discipleship Adventure). These and other short-term mission opportunities, although newly popular, built on a much longer history of service on the part of Mennonite and BIC young adults seeking to offer a practical witness for peace.

### **People of Peace in a World at War**

The global catastrophe that was the Second World War (1939-1945 in North American terms) marked a watershed for the Mennonite practice of pacifism – a practice that, in turn, reshaped Mennonite identity along lines of humanitarian service. As one of North America’s “historic peace churches,” along with Quakers and Brethren, Mennonites had long claimed conscientious objection from military participation, and as this new war began they saw military conscription as their immediate peace concern. Initially, Canadian Prime Minister William L. Mackenzie King had resisted promising Britain an unlimited number of troops, and U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt looked for a way to please both isolationists and interventionists without resorting to a draft.

Nevertheless, in 1940 both countries lurched toward mass conscription, and in both places peace church leaders, with Mennonites playing prominent roles, lobbied for recognition of conscientious objection. In Canada, Mackenzie King, a personal friend of leading Ontario Mennonites, publicly announced in June 1940 that “certain religious groups in Canada, as for example the Mennonites,” would be exempted from military service. Meanwhile, in the United States MCC negotiated with Selective Service Director Lewis B. Hershey, who had Mennonite ancestry and looked favorably on conscientious objectors (COs) as quaint but sincere people.

Mennonites approached these negotiations with fresh ideas. Although many Canadian Mennonites still hoped for total exemption from military responsibility and a large portion of American Menno-

nites understood “nonresistance” as a passive refusal to fight coupled with diffident respect for the authority of the state, key leaders had been rethinking peace theology and its wartime implications.

In the mid-1930s, in anticipation of some future war, Mennonite ethicist Guy F. Hershberger, of Goshen College in Indiana, had presented a framework for understanding conscientious objection in the modern world – a framework that was influential well beyond his own (Old) Mennonite sphere. For Hershberger, every CO had an obligation to demonstrate a positive witness in the context of a world at war, but one that recognized and addressed the systemic and institutional needs of modern society. Farm deferments were fine, but better would be service in work of national importance that assisted segments of society beyond the Mennonite community.

As historian Theron Schlabach has explained, this new ethic centered on “the witness of a faithful church” that operated “in its own ethical realm,” quite different from the standards of the world. But unlike a traditionalist-Mennonite nonresistance that parlayed that point into an argument for withdrawal, Hershberger insisted that “the purpose of being counter-cultural ... was precisely so the church could give its witness, do its reconciling work, and be God’s agent for the

**In 1940 the historic peace churches negotiated programs of CO work**

world’s salvation.” This was not “separation as a principle for itself,” but a “corporate witness” through which the

church would “exercise ... its ‘social responsibility.’”<sup>22</sup>

Building on this analysis of the church’s responsibility, and drawing somewhat on the example of forestry work that Mennonites had performed in lieu of military service in the Russian Empire, in 1940 the historic peace churches negotiated fairly complex programs of CO work camps known in Canada as Alternative Service Work (ASW) and in the United States as Civilian Public Service (CPS). CPS and AWS were novel experiments in church-state relations. Governments provided most of the camp facilities and transportation to the camps, but churches – with MCC playing a leading administrative role – financed the rest of the system.

Agreeing to shoulder the costs was a big step for constituent churches, but a price MCC executive Orié O. Miller said they would “gladly pay” even if “every Mennonite farmer had to mortgage his farm.”<sup>23</sup> COs undertook a massive program of public service, building roads and dams,

fighting forest fires, acting as medical guinea pigs and, on Vancouver Island, planting millions of trees. Beginning in 1942 hundreds of CPS participants in the United States and a small number in Canada accepted assignment to under-staffed public mental hospitals.

In all some 4,700 American Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren in Christ participated in CPS, and they accounted for about 40 percent of all those enrolled in the program. In addition, an undetermined but probably larger number of men from these churches negotiated with local draft boards to receive agricultural deferments that kept them out of the army, but also kept them off the official roster of COs. In Canada more than 7,000 Mennonites, Hutterites, and Brethren in Christ performed alternative service – a number that included many employed in agriculture – and comprised 70 percent of Canada’s COs.

Wartime conscription upended the lives of thousands of Mennonite women, as well. Hundreds of wives and girlfriends moved to be closer to ASW and CPS camps, and other Mennonite women took jobs as camp staff, especially as nurses and dieticians. Some “fifty wives and summer [women] volunteers – known as ‘CO girls’ or ‘COGS’—lived and worked” at the CPS unit at the Howard, Rhode Island mental hospital, among other places. In Ontario, Mennonite sewing circles “knitted



Although not subject to the draft, some women volunteered for Civilian Public Service, including work at Rhode Island State Mental Hospital in Howard, Rhode Island, a unit administered by Mennonite Central Committee.

and sent boxes of clothing, food and other appropriate items to the men in the alternative service camps."<sup>24</sup> Wives of drafted men who remained at home had to manage farming operations single-handedly, raised children by themselves, and often struggled to make ends meet since COs received only very modest monthly stipends from MCC.

Simply being a pacifist in a society mobilized for total war could be challenging. Public schoolchildren faced pressure to contribute to scrap metal drives and buy war bonds. E. Morris Sider, of Cheapside, Ontario, was bullied because of his Brethren in Christ peace convictions. Another boy, "knowing that Sider was not supposed to fight back, would ... 'punch and pummel'" him repeatedly. Sider retaliated only once, on a day his older sister was not "at school and therefore unable to report [his fighting] to their parents."<sup>25</sup>

Church leaders recognized the stress children faced, and commended their nonresistant behavior to adults. In 1943 the Ohio-Kentucky Brethren in Christ annual meeting heard the following account: "A boy of

**For draft-age men the pressure was most intense**

our faith when asked by his teacher if he hated the Japs said, 'No.' He was ridiculed by his class mates. The teacher said, 'What would you do if

Hitler came over?' He replied, 'I'd leave him to Jesus to handle.' How good for this Elementary Youth."<sup>26</sup>

For draft-age men the pressure was most intense. "I still recall the feeling of being a fugitive in society," remembered Henry Funk of Rosenfeld, Manitoba. "All propaganda, radio, press, billboards pointed a finger at you – why are you not in the army doing your duty? One of the boys came to [Portage la Prairie, Manitoba] by train – got on a train in Winnipeg and it happened to be a troop train – all passengers were army men. The three other persons in his double seat were in uniform and for the whole time – Winnipeg to Portage – they discussed conscientious objectors. One was ready to shoot them all, one was sort of neutral, one tried to defend COs. Imagine Ed Penner, from Plum Coulee [Manitoba], fresh from the farm, age 18, trying to fade into the upholstery, hoping no one would notice him and ask him why he was in civilian clothes."<sup>27</sup>

In fact, a sizable minority of Mennonite men chose regular military service or noncombatant service within the military, though evidence indicates they were reluctant soldiers. Historian T. D. Regehr notes that the roughly 4,500 Canadian Mennonites who enlisted had not been

“quick to volunteer” and rarely received promotions, suggesting they were “willing to serve their country in its hour of need,” but “did not find the armed forces sufficiently congenial to stay once the war was over.”<sup>28</sup> Some 5,200 drafted U. S. Mennonites ended up in combatant and non-combatant ranks, with more acculturated groups, such as the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (later, the Missionary Church) and GC Mennonites registering larger shares, and all traditionalist groups, such as Holdeman Mennonites and Old Order groups, accounting for very few.



Mennonite conscientious objectors working at Caves Trail, British Columbia, during the Second World War.

Because CO camps and hospital units were largely self-contained they developed a rich community life and camaraderie that expressed itself in life-long friendships. Evening classes and other educational programs in the camps introduced a generation of young men to higher education and post-war professional opportunities. As well, most camps were somewhat interdenominational, and Mennonites rubbed shoulders with Quakers and liberal pacifists from mainline denominations.

For his part, a conservative Bergthaler Mennonite man, assigned to work with Aboriginal people on a United Church mission, later reflected on how his “wartime experiences on the Cross Lake Indian Reserve helped me begin to sort out many misconceptions about Indians ... Their hunting and fishing lifestyle did not call for the schedule of a farm routine. Their concept of time was more circular whereas ours was straight.”<sup>29</sup>

As the war ended, marked by the fall of Berlin in Europe and atomic inferno in Japan, COs in both countries sought to maintain the ethic of service as a peace-time expression of their convictions. Mennonites who had staffed mental hospitals during the war and had found the hospitals' policies of confrontation and control repulsive, launched a movement for Mennonite-run community mental health centers. Drawing on their wartime service, and also looking to the model provided by the Mennonite-managed Bethesda Hospital in Vineland, Ontario, MCC established Brook Lane Psychiatric Center near Hagerstown, Maryland in 1947, the first of several centers that would form Mennonite Mental Health Services. Acting on a similar impulse to serve others, in 1950 a group of CPS alumni in Hesston, Kansas filled sandbags and built dikes when heavy rain sent the Little Arkansas River over its banks, flooding Wichita. Their response evolved into Mennonite Disaster Service, a practical and soon bi-national expression of conscientious concern.

### **Cold War Pacifism in the United States**

With the end of the Second World War, Canada ended conscription but the United States continued it in response to mounting tensions with the Soviet Union. Indeed, a tense Cold War (1947-1989) soon pitted Western powers against the Soviets and their allies. For American Mennonites, the militaristic atmosphere of the Second World War continued and demanded a persistent response. A quirk in the 1948 U.S. draft law had all but exempted COs, but the advent of the Korean War (1950-1953) closed that loophole. Military conscription – including conscription of conscientious objectors – would continue until the end of 1972, with the last draftees inducted in 1973.

Participation in church-sponsored service programs could satisfy a local draft board and that fact, coupled with the sincere desire to offer an active Christian witness, spurred volunteerism among American Mennonites for rebuilding and relief work in Europe. Indeed, MCC had small groups of workers on the ground in France in early 1945, even before fighting in Europe had ended, and during the late 1940s MCC sent other groups, including groups of college students, to West Germany where they worked under the direction of European Mennonites and other Christians building homes for the disabled.

As the number of volunteers increased, MCC formalized a program in 1950 under the name "PAX." For the next twenty-five years (1951-1976) some 1,800 "PAX men" and women spent two to three



years working overseas. Initially, PAX participants went to Europe but by 1952, PAX workers were assigned to Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, and the next year went to South Korea, and soon to Peru, Indonesia, Nepal, Algeria, Vietnam, and thirty other countries. PAX participants helped construct the Trans-Chaco Highway in Paraguay, assisted with community development in Haiti, and did agricultural work in Congo.

PAX work involved largely semiskilled or unskilled labor, and a growing number of college-educated Mennonites asked for international positions that would utilize their training. In response, MCC launched the Teachers Abroad Program (TAP) in 1962. TAP teachers served in Kenya, Congo, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Nyasaland (Malawi), and Nigeria. TAP expanded rapidly, and 215 teachers were in African classrooms by 1971. During the quarter century of TAP's existence participants logged almost 3,000 teaching years. But TAP also shaped Mennonite sensibilities in North America. One MCC administrator, seeking to chart the effect of the first 800 teachers who had completed their TAP terms, discovered that "dozens of TAP alumni have pursued master's and doctoral studies in language, African history and culture, tropical agriculture, and international development," and that others planned to pursue such study. "Eight hundred M.C.C. teachers have gone to Africa to teach, and eight hundred have returned from three or more years as students of African culture."<sup>30</sup>

As the experience of TAP alumni suggests, alternative service often launched North American professional careers. Cold War conscientious objection produced a paradox. On the one hand, refusing military service placed Mennonites on the margins of society, despite the rise of a secular anti-Vietnam War movement in the late 1960s. Yet, alternative service experiences often integrated young people into a wider world of urban, professional, and cosmopolitan experiences, and produced more self-confident and assertive Mennonites.

Arnold C. Roth, a CO from Wayland, Iowa, described his three years in PAX – one year in Germany and two in Greece – as "the chance to look at myself from the distance of several thousand miles and to really evaluate whether I was the person I wanted to be." Along the way, "the people I learned to know ... provided a whole other dimension to my

**Paradoxically, alternative service often launched professional careers**

life” and made “me think what this world is about and what is worth giving yourself to.”

Jason S. Martin, raised in an Old Order Mennonite home, went to Puerto Rico for two years of voluntary service to satisfy his draft board. Martin left home “unsure [of] what lay ahead. Two years later ... I strode out with confidence inspired by new goals for the future” – goals that included college. He eventually earned two master’s degrees, one in Latin American studies.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, voluntary service was coming to be seen as something of a Mennonite rite-of-passage. By the 1980s more than one in ten North American Mennonites had completed a long-term overseas service assignment through MCC and 4 percent had served internationally with a non-Mennonite agency or a Mennonite agency other than MCC.<sup>32</sup>



A Mennonite Central Committee U.S. delegation, including Amish Mennonite, Brethren in Christ, and Mennonite members, visit officials in Washington, DC in 1980 to discuss their concerns about the introduction of military registration. Delton Franz, second from right, was the director of the MCC Washington Office from 1968 to 1993.

Yet MCC work was never the most common form of alternative service to the draft. In May 1951 Congress outlined new provisions for COs which permitted them to take wage-paying jobs in nonprofit organizations engaged in health and welfare work. Almost 90 percent of COs in the 1950s and 1960s took jobs in public hospitals or psychiatric centers, often as orderlies, launderers, or custodians. Owing to

their Selective Service classification code, which was I-W, these COs were commonly called “I-W men.”

Unlike the CPS camps of the Second World War or the PAX and VS programs that had strong church oversight, I-W work was fairly autonomous. Men found their own housing, often lived alone, and not infrequently had to accept weekend shifts that precluded attending any church. MCC administrator Bill Keeney, who had served in CPS, spent time in the 1950s visiting I-W participants and was struck “by the individuality and isolation of this service.”<sup>33</sup> Yet a good number of participants, coming from rural and small town settings, found work in a big city hospital in New York, Indianapolis, or Denver exciting, even if the tasks were menial. And some moved into more challenging jobs in radiology or practical nursing.

By the mid-1960s, rising politicization among Vietnam-era young people brought calls for complete non-cooperation with the draft in any form. For more conservative Mennonites, as well as those of a more progressive stripe who had come to see alternative service as part civic privilege and part Christian duty, refusing the state’s offer of alternative service in favor of noncompliance or flight to Canada was not only criminal but also a short-sighted rejection of a fine opportunity to offer a public Mennonite witness to society.

For a number of young Mennonites, however, an authentic witness involved a refusal to reply to any draft board summons. At a tense (Old) Mennonite bi-national conference in Turner, Oregon in 1969, as noted in chapter 6, delegates went on record as supporting noncooperation. Few Mennonite young men subsequently took such an approach. But eleven years later, when President Jimmy Carter reinstated draft registration – though not conscription itself – as a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, American Mennonites again debated the merits of registration. As many as eighty Mennonites refused draft registration in early 1980s, and three were among a handful prosecuted by the government. Peace and national militarism remained lively issues even at the end of the Cold War.<sup>34</sup>

### **Beyond the Draft in Canada**

The military draft in the United States had boosted participation in MCC service and energized theological debates about peace and Mennonite relationships with the state. But one tenth of PAX workers and many TAP participants were Canadians who, along with the hundreds

of women participants from both countries, demonstrated that expressions of a Mennonite service ethic were never merely an effort to satisfy draft boards. Indeed, peace concerns remained vital among Canadian Mennonites.

In the absence of young men needing to declare conscientious objection to direct military service, Mennonites nevertheless found ways to express their convictions in new avenues of service and advocacy that called into question the politics of the Cold War or spoke for the politically marginalized. The specter of nuclear war, symbolized by the deployment of Bomarc missiles on Canadian soil in 1963, engendered discussion in MCC Canada and pushed Ernie Regehr to publish exposés on Canada's arms industry.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, greater access to mass media and rising levels of education were broadening Canadian Mennonites' sense of conscientious responsibility. In the late 1960s, just as many Mennonite households were acquiring television sets, newscasts began beaming graphic images of napalm bombing and civilian casualties in Vietnam. Canadian Mennonites responded especially by assisting Southeast Asian refugees, including sponsoring large numbers of so-called "boat people" who fled Vietnam in 1979. MCC and Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions had worked in Vietnam since 1954, and the plight of the refugees struck many Mennonites as a poignant example of the consequences of the U.S. war there. In 1980 the MCC board passed a resolution on refugees calling on Mennonites to "give special atten-



By special agreement with the Government of Canada, Mennonite churches sponsored thousands of so-called Vietnamese "Boat People" in 1979 and the early 1980s. When the first contingent of 53 Vietnamese refugees arrived at the Winnipeg Airport in July 1979, they were welcomed by local Mennonites. From left, holding the sign, David Dueck, John P. Loewen (with glasses, looking right), Art DeFehr, Sarah Jane Schmidt, Rick Schmidt, and Rev. Francis Tung, far right.

tion during the next three years to the needs of refugees in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and other regions."<sup>36</sup>

Refugee sponsorship became a signature expression of service and Cold War peace witness on the part of Canadian Mennonites. MCC Canada was the first body to sign a Master Agreement with the government of Canada for the sponsorship of refugees, and MCC Canada lobbied hard for changes in Canada's refugee policy.<sup>37</sup> Between 1979 and 1985 Mennonites across Canada sponsored more than 4,650 Southeast Asians.<sup>38</sup> For some Mennonites, the refugees called to mind their own experience as immigrants fleeing the Soviet Union in the 1920s; for others, it was a way of embracing a new Canadian identity as a peace-making country while simultaneously distancing themselves from the American war in Vietnam.

Regardless of the sponsor's motive, refugees found a warm welcome and help in navigating dramatically new cultures and climates. As a child, Vinh Huynh went from a refugee camp in Malaysia to the Manitoba prairie town of Birtle in November, and found the cold weather shocking. But "our misgivings quickly gave way to relief and joy" upon finding "the house that was provided for us and to our delight, my siblings and I discovered the toys and household goods that were neatly arranged for our use."<sup>39</sup> Huynh later joined a Mennonite Brethren congregation and a growing number of Asian-Canadian Mennonite churches – especially in British Columbia – contributed to the church's changing demographic profile. More often, no religious conversion took place, but refugee sponsorship continued and even expanded into other parts of the globe.

"Restorative justice" was another avenue of peace work pioneered by Canadian Mennonites in the 1970s. MCC Ontario staff had been working with the Waterloo Region Probation Department on possibilities for rehabilitating criminal offenders when, in 1974, two youth were arrested for an extensive vandalism spree in the town of Elmira. Mark Yantzi, a Mennonite probation officer broached "a novel idea": Why not "initiate a meeting between these two young men and their victims" with the goal of giving victims a voice and allowing perpetrators to make restitution in a way that "they could hold up their heads in the community"? Thus was born Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP). VORP quickly spread across the continent and well beyond Mennonite circles, though Mennonite Howard Zehr, who

initially directed MCC criminal justice programs, became an internationally-recognized voice in restorative justice theory and practice.<sup>40</sup>

Concern for social justice, meanwhile, was evident in Mennonite advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal people and their land rights disputes with the federal government. Mennonite Voluntary Service programs since the 1950s in northern Alberta had created “direct, personal relationships with the Lubicon Cree” near the community of Little Buffalo.<sup>41</sup> The Lubicon Cree had been left out of an 1899 treaty, which undercut their access to resources, and after 1983 MCC Canada joined a “rights support network” that participated in letter-writing and publicity to ensure “rights to traditional lands and resources, the fulfillment of land entitlement promises, and compensation.” Menno Wiebe, director of Native Concerns for MCC Canada, explained his participation in a 1988 blockade of oil and gas companies from Cree land by noting “we ourselves have a history of displacement and social marginalization.”<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, in the 1980s, progressive Mennonites in both Canada and the United States had moved sharply away from the language and theology of “nonresistance” and toward advocacy for “peace and justice” or “peace-building.” Sociologists Leo Driedger and Donald Kraybill found a “fundamental rethinking” of peace in a 1983 joint General Conference and Mennonite Church statement on “Justice and the Christian Witness” that sought to “enlarge our understanding of peace with the dimension of biblical justice” that was activist, externally focused, and aware of “systemic evil.” “Passive nonresistance,” Kraybill and Driedger concluded, “had succumbed to the winds of modernity.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Transformed by Mission and Service – and its Limits**

Of course not all Mennonites warmed to the language of justice, and it is difficult to measure how wide the support was for political activism such as that on behalf of Aboriginal rights. Yet the remarkable mid-century experiences in cross-cultural mission and international service had undoubtedly reshaped Mennonite life, and the reordering of Germanic Mennonite food-ways in response to world hunger was one measure of how thoroughgoing the transformation could be.

In the early 1970s a host of public sector voices were calling attention to what the United Nations termed a “world food crisis” marked by diminishing food reserves, food price inflation, and lack of clean water.<sup>44</sup> In response, Doris Janzen Longacre, a native of Elbing, Kansas, who had lived during the 1960s and early 1970s with husband and

daughters in Vietnam and Indonesia on MCC assignments, posted notices in Mennonite periodicals asking readers to send her ideas for “how to eat better and consume less.” Thousands of recipes poured in from around the world, and in 1976 Longacre tested and then edited 500 recipes into the *More-With-Less Cookbook*.



Doris Janzen Longacre and daughter Cara demonstrate Asian stir-fry recipes from *More-With-Less Cookbook*, in 1976.

In a lengthy introduction in the cookbook, Janzen Longacre wrote that “there is a way which gives not less, but more . . . more to share and less to hoard.” She made her case in part with data from academics and development experts, but warned: “keep in mind that our direction does not come from how society operates, but from Jesus.”<sup>45</sup> The book emphasized cooking with an awareness of world food concerns and world Christian critique of over-consumption.

The collection featured recipes from the developing world, such as Indonesian *Nasi Goreng* (fried rice), Pakistani *Kima*, and Egyptian *Kusherie*, often accompanied by a contributor’s note on how this dish had become a family favorite while living overseas or was introduced

to them by an international MCC guest they had hosted.<sup>46</sup> Some traditional Germanic Mennonite recipes remained, but in a new context: *Rollkuchen* now appeared next to Navajo Fry Bread, for example.<sup>47</sup>

Considering its modest marketing, the book sold phenomenally well: 850,000 copies by 2007. Letters received by Longacre and the publisher, as well as anecdotal evidence from Mennonite institutions and publications, point to a transformation in Mennonite household kitchens and institutional cafeterias, as lentils and rice began to displace meat and potatoes.<sup>48</sup>

But the book was about more than food. One homemaker from rural Hagerstown, Maryland, wrote that “I have used this cookbook for worship program ideas, especially in relation to cultures beyond our own. In study groups and for meditations, I’ve found it an excellent source of ‘nugget thoughts’ packed with ‘nutrition for the soul.’”<sup>49</sup> In short order, cooking “more-with-less” became a Mennonite habit, recognized and expected by those outside Mennonite circles, and serving to link North American Mennonites, in practical ways, with Christians around the world, both through adopting foreign food-ways and eating in a manner deemed harmonious with world needs.

For some observers, the Mennonite response to hunger was the passionate argument of Ronald J. Sider’s *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*.<sup>50</sup> For many Mennonites themselves, a stained and dog-eared cookbook was the stuff of

**Some North Americans noted ruefully that missional transformation only went so far**

lived theology. “If you consider the theological teaching and witness of [the *More-with-Less*] cookbook, its impact far outweighs that of most Mennonite

writings in theology and ethics,” remarked Gayle Gerber Koontz, professor of theology at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, some North Americans noted ruefully that missional transformation only went so far. Celebrating connections to the global church could seem easier than re-allocating power across racial and ethnic lines at home. As funding for international development grew, African-American staff within the Mennonite Church’s Minority Ministries Council watched white Mennonites’ support for Minority Ministries’ projects wane.



About the same time, in 1973, MCC Peace Section staff received a request from Mexican-American Mennonites in California to mediate conflict between white Mennonite fruit and vegetable growers and Latino Mennonite migrant workers who picked fruits and vegetables and were now participating in a United Farm Workers strike. Ted Koontz, a member of the Peace Section's delegation, was troubled to arrive and find that some Mennonite growers were "carrying guns in the fields." Other non-Latino Mennonites admitted that they "hate[d] Mexicans," and one woman said "it would not hurt her conscience to shoot troublemakers."

Although the growers were key financial supporters of MCC work overseas, they did not see any need for such development work at home. If there was poverty among farm workers it resulted from the workers' "mismanaging money or unwillingness to work when work is available." One Mennonite farmer expressed surprise that field laborers would want better housing since "that kind of people do not want nice houses. They're not like us."

Caught between Mennonites on both sides of a conflict, the MCC delegation "recommended that the churches in central California and MCC not get involved nor choose sides." Latino Mennonite leaders were incensed and "vehemently disagreed with MCC's decision to remain neutral." Neftali Torres, the Puerto Rican who had responded to Mennonite witness in New York City years earlier, and whose interaction with Mexican-American Mennonites in California now raised his own sense of pan-Latin identity, was deeply disappointed with his adopted church: "Obviously MCC suffers economically if it aligns itself with those who do not agree with the growers," he complained.<sup>52</sup> In 1974 Torres left the Mennonite fold, embittered that a group ready to celebrate conscientious objection, refugee resettlement, and international food-ways could remain trapped in North American racial patterns.

## **Conclusion**

Between 1930 and 1980 North American Mennonites were transformed by mission and service programs, some of which were initiated in response to national military conscription. The memories of men and women who participated in alternative service, the congregational histories that devote much of their space to missionaries, and the level of support for MCC and mission boards suggest that North American Mennonites – at least those outside the Old Order or traditionalist

orbit – had redefined Mennonitism on new, multicultural and service terms. Domestic mission programs and Fresh Air children increasingly made the foreign familiar at home, while overseas mission allowed North American Mennonites to see themselves as part of a “worldwide ... team” of churches “in at least two dozen overseas countries” whose members “speak some 60 languages.”<sup>53</sup>

The transformation also hinged on Mennonite peace convictions, and therein lay something of a paradox. Pacifism set Mennonites apart from their neighbors, but acting as conscientious objectors brought them face-to-face with the hurting in their own communities or took them around the globe in ways that broke down older Mennonite boundaries.

The impact of thousands of young adults who served from Vancouver to Vietnam brought cross-cultural service and practical conscientious objection to virtually every Mennonite congregation and extended family. Many young adults had married and started families while overseas, and so hundreds of children born to Mennonite households between the 1950s and 1970s began life as dual-citizens or were adopted by North American Mennonite parents from Indigenous orphanages. But this was only one way in which the Mennonite family was changing, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## Families of Faith

*On January 6, 1952, tragedy struck the family of Jacob and Grace (Hertzler) Stoltzfus of Coatesville, Pennsylvania. The family of five was heading to the local Mennonite Sunday evening service when their car was hit broadside by juveniles racing their cars on Lincoln Highway. Pastor Brown of the nearby Presbyterian congregation was first at the crash site. He rushed over to the twisted wreck and did what he could, tenderly holding nine year old "little Joey" Stoltzfus. Once the crash victims had been rushed to hospital, Brown, "blood-splattered" and "choking with emotion," drove to his church and spoke of the tragedy. At the end of that day, Jacob the father, Joey, and 16-year-old Vida Jean, had all died. Leaving to mourn them was Grace, the badly injured mother and six-year-old Lena Mae. Sometime later, Brown paid an unannounced visit to the Coatesville Mennonite congregation: "I have a message ... especially [for] a Mennonite group," he told them. "I have come to tell you of the conversion of 17 souls [in our community] as the result of the tragic accident which has robbed you of some of your faithful workers." The conversions, he went on to explain, were directly linked to the "non-resistant attitude of the [Stoltzfus] family ... toward the erring boys," which had deeply impressed the entire community. For, instead of "vengeful words, prayers of concern were offered for ... the racers, and the world around you took notice that this was the Spirit of Jesus and His Gospel." The Mennonite congregation was profoundly moved by the Presbyterian minister's affirming words.<sup>1</sup>*

*May 1947 marked a starkly different time in the life of Jacob Block and Lena Janzen of Yarrow, British Columbia, a momentarily joyful one. The young couple had met at Sharon High School, a private Mennonite institution, and now planned on marrying. As Jacob recalled the events leading to their engagement, he had first noticed a "small" but "mature" young woman running a race in physical education class at Sharon. He pursued her at their*

*church's choir practice, offered her rides in his father's car, and finally sent her a watch engraved with the words, "I love you." When Lena at first ignored the message, he borrowed a car and asked her to come "along the mountain road toward Chilliwack." There by the turbulent, cascading Vedder River he offered a second gift, a diamond ring. Only then did "she put her arms around [him] and said, 'yes,'" she would marry him. The couple came down the mountain, went straight to the Janzens' place where Jacob expressed his wish to marry Lena. After receiving a positive response, the young couple listened as Mr. Janzen "opened his Bible and read a portion of scripture" and then as Mrs. Janzen served "wonderful Zwieback [buns] and cookies...everyone seemed to be in a very happy mood."<sup>2</sup>*

### **Faith and Culture in the Family**

The Stoltzfus tragedy and the Block-Janzen engagement marked two accounts of North American Mennonite life in which the family was front and center. No doubt the most public manifestations of Mennonite life lay in the rich array of institutions – the schools, insurance companies, church headquarters and mutual aid societies – but the place where old values were anchored most securely and tested most dynamically was in the family. Family matters brought North American Mennonites both their deepest grief (suffering and death of loved ones at the prime of life) and their most intense joy (romantic love, the prospects of sexual intimacy, and new and unfettered beginnings).

The two stories above also suggest that family was central to change and continuity in the Mennonite community. Old Anabaptist values of forgiveness and peace were expressed to a wider community by the suffering Stoltzfus family. The setting aside of traditional Mennonite values of sobriety and plain living with car rides to romantic sites and expensive jewelry marked the Block-Janzen engagement, the point in which a new family began its formation.

The first account supports sociologist Calvin Redekop's statement that "it is no exaggeration ... that the family has been a bulwark of the persistence of the Mennonite movement."<sup>3</sup> The second account indicates that the family was also the harbinger of change. Both accounts suggest that the Mennonite family was dynamic, always in conversation with the wider North American world, always adapting to new circumstances.

Because the family was a complex social organism, so too was its history. As historian Mary Jane Heisey writes, a history of the Mennonite family reveals “amazingly diverse aspects of human life – sexuality, gender expectations, friendships, economic production, nurture and care of the young, the old, the hurt, inter-generational pathways of wealth, and symbols of group identity and prowess.”<sup>4</sup> Family always consisted of an overlapping and dynamic set of relationships – marriage, sibling, generational, and kin-based.

These social ties changed during the family’s very life course, from childhood through teenaged years, from times of marriage or adult singleness, to old age and widowhood. These stages exhibit what some historians call “emotional history,” moments of the “human heart,” and portray the family in times of sadness, grief, anxiety or joy.<sup>5</sup> These expressions were apparent at the innumerable moments in daily life and expressed in many places – in the kitchen, the backyard or local roadway. It was here, in these ordinary family encounters, that faith was shaped, reconfirmed or reconfigured.

### **Childhood and Youth**

Mennonite childhood in North America reflected the culture that nurtured it. In some ways it can be said that children were hidden in the household, not unlike the way Mennonite practices in the farmstead or rural village occurred outside public view. Children were taught to be the “quiet in the land” at an early age; true, they played joyfully and laughed easily, but the “good” child listened carefully, and the virtuous youth was a modest one.

Even pregnancy was a time of being quiet. The expectant mother on the farm usually did not speak about her condition: “You love the little children once they are growing in your body,” recalled Margaret Sawatsky of Gnadenthal, Manitoba, who had her babies in the 1930s and 40s. But it was news she shared only with her husband, mother and sisters. Quiescence also marked the end of the difficult hours of birth, a moment of silent prayer and gratitude. With the baby safely at the mother’s breast, Sawatsky’s midwife “knelt down beside the bed and thanked God ... that the baby had come into this world, and that child and mother were alive.” Only then did the event become public. The older children were summoned from the neighbors’ and told the joyful news. As Sawatsky recalled, “I remember especially

when the 11<sup>th</sup> baby was born ... how the [children] jumped about for joy.”<sup>6</sup>

News traveled quickly within the kinship group or village, but most early twentieth century Mennonites made no public birth announcement, not even in church. “Baby” was simply an integral part of the family, and in many circles, called by no other name until the arrival of the next “Baby,” often two years later. Thereafter, until his or her own marriage, a child was usually known as the son or daughter of a particular household, Hildebrand’s Eddie or Josiah’s Annie.



Nursemaid Sue (Mowrey) Lefever (left) holds baby Paul, born June 22, 1922. Just up from the traditional ten days of postnatal bed rest, Mary (Groff) Lefever holds her older son, Elvin. Nursemaids assisted with birthing and then remained to help the new mother for several weeks. Sue Lefever frequently acted as a nursemaid in her Lancaster, Pennsylvania, community, in addition to raising her own seven children.

Childhood was a multifaceted time. Most romantically, it was a time of play, exploring the groves and ditches, engaging in make-believe, mimicking the parent’s work in the kitchen or field, learning various circle games brought from the old country, or learned on the streets of the North American town. The games were entertaining, but also times of testing the limits of correct ideas and behavior. Mennonite lore is rich with stories of boys and girls pushing the limits, especially turning work objects into toys, or being naughty without being wicked.

The Aaron and Hannah (Good) Wise family book records the time when the three Martin boys visited the Wise home near Ephrata, Pennsylvania: they took “the two wheeled gig ... designed to hold two cans of milk and be pulled by one man,” and bumped it “rapidly down our lane ... eventually they flipped it over completely, with one boy caught underneath.”<sup>7</sup> Stories from the David and Elizabeth Klassen farm in Ekron, Manitoba recount how their six girls – Neta, Tina, Mary, Betty, Annie and Gertie, born all in a row – picked on neighborhood boys, dousing them with water from a hidden hole in the hay loft when they unwittingly stepped into the Klassens’ barn on a casual visit.<sup>8</sup>

Other early century accounts tell of older siblings teaching forbidden rhymes and nonsense stories to curious younger family members. Novelist Rudy Wiebe, remembers how his older sister Helen told stories in their Alberta home in the 1930s, tales accompanied by “an endlessly circulating stew of gossip and humor and ‘Shush’ and implication ... hilarious laughter cavorting through an immensity of detail only a literal contortionist could attempt to reorder.”<sup>9</sup>

Childhood was also a time of learning values from parents: right from wrong, trust and obligation, compliance and co-operation, and especially, it seems, honesty, fairness and forgiveness. Despite the designation of fathers as “heads of the home” and numerous accounts of fathers who played and prayed with their children, at the very center of this learning was mother. The history of the Leamington Men-



An undated and unidentified photo of a Mennonite community playing a circle game, possibly in Saskatchewan. Circle games and line dances were common at weddings of some Dutch Russian Mennonite communities.

nonite Church in Ontario states boldly that the one thousand young people who joined the church in the generation after its founding in 1925 did so because of “the Christian mother” who was the “first to instill in the child a love and respect for God” and a “desire to become a part of the body of Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

Numerous writings underscore this observation on mothers. Jake Sawatsky of Oak Lake, Manitoba describes his mother “taking children on imaginary trips to fairyland, to her childhood home” in Low German, singing “while we were driving by horse and buggy,” telling “us about the Bible and catechism too,” teaching us about “two voices ... the good is the voice of God, [while] whatever [is] ... bad, stems from the devil.” And, of course, it was mother who oversaw the children’s bedtime prayers.<sup>11</sup>

By the 1950s a set of well-written books, rooted in Anabaptist values, had become prime teaching tools for parents. Invariably they taught peace and love at all costs. In Elizabeth Hershberger Bauman’s collection of short stories, *Coals of Fire*, feelings of aggression are smothered by trust and acts of kindness. In one especially riveting chapter, “The Mystery of the Thatch,” young vandals who tear apart an elderly couple’s thatch roof are shamed intensely when the old man invites them down to a hot meal his wife has just cooked.

In *Henry’s Red Sea* by Barbara Claassen Smucker, the message is one of agape love: “Christ died for everyone,” MCC worker Peter Dyck says to Henry, a boy whose family has just fled Stalin’s Soviet Union, “for refugees and for the Russian Communists, too!” In Esther Eby Glass’s *The Miller Five*, Ronald the Mennonite boy visits his non-Mennonite neighbor Gloretta. Ronald is “shocked by her cynical, worldly-wise, lipstick-wearing, chain-smoking mother and he retreats from his friendship with the glamor girl in favor of his friendship with Carol, the Mennonite girl, who sits on the porch of her home, “wearing ‘an apron over the skirt she had made herself,’ peeling apples.” Mennonite teachings tried to steer children from a world of violence and frivolity, instilling Anabaptist values with which to negotiate a troubled world.<sup>12</sup>

Until the mid-twentieth century, life on the farm or in the rural village was a time of apprenticeship for teenaged Mennonites. They were taught crucial farm household skills and given a sense of ensuring the farm’s success. Both boys and girls assisted with household



and farmyard chores, with boys usually feeding the cattle and girls milking the cows, sometimes as early as age six.<sup>13</sup>

Children of more acculturated Mennonite families on commercialized farms or in larger towns, were raised with a vivid sense of being “adolescent,” a relatively new way of looking at youth and one that took hold among Mennonites especially after the Second World War. As “adolescents,” youth were seen as especially vulnerable and malleable, and parents strove hard to guide their spiritual growth and church commitment amidst the demands of the middle class world. Much effort was directed to reinforce individual skill and confidence, and often included piano lessons, 4-H club membership or sports activities.



The formidable “Dutchmen” football team of Landmark, Manitoba, in 1957. Although most Mennonites accepted sports for children, it could be controversial if it involved grown men. The local Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite elders strongly criticized the team, especially because some of the players were church members. Wilmer Penner, the quarterback, is the fourth person from the left in the back row. The surnames of almost all of the other players were Plett, Reimer and Penner, denoting founding families of this tightly-knit Kleine Gemeinde community.

For all early twentieth-century Mennonite children – rural or urban – the inner sanctum of their worlds was the house and, inside it, the kitchen table. The table was the heart and virtual hearth of the Mennonite home. Rosthern, Saskatchewan writer Carl Victor Friesen describes the kitchen table as “the most important piece of furniture in our farmhouse ... We gathered round it three times each day for our meals ... It was a starting point and a destination:

the center of our family communication network, a workplace, and safe haven all in one." Here "the fascination of childhood" could be fed by observing Mother baking or ironing, or Father keeping the household financial record.

The table was the site of important conversation, during a break on the farm for instance, and at such a time "we children sometimes gravitated there, too, somehow feeling we were part of the adult world of cares and responsibilities." Here "a fraying household, with young married children or unmarried kids away at college, could re-congregate at suppertime or weekends." It was inevitably a place of centering down. As Friesen recalls, after supper and a day's demanding work, amidst a feeling "of harmony and security ... [the] coal lamp ... cast a warm glow on the food spread ... Heads bowed in silent prayer, we ... were at the kitchen table again, feeling an inner strength and bliss in family togetherness."<sup>14</sup>

Teenaged years brought with them awe of the body and sexual curiosity. Mennonites, like everyone else, talked about sex, made insinuating remarks about it, and told jokes about it. Sexuality was explored, and often outside prescribed moral codes. The Amish acknowledged the midnight practice of "bundling" in which, from time to time, boys sneaked into the homes of their girlfriends and slept with them, albeit with a board separating the two. Mennonite Church leaders listed "pitfalls" facing young people in urban settings as including "amusements, the saloon, fashion, falling in love and bad friends."<sup>15</sup> Progressive and traditionalist groups alike warned against "conforming to the patterns of this world" and troubled themselves with the unwelcome news of at least some pre-nuptially conceived children.<sup>16</sup>

Adults, and especially those based in towns, could be very strict about sexual matters. A study by Brenda Martin Hurst of U.S. evangelist Menno Steiner's late nineteenth century sermons on sexuality highlights a growing idea among more modern Mennonites that sexual urges needed to be "controlled ... for the sake of higher spiritual goals."<sup>17</sup> In time progressive Mennonites became more open on sexual matters and numerous writings tried to corral teenage curiosity. The best known was the book by Rev. C. F. Derstine of Waterloo, Ontario,

**Mennonites, like everyone else, talked about sex**

the *Manual of Sex Education* published in 1943 by Zondervan and distributed widely in the Mennonite world.

The book's objective was clear: instruct youth who have "on their hands vast quantities of sex energy" at a time when "novels, films, plays of a certain kind, not to speak of 'smutty yarns' that go around the places where we work, fling sex at us." Derstine was ahead of his time in some ways. He called upon readers to drop the "Victorian" idea that "modesty demanded silence" and instead "teach children the beautiful meaning of sex." But he also demonstrated a highly moralistic outlook, declaring that God only allows "clean people" into heaven. He insisted that youth must learn the consequences of sexual impurity: unwed motherhood "sullies the reputation, imposes disgrace on the unborn," while male masturbation "makes for an aimless, shiftless ... dwarfed, unambitious specimen of humanity."<sup>18</sup> The message was clear: unchecked sexual energy could destroy youth.

### **A widening sexual culture emerged during the 1960s**

A widening sexual culture emerged during the 1960s for most of the progressive Mennonites, and often it was led by a new generation of university-educated leaders. The 1985 publication *Human Sexuality in the Christian Life*, produced by a Mennonite Church-General Conference task force, sought to speak "the mind of Christ in the midst of the sexual revolution." Sex was complicated. Much more "than sexual intercourse," it was "a way of living in a body as a person with sexual drives that bear on each person's way of thinking, feeling and acting." In fact, the study guide said, sexuality made Jesus human, even shaping his unorthodox relationship with women.

The booklet avoided easy dichotomies: it would not unequivocally condemn "premarital sex on the part of the engaged couple who sincerely love each other"; it questioned mainstream ideas of masculinity that "almost guarantee that men will not learn intimacy"; it explained adolescent masturbation as driven by curiosity. The great sin was not so much sex outside of marriage, as lives without intimacy, whether one was married or single.<sup>19</sup>

This church report also signaled the growing pressure from young gay and lesbian Mennonites for recognition, especially within Mennonite Church and General Conference communities. The report acknowledged in unprecedented fashion that for "some of us" an

“inner compass orientates us toward persons of our own sex.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed gay and lesbian Mennonites had been publicly advocating on behalf of same-sex persons for some time. In 1976 the Brethren and Mennonite Council for Gay and Lesbian Concerns had been created in part to assist homosexual Mennonites find legitimate places within the church. Popularly known as BMC this organization put out numerous resources, including a movie, *The Journey is our Home*, widely screened during the 1990s. It depicted a number of young Mennonites speaking emotionally about their struggles with the heterosexual norms of the church.

In her autobiographical writing, Jan Braun recalls how at age 18, when she left her home in Osler, Saskatchewan, she started “the process of coming out to myself and to some of my close friends.” But when she decided to become a minister a year later while interning at Toronto United Mennonite Church, she braced for a lonely world, aware that “being openly queer did not seem like a viable option.”<sup>21</sup> For even the most acculturated of the Mennonite conferences, the same-sex question was a troubling one.

The cultural tide that raised these questions of sexuality also re-ordered parent-teen relations in more general terms. At the center of these relationships were changes to ways wealth was transferred from one generation to the next. A centuries old inheritance system – bilateral and partible – among both the Dutch-Russian and Swiss-South German traditions had guaranteed both boys and girls an equal stake in family wealth.<sup>22</sup> While family conflicts over inheritance were common, this commitment to equal inheritance shaped most household economic strategies. It also meant that all teenaged children – boys and girls – surrendered their wages until age 21 when they could expect financial help in establishing their own households. This deeply rooted practice made for a relatively ordered relationship between parent and adult child.

Urbanization disrupted this pattern, creating moments of conflict, but re-ordering aspects of parent-child bonding. Henry Schulz of Abbotsford, British Columbia, recalled his attempt to become independent from his parents as a tumultuous time. In 1932 at age 20, he writes, “I decided I was grown up and I kept all of the money that I made ... but my father did not agree with me” saying that in “Mennonite custom children had to work or give their earnings to their parents until they were 21.” Young Henry suggested a partner-

ship, but Father “said I was too aggressive,” worth no more than “any hired man in the area ... And so we were at loggerheads.”<sup>23</sup>

New vocational paths sometimes had the opposite effect, even when adult children left home for college. College brought greater independence on the one hand, but it also left the young person feeling uprooted, uncertain about the future, more aware of the wider world. Often this moment in life encouraged a continued dependence on parental guidance, albeit long distance.

Alan Kreider recalls that while studying at Princeton University during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 the “spiraling global crises terrified me,” causing him to be “confused, unhappy ... and emotionally exhausted” and “distant [from] God.” One night the phone rang and to “my astonishment, it was my mother. ‘Are you alright, Alan? I feel troubled about you.’” After the expensive long distance telephone call from his mother, Kreider’s “homesick inner self wept in gratitude.”<sup>24</sup> The youth movement that re-ordered parent-child relationships in the wider North American society affected Mennonite homes in a variety of ways, some even contradictory.

## Courtship

Courtship too changed over time and differed dramatically from one group of Mennonites to another. Most courtship occurred within specific spaces: the village street among the Old Colony Mennonites; the Sunday evening hymn sing among the Amish; church youth meetings, summer camps, and Mennonite high schools and colleges among the more acculturated.

As time passed, the more modernized of the Mennonites went to great lengths to construct sanctioned meeting places for young suitors. Indeed, a special May 1951 issue of *Mennonite Weekly Review* decrying the increasing divorce rate in the United States, urged youth not to meet in casual social settings, on the farmyard or in the roadway, but in more ordered church-related places, especially private schools and colleges.

Except for the length of time involved in the process, the engagement of Ella Garber to Harvey Bauman in Ohio in 1918 was quickly becoming typical of most North American Mennonite couples. The account possessed a mystical quality, it echoed the language of romance novels and it was rooted in a Mennonite institution. Ella met Harvey while studying at Bluffton College even as she

was planning to become a single, missionary doctor. Her outlook changed while house cleaning, when “suddenly behind her she heard, ‘Harvey Bauman is to be your future husband,’” and she “knew that God had talked to [her].” A full four years later, after a somewhat bumpy courtship during which time Ella became a doctor, the quiet and intuitive Harvey finally proposed. The gregarious and energetic Ella, following divine guidance, agreed to marriage.<sup>25</sup>



Wedding of Gerald Hughes  
and Annabelle Conrad, Oak  
Grove Mennonite Church,  
Smithville, Ohio.

Courtship was even more complicated when it proposed interracial unions. Even progressive Mennonites who sponsored urban missions with an enthusiasm for racially integrated churches were much less keen on the idea of racially integrated families. Some couples, including Annabelle Conrad, a white woman, and Gerald Hughes, a black man, who had met at Goshen College, persisted in their relationships, and were married in 1954 at her Oak Grove Mennonite Church near Smithville, Ohio – but only after vigorous congregational debate. Ohio Conference leaders then rejected Gerald’s candidacy for the ministry because his marriage to a white woman made him a problematic role model.

Still, historian Tobin Miller Shearer has discovered that by the early 1960s the handful of interracial Mennonite couples had come to cast a disproportionately large profile, speaking at church gather-

ings, serving on committees, and offering a live example of racial harmony. Integrated households actually led the way to integrated churches, another instance in which family shaped theology.<sup>26</sup>

## Marriage

The 1951 *Mennonite Weekly Review* special issue on marriage reported that unions based on “mutual benefit” were going out of fashion and were being replaced by ones based on “mutual love.” Town life was turning a centuries-old culture of marriage on its head. Traditionally, farm imperatives had demanded a strong degree of mutuality in marriage. Such marriages were officially male-headed, to be sure, but both men and women played crucial economic roles within the farm household. Those roles had significant social consequences. One 1981 study of rural Amish women concluded that they were “economically important and within the family ... independent and assertive.” This fact, in addition to their roles as mothers of many children and guarantors of Amish self-sufficiency, provided them with important degrees of status.<sup>27</sup>



John A. and Mary (Letkemann) Dyck on their wedding day in December 1942 in Mullinger, Saskatchewan, a year after John graduated from the nearby Bethany Bible School. Although the Dycks appear in modern wedding garb and went on to have four children, they were not a typical family. They became missionaries in Colombia where John and Mary died in an airplane crash in 1957.

Numerous rural family histories also suggest surprising degrees of mutuality and equality on the farms of acculturated Mennonites. One such history notes that Charles and Lizzie Pellman of Richfield, Pennsylvania, “worked as a team on matters of moral and spiritual education of their children,” if anything, “mother was ‘more outspoken’ than father.”<sup>28</sup> The inner sanctum of farm homes in these instances was ordered less by patriarchy than by personality and by inter-dependence.

As farms began to commercialize and Mennonites found their ways into towns and cities, they began to speak of marital companionship in a new way. The small library of Dave and Gertie Loewen of Blumenort, Manitoba, had two books on marriage in the 1950s, neither by a Mennonite but read by them. One was John R. Rice’s *The Home: Courtship,*

**Ironically,  
companionship  
marriage emphasized  
gender differences**

*Marriage and Children,* published in Wheaton, Illinois in 1946, with chapter headings that prescribed gender roles: “Man, God’s Deputy, as Head of the Home” or “Wives to

be Subject to Husbands.”<sup>29</sup> But a second book, *The Christian Home* by Norman V. Williams, published by Moody Press in 1951, was less sharp in its counsel.

While keeping the patriarchal structure of the home, Williams’ book emphasized companionship in marriage. Only three paragraphs in the Loewens’ copy of the book were highlighted and each underscored this new approach. The first paragraph noted that everything a husband “does is to be a means of spiritual blessing and growth to his wife,” and must include “time each day for companionship with his wife.” The second outlined an image of the body that underscored companionship: a man may wish to have a body “handsomer, healthier, stronger ... still it is his body ... and he ... cherishes it tenderly ... So a man may have a wife whom he could wish to be ... more beautiful ...; still it is his wife ... a part of himself.” The third paragraph related to the duty of the wife to the husband: “The Christian wife is a booster to her husband ... All others may look with indifference, but as long as she ... believes in him, he will rise from strength to strength.”<sup>30</sup>

Ironically, this new kind of companionship marriage emphasized gender differences. In it the husband was the sole breadwinner, the wife was the homemaker; she offered him respect, he made her feel appreciated. Wedding ceremonies were changing to symbolize this new culture of gender relations. In many traditional Mennonite wed-



dings the bride and groom had been dressed in similarly dark colors and the event had been intentionally low key, usually in semi-private ceremonies in homes or in very short ceremonies in churches following the Sunday morning service.

However, especially after the Second World War, weddings became distinct church ceremonies, with the groom usually distinguished sharply in dark tuxedo from the bride in a white, elaborate dress. Within the ceremony, the bride often walked alone down the church aisle with her father, who gave her in marriage to the groom who waited near the front of the sanctuary.<sup>31</sup> The wedding ceremony was a script, it seemed, to reinforce the idea of the gentle woman and the determined man.

In the second half of the century ideas of the male-headed marriage came under criticism, especially from the more progressive of the Mennonite church leaders who now encouraged the absolute equality of women and men, and taught the need to “submit to one another” within marriage.<sup>32</sup> Coincidentally, as these ideas gained traction they drew reactions from cultural conservatives who warned that such equality could threaten family stability.

During the 1970s such ideas were heard by a wide variety of Mennonites, including Conservative Mennonite Conference men and women who flocked to the family life seminars of popular evangelical speaker Bill Gothard. Meeting in large metropolitan halls in Ohio, Minnesota, and elsewhere, audiences listened to Gothard explain a biblical “chain of command” that placed the husband as uncontested head of the home, and represented fathers as hammers and mothers as chisels in relation to their children. Anabaptist attendees heard Gothard praise plain-living Mennonites as exemplars of values North American society was in danger of losing.<sup>33</sup>

### **Acculturated Mennonites seemed to be losing their opposition to divorce**

No matter the particular teaching on marriage among Mennonites, marriage came under increasing strain, as it did in the wider North American society. Marriage itself remained very strong among Mennonites, with one 1985 survey suggesting that 91 percent of all men and 98 percent of all women eventually married. But other figures from the same survey were troubling: 4.5 percent of married Mennonites at one point had been divorced, and although this was a small figure when compared

to the 35 percent national average, it had grown significantly from just a generation earlier. Then, too, acculturated Mennonites seemed to be losing their opposition to divorce, from 49 percent in 1972, to only 35 percent in 1989.

Church statements on marriage were also changing: where a 1960s pronouncement described marriage unequivocally as a “monogamous” and “heterosexual” union lasting a lifetime, a statement from the 1980s mentioned fragile marriages that sometimes ended in failure.<sup>34</sup> Increasingly, too, studies spoke openly about the existence of physical abuse in Mennonite homes. Isaac Block’s shocking 1980 *Assault on God’s Image* was just one of several such studies. His finding, based on 300 random phone calls, recorded “domestic abuse among people associated with Mennonite churches in Winnipeg,” with 5.4 percent of the respondents saying that during the past twelve months a spouse had thrown something at them, 2.2 percent had been slapped, and 2.6 percent had been physically threatened.<sup>35</sup>

In some ways Mennonite churches were less than helpful in keeping marriages strong. Some churches hesitated to address cases of domestic abuse, no matter how grievous the violation.<sup>36</sup> Some churches summarily excommunicated members who married across church lines, no matter the strength of the conjugal bond. A typical case was that of Pete Bergen, the son of Jacob and Gertrude Bergen who had been married in 1908 and moved from Hutchinson, Kansas to Shafter, California. In the multicultural society of the west coast, Peter married non-Mennonite, Ada Suydam, in about 1930. According to the Bergen family book, because Ada had been “brought up in another Christian faith ... [the] Mennonite church refused to marry them and Pete [described as a ‘devout Mennonite’] was eventually excommunicated ... for marrying a non-Mennonite.”<sup>37</sup>

Strained marriages even involved male church leaders, especially those ostensibly called by God to spend much time away from their families. Brethren in Christ author Ronald Sider writes that in 1978 he and his wife Artubus faced a crisis in marriage even though “in a thousand conscious and unconscious ways” they had moved from a “gentle patriarchy ... to mutual submission in ... marriage.” Ironically, it was Ron’s demanding speaking commitments with the organization New Call to Peacemaking that led to tremendous busyness and stress, to “sharp quarrels” and frequent anger, a development broken only through “wise, solid counseling.”<sup>38</sup>

By other accounts, the hectic and harried agendas of urban life in North America often pulled Mennonite couples apart. Salem, Oregon writer Philip Wiebe's 1999 self-help book, *It Takes Two to Tangle*, published by the Mennonite Brethren's Kindred Productions, confirmed the trend. The foremost enemy of good marriages, wrote Wiebe in this guide to better marriage, was busyness. Modern homes were filled with "beeping devices ... TVs and stereos and cell phones and pagers and answering machines," all of which conspired to keep couples from "getting a word in edgewise" with each other. The solution to good marriage and good communication, Wiebe counseled, was getting away from the noise and embracing silent, "beautiful boredom."<sup>39</sup>

### Women and Men

Closely linked to changing ideas on marriage were changing views on gender, on what it meant to be a woman and feminine, or a man and masculine. Generally speaking Mennonite women in North America during the twentieth century gained greater public roles and recognition and men found ways of expressing their masculinity outside of physical activity and the closely-knit Mennonite community. But



The Webb family: mother Roberta with daughters Nancy, Peggy, and Ada. Roberta was a school teacher who, in 1943, joined a Mennonite mission church in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Following her baptism she wore the devotional head covering and plain dress required of Virginia Mennonite women at the time. Ada and Peggy each attended Eastern Mennonite College after that school opened enrollment to black students in 1948.

there was nothing simple about these changes: women did not merely become more “liberated” and men less patriarchal.

Certainly there were some basic signs suggesting greater independence and liberation for women, especially in the more modern wing of the Mennonite community. In the early decades of the twentieth century, for example, many Mennonite women in North America wore a distinctive garb: a long dress, made of plain material with an additional bodice, sometimes referred to as a “cape dress,” to ensure complete modesty, and a kerchief, bonnet or prayer veil, denoting humility and subservience.

The (Old) Mennonite Church and the assortment of conservative Dutch-Russian Mennonite groups expected women and not men

**Laying aside old symbols  
did not immediately  
bring status or freedom  
to women**

to carry the most important physical symbol of separateness from the wider world, a head covering of some sort. Coincidentally the covering was also often seen as a mark

of subordination to men. A significant point in the history of this symbol came in 1911 in the large (Old) Mennonite Church, where Daniel Kauffman and other leaders invoked the wider social debate of “fundamentals” and used that language to justify a strict stance on women’s plain clothing.<sup>40</sup>

By the 1920s some women in this church openly questioned this practice, in time with far reaching consequences. In upstate New York, young factory workers in the 1940s who simply refused to wear their white head coverings to work did more than rebel, they initiated a searing church schism.<sup>41</sup> Similar changes could be seen in other smaller conservative denominations. In Manitoba’s Interlake region, some women from the Evangelical Mennonite Conference in the 1970s still wore head coverings, but only small black hats and only to church, while older women donned their traditional thick black kerchiefs only for the meal time grace.<sup>42</sup>

Laying aside these old symbols, however, did not immediately bring greater status or freedom to women. As homemakers, mothers, and supportive wives of male breadwinners, the absence of the old head coverings often made little difference; modern Mennonite women in towns and cities were still the quiet ones, within the homes. Some women in the 1960s spoke of being stuck in a

kind “feminine mystique,” a malaise that kept women in places of subservience.<sup>43</sup>

Even when women acquired more public faces, they did so in organizations such as sewing circles where men stood looking over their shoulders. Historian Lucille Marr observes that when MCC-sponsored sewing bees received publicity during the 1950s, it was as “faceless and nameless women ... doing what they did so skilfully, sewing for relief, while male leaders [were] identified and shown in a variety of policy-making tasks.”<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, only haltingly did women become leaders or breadwinners in their own right. Helen (Erb) Burkholder of Ontario, for example, found “temporary” work as a “primary breadwinner” on Vancouver Island in 1944 when her husband, Clayton, served as a conscientious objector in British Columbia.<sup>45</sup> With time, as household consumption costs rose, the number of children decreased and the idea of women in the workforce came to be accepted, more and more women joined their husbands as breadwinners.<sup>46</sup> By the end of the century it was common for young Mennonite women from more urbanized churches to obtain professional degrees in towns and cities, and plan for a life-long career alongside motherhood.



Old Order Mennonites of Waterloo County, Ontario, partaking in a meal in 1979 during a barn raising. Here, Old Order women have prepared a table full of food for the Old Order men who have come in from the construction work.

Another complicating factor in seeking to understand how Mennonite women's sense of worthiness and status changed over time is the argument made by feminist scholars that despite symbols of subservience, such as the kerchief, and economic structures that defined women as homemakers, women were creative and exercised significant agency within the home, finding lives in their daily domestic worlds meaningful, freeing and even empowering. Food preparation, for example, was depicted not as a subservient role, but as a creative struggle to sustain the family. Susan Wise of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, recalled that her mother took this role so seriously, that "during the Depression, [when] Mom hardly knew what to cook for her growing family," she sat in the "kitchen, crying," determined not to acquiesce to a difficult circumstance.<sup>47</sup>

Mennonite women who arrived in Kitchener and Winnipeg after the Second World War recalled how they had striven as refugees in war-time Europe to devise a way to bake "even a semblance of the fluffy white or heavy rye bread that was symbolic of better times." Ordinary bread was even reminiscent, writes historian Marlene Epp, "for Mennonites [of] the communal meal – whereby Christ's body (his life) is received in the eating of the bread."<sup>48</sup>

Carrying this image into the wider Canadian world of the 1960s was Edna Staebler's book, *Sauerkraut and Enterprise*. In it she reports on visits to the Martin household of Waterloo, noting the "homely fragrance of wonderful things to eat," as the "lady of the house ... [was] always busy schnitzing, canning or cooking."<sup>49</sup> In many places, women were remembered for linking their families to a Mennonite past through cooking "traditional foods." The evidence for this association lay in the astonishing popularity of women-authored "Mennonite" cookbooks, some outlining Ukrainian dishes and others Pennsylvania Dutch recipes, with the most popular, *The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes*, out of Steinbach, Manitoba selling 42,000 copies between 1961 and the 1980s.<sup>50</sup>

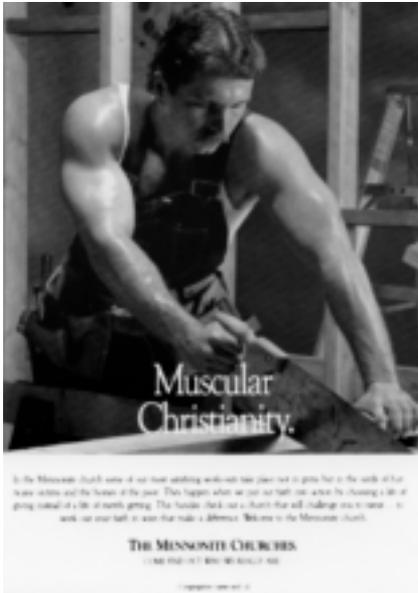
Mennonite men, too, found their meaning, status and sense of respect tested in a milieu of changing vocation. Historically, men's

**It was assumed that the "good man" combined hard work with a gentle, consistent moral strictness**

hard work on the farm had been rewarded with the depiction of being "manly." Ralph Lebold of New Hamburg, Ontario recalls that in 1948 "I finished grade

eight at the age of 14 and was happy to stay at home to work on the farm” for it was “‘man’s work’ ... I was never tall ... but I was strong and could move quickly.”<sup>51</sup>

It was assumed that the “good man” was one who combined hard work with a gentle, but consistent moral strictness. Ezra Beachy writes that even though his family moved many times between about 1900 and 1930, from Madison County, Ohio, to Dimmitt County, Texas, to Allemands, Louisiana, there was order in his family. The fact was that his father, Jonas, “was a man of few words ... [and] he meant what he said. To keep a family of 11 children in an orderly working relationship was a task which required careful planning, congenial associations and stern discipline.”<sup>52</sup>



A 1993 advertisement drew on masculine stereotypes, but suggested that Mennonite men use their muscles to serve. “Our most satisfying work-outs take place not in gyms but in the yards of hurricane victims and the homes of the poor,” the ad announced. “Check out a church that will challenge you to sweat ... to work out your faith in ways that make a difference.” Mennonite Church (MC) congregations ran the advertisement in local newspapers and it also appeared in *Newsweek*, a prominent national magazine.

Still, old definitions of masculinity were changing, especially as war broke out and town life beckoned. Mennonite conscientious objectors during the Second World War chafed under the label of “yellow belly” coward. Thus, through whatever means – hard physical work, sports, and dangerous international assignments – Mennonite men sought to change the image that linked pacifism with timidity.<sup>53</sup> Even as they turned their backs on simple, mixed farming

for commercialized and specialized operations, or entered into town-based business, they seemed to borrow new masculinities from the wider society.

During the 1950s the most celebrated men in Steinbach, Manitoba were the highly technologized and assertive “poultrymen” or “dairymen” and the car dealers, who although dressed in “Sunday suits,” spoke of long hours of hard work, iron-willed determination, and of selling ever bigger and more powerful cars. Even churchmen were presented as strong and determined. When Mennonite evangelist, George R. Brunk of Denbigh, Virginia, visited Steinbach in 1957, the local *Carillon News* declared that at “6 feet 4” he had the look of “a ship’s commander.”<sup>54</sup> During the same years, Steinbach spawned its own energetic evangelist in Ben D. Reimer; as founder of the Western Gospel Mission he traveled frequently to rural Saskatchewan, practicing a “confrontational evangelism,” an approach that later earned him the depiction as “one who dared.”<sup>55</sup>

The meaning of Mennonite masculinity was more complicated for those whose manhood was denied by racist assumptions. For Latino men, military service had been a way of asserting manhood and challenging stereotypes that pictured them as lazy and undisciplined. During the 1960s, in the midst of the U.S. war in Vietnam, Lupe De León, Ted Chapa, Raúl and Samuel Hernandez, and other young men attracted to the witness of the Mennonite Voluntary Service unit in their hometown of Mathis, Texas, were nevertheless deeply skeptical of pacifism. If they as Latinos registered as conscientious objectors, they risked feeding popular local notions of Chicano men as shiftless and avoiding responsibility.

Eventually, most of the Latino Mennonite men in Mathis chose conscientious objection, but they struggled to reconcile conflicting ethnic and religious gender claims. In 1972, speaking at a Cross-Cultural Youth Convention at Epworth Forrest, Indiana, De León declared that Latino Mennonite manhood would not be quiescent: “The fact is that I am who I am because Jesus Christ made a macho out of me ... Just because I’m a Christian doesn’t mean that I’m a patsy.” For De León being macho meant that “It is my duty as a Christian, as a son of God, to speak against the establishment that keeps the campesinos [down].”<sup>56</sup> The Men-



nonite “man” was nonviolent, a pacifist, but his masculinity was not static.

### **Old Age**

Elderly Mennonites also experienced changes to their lives. Families traditionally had made provision for the cohabitation of the elderly with their children or grandchildren. The most traditionalist groups maintained this system the most faithfully, in fact, providing the elderly with either a semi-independent living arrangement on the family’s old farmstead, or a separate wing in the house of one of their married children. Defenders of the Old Order groups in Ontario and Pennsylvania noted the long, dignified years of productivity of the elderly: “Grandpa groomed the horses, oiled the squeaky garden gate ... Grandma knitted socks and socks ... and occasionally peeled potatoes for her daughter-in-law,” the new mistress of the familial house. Theirs was the good life near the grandchildren in the “doddy house” or “grandparents’ hut.”<sup>57</sup>



Braeside Home in Preston, Ontario, 1952, a “home for the aged” begun in 1942 by the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. The Home housed up to twenty-five residents at a time, and in 1956 was replaced by a larger facility.

Acculturated Mennonites more often constructed elaborate seniors' homes. Often these institutionalized living arrangements were in places a long distance from adult children who were increasingly spread across the continent; certainly, they were places well removed from the old family homestead. Understandably many Mennonites were deeply concerned about this development. When the Ontario Mennonite Conference founded its old-age home, Braeside Home in Preston, Ontario in 1942, some people expressed significant concern that the new arrangement would discourage children from taking care of their parents.<sup>58</sup>

When graduate student James W. Lanning of Texas A&M University visited the Old Colony Mennonite settlements near Santa Cruz, Bolivia between 1968 and 1971, he was startled to hear one member inquire about U.S. "dying houses," that is, "places in the United States where families send their elders" to die.<sup>59</sup> But another view of the senior citizen's home was also on the rise. When Anna Born of

**Grandparents of all  
Mennonite traditions  
liked to reach out to  
their grandchildren**

Altona, Manitoba moved into the local Ebenezer Home in 1973, it was her own idea; as Born said, "it's time for our [adult] kids to have some privacy" and time that after "I talk to the [children] and try to

show them what to do ... I let go and let Jesus take over ... Jesus is the one who will look after them."<sup>60</sup>

Grandparents of all Mennonite traditions liked to reach out to their grandchildren and did so in a variety of ways. Grandmothers made small quilts for them, grandfathers made wooden toys, and both told stories of a Mennonite yesteryear, one in which the grandparents played central roles. Canadian Mennonites who arrived from the Soviet Union in the 1920s and late 1940s, for example, frequently used autobiography to relay their accounts of unmitigated hardship, albeit laced with moments of joy. Elderly Winnipeg writer, Maria Buhler, a widow and grandmother, began her memoir by unreservedly placing herself at the front and center of the story: "I was born in the village of Grigorjewka, South Russia, on September 20, 1907 [and on that day] *Taunte* [Aunt] Nietta, rushed to the field ... shouting the news, 'Helena has just given birth to Maria'"<sup>61</sup>

Men, it seemed, were drawn more often to write the genealogies, books that situated the clan within the Anabaptist family. In 1975

Samuel Wenger of Lancaster County, working with an editorial committee, launched *The Wenger Book: A Foundation Book of American Wengers*. It linked readers to the union of Christian Wenger and Eve Graybill who had come to America in 1727, celebrated an historic Bible and called for action to preserve “the burial place” of Christian and Eve, in “the rear burial row of the Groffdale Mennonite cemetery.” It proved the existence of a Wenger at a 1532 Swiss Anabaptist disputation, not only tying the Wengers to one another, but authenticating them as a clan with a deep history.<sup>62</sup>

These family history books signaled the importance of the extended family. Gatherings of aunts, uncles and cousins were common throughout the century, especially at Christmas time. For many families, the focus of the Christmas gathering was when grandchildren greeted grandparents by reciting scripture or German poetry, and in turn were rewarded with a bag of peanuts, candies and an orange, and perhaps a small gift such as an embroidered handkerchief.<sup>63</sup> Other families treasured the much larger summer time “cousin gatherings,” especially those including retired and elderly cousins, reassembled from all points in North America. They gathered in historic spots, telling stories, sometimes reporting on familial achievements or troubles.



Descendants of David F. Pauls (1871–1953) and Sara Dueckmann (1877–1946) gather for a family reunion in Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1978.

Typical was the 1920 Betzner family gathering where 200 cousins packed into a Waterloo County, Ontario barn to hear Isador Snyder, a great-great-grandson of the “original” Betzner, tell the Betzner

story. The story went back to Switzerland and, over time, he said, the Betznern proved to be “mostly God-fearing, and devout in their religious duties, none accused of serious crimes.” Like other gathered clans, the Betznern celebrated an historic physical site, and thus, following “their reunion program,” the whole assembly “toured the [historic] farm, ending up on a bluff overlooking the Grand River” and here “they walked among the graves of Maria Betzner ... and old Samuel.”<sup>64</sup>

Old age also eventually resulted in the death of loved ones and the deep grief of separation. The dominant association of death and funerals with the elderly was a new development. Until the early decades of the twentieth century death came readily at any time and when it did, Mennonites expressed their faith most intensely, even mystically. An early twentieth-century survey of the expansive Mellinger Mennonite cemetery in East Lampeter Township, in eastern Pennsylvania, revealed that one third of its more than 1500 graves were for children who had died by the age of 10, leading the author to “think of the tears shed upon this ‘God’s Acre’” by mourners “as they gave the last look at the silent faces of departing loved ones.”<sup>65</sup>

The difficult death of a child often accompanied testimonials of images of angels and sometimes recitations of dreams. Katherina (Klassen) Neufeld of the Mennonite Brethren congregation in Winkler, Manitoba experienced such a vision during a typhoid epidemic in about 1935. Her fifth child had just died, another one lay critically ill and her husband Peter was forced to leave home for a week to find work in neighboring Morden. Katherina was terrified, that is until she saw four cherubims perched on the roof of her small house. She knew them as real, a signal of God’s abiding love and protection.<sup>66</sup> Many other stories attest to a spiritual connectedness at the time of the death of children.

The death of aged spouses, however, often marked no less intense a time. When Art Ringenberg, one-time farmer of Meadows, Illinois, died in 1960 after a good era of retirement in a new brick bungalow and winters in Florida, his quiet-spoken wife Ella “slipped into ... depression.” Grandson Jeff Gundy saw in her grief the “stereotype of the reserved, phlegmatic Swiss Mennonites ... [who] assume[ed] that because [they] ... care[d] for each other” there was no “need to talk

about it much," a silence that "sometimes masked distress they found no good way to reveal."<sup>67</sup>

Other accounts do record high emotion. Anna Pauls recalled the death of her mother in 1946 in Arnaud, Manitoba: the funeral itself uttered a hopeful refrain as Dr. J. B. Toews spoke in English "so that all her English friends would benefit from her testimony," while other ministers – Henry Goossen, Paul Schaefer and Jacob Epp – spoke of heavenly bliss. But then came the days of bitter separation after the funeral: "how difficult" they were for Father, and on numerous occasions "he gave vent to his deep grief by walking into the open fields and crying to God," feeling "alone and deserted" among children who "were married and ... busy with their own families."<sup>68</sup>

Numerous other accounts evoke the mystical side otherwise unexpressed among the stoic Mennonites and rarely shared in public. In a not-isolated event, Shirley Hershey Showalter, who grew up in Pennsylvania, recalled how in 1963 her father told her the "blessed" account that after "Grandma Hess died she came back and sat in a chair and talked to Mother for a while before she disappeared again." Then just before his own death in 1980, Shirley's father had his own comforting vision, one "of three plowshares" in the middle of the room, an image that also appeared to Shirley on the day of his funeral in the Lititz, Pennsylvania, Mennonite Church.<sup>69</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Taking stock of the Mennonite family in North America is complicated because of the very nature of that community – scattered, diverse, quiescent. It is made the more complex by different ideas of what it meant to be a "Mennonite" within the family. Instruction at the kitchen table, subtle socialization in song and conversation, traditions of courtship and love, sexual codes and cultures of shame, ideas of gender and generational capital, folklore and family history, all wove faith and identity through kith and kin.

This diversity, however, held a common element; most North American Mennonites during the twentieth century learned their faith from their parents. And if they became Mennonites from outside the family, an event increasingly common at century's end, they were committed to passing on the faith to their own children. Most

Mennonites celebrated their history as a people of obedience and suffering, through genealogy or family history, recorded or spoken. Mennonite faith and identity was articulated, invigorated and passed on to the next generation in a myriad of unwritten and unorganized social encounters within the close bonds of the family.

These moments were often unplanned, perhaps occurring at times of tragedy when a wider sympathetic public could look into the very heart of the family and see strong expressions of Anabaptist values. Or they could be carefully scripted times of celebration, an engagement perhaps, when family members gathered and sometimes pushed the boundaries of their cultural inheritance. Most often identities were formed and faith was tested within the innumerable moments of everyday life and within a complex constellation of familial relationships.

# Mennonites and Money

*In the early 1950s Mary Ellen Kauffman, an elementary school child whose family attended East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, carefully deposited coins into a small cast iron bank that was a replica of the East Chestnut Street meetinghouse. Kauffman then took these savings to church on Sunday mornings where she placed them in the Sunday school offering collected as she and her friends gathered in small classrooms in the church basement. Labelled the “Self Denial Missionary Fund Bank” on one side and “God Loves a Cheerful Giver” on the other, the bank symbolized a network of local and international relationships mediated by money. Although she was not yet baptized, her parents were coaching her to contribute, teaching her that the money she was giving was going to benefit people in a distant place that her Sunday school teachers called Honduras. The bank itself had been manufactured by the Hubley Toy Company, an international toy manufacturer that employed Mennonite workers, and in fact the bank had been designed by Hubley die-master Jacob Brubaker, who was also a lay minister at the East Chestnut Street church. As a child, Kauffman was learning that the church needed money and that she and others could participate in the life of the church by giving.<sup>1</sup>*

*Levi Giesbrecht faced the challenge of successful Mennonite entrepreneurs. His venture, Spruceland Millworks British Columbia, founded in the early 1980s, was thriving. By buying low-grade lumber and cutting it into components, and then shipping it mostly to international markets, the firm had “exploited the gaps” and was able to “respond quickly to the often volatile market changes.” But growth came with a price: “at some point the pressure became too intense,” he recalled. Against the advice of his lawyer, Giesbrecht gave up control of his company and invited his siblings and in-laws to join the firm as equal managing partners. A researcher investigating this unconven-*

tional decision concluded that Giesbrecht's approach to business and wealth was an expression of "his faith and heritage." Born in Paraguay to a family that believed "if you want something, you're going to have to work for it," Giesbrecht had immigrated as a child to Manitoba, participated in the Niverville Chortitzer Mennonite Church, observed the financial vulnerability of his day-laborer father, and sensed the importance of sharing and cooperation. "I came to a point in time," Giesbrecht reflected, "where I said that if I keep piling [money] up it makes me feel a little bit greedy or that I'm making profits too important." Yet giving up control of the firm hardly resulted in sacrifice; by 1996 profits were mushrooming. Giesbrecht's Mennonite congregation in Vancouver was "relatively affluent" so his "admittedly 'upper-middle-class' lifestyle isn't out of keeping with prevailing standards." Explained Giesbrecht, "Having come from a very meager background, I don't have a real problem enjoying a fine home."<sup>2</sup>

### Earning, spending, giving

Wealth, trade, commerce, work – economic activity of all sorts – had never been absent from North American Mennonite life, but during the second half of the twentieth century money came to play a more prominent role in both everyday activity and in the dynamics of the church. During these years North American life was increasingly monetized as more and more human activities were assigned dollar values, from meals now eaten in restaurants to the fees families paid nursing homes to care for aged relatives. Meanwhile, more Mennonites moved into wage-earning employment, saved cash for the future instead of relying on land, kin, and community, and measured the activities of their churches in terms of budgets and donations.

By the late twentieth century, monetary transactions were also formalized and rendered less personal than they had been three generations earlier. In 1930, for example, when Noah Burkholder, a farmer and future minister near Ephrata, Pennsylvania, considered starting a weekly auction house "on a cash-and-carry basis," an experienced non-Mennonite businessman told him that sort of novel arrangement would not succeed "because the people around here" settle accounts only annually, and "pay for their things at the bank on the first of April every year."<sup>3</sup> Typically in rural communities exchange operated on the basis of reputation and trust, loans were almost always private arrangements, and financing often



merged with charity. Henry Schneider, a Brethren in Christ bishop in Midland, Michigan, had a “soft touch” that “encouraged requests for loans that were never repaid,” so much so that Schneider’s son, Gordon, recalled “my mother would shudder every time a strange car drove in the driveway.”<sup>4</sup>

By the twenty-first century the financial worlds of Burkholder and Schneider seemed distant, indeed. The revolution in rural life that saw small farms consolidate into agribusinesses and turned rurally-reared populations into urban and suburban salaried and hourly employees, meant that Mennonites increasing swam in an economy where wealth was liquid and income more predictable.

Monetary transactions were the new standard. They were ubiquitous, instantaneous, and impersonal. In 2004, for example, Mennonite Church USA introduced “First Fruits Direct Giving,” an electronic funds transfer service by which church members could authorize the regular and automatic debit of funds from their bank accounts to congregational or church agency treasuries. An upbeat press release touted “transfer tithing” and quoted satisfied user Brenda Shelby of Atlanta, Georgia, who loved the impersonality of it all: “You don’t have to think about it!”<sup>5</sup>



Mary Ellen Kauffman’s bank, modeled on the East Chestnut Street Mennonite meetinghouse.

Whether one thought about it or not, money was now everywhere and it implied wage labor, consumption, and financial planning. Business owners, with access to capital, rose to new prominence in Mennonite communities as employers, civic leaders, and church members with sought-after money and financial expertise. These patterns affected both modernizing and tradition-minded Mennonites. Meanwhile, the advent of cash and credit produced a new world of charitable giving and restructured church life around new institutions.

## **A World of Business and Capitalist Production**

Since the days of the early Anabaptists, economic realities had shaped Mennonite life, but for much of their North American sojourn, Mennonite economics had been of a particular type: tied to small-scale agriculture, often weather-dependent, reliant on the unsalaried labor of an entire family, steeped in traditional folkways, and measured in land and seasonal commodities. Meanwhile, the larger North American economy, from the mid-1800s onward, was evolving in the direction of capitalism – a system in which access to capital, rather than to skills or natural resources, was the key to success, along with commercial attributes of innovation and profit-motive.

Mennonites were ambivalent about capitalist pursuits. Sermons condemned the accumulation of wealth and discouraged individuals from making a name for themselves, while traditional sensibilities could militate against risk-taking and innovation. At the same time, entrepreneurship was, in fact, common in Mennonite circles, and the church censured business failure as much as it warned against success. Bankruptcy carried stigma, while men of means were often leading candidates for ordination. Thus, even if Mennonite theology asserted “the value of community over individualism, in day-to-day practice



Harold Alderfer and Ralph Hedrick at Ralph's Market, Lansdale, Pennsylvania about 1948, a typical Mennonite-owned small business. Hedrick had purchased the store from John E. Lapp, another Mennonite, and eventually built the business into one of the area's largest supermarkets. Hedrick was an active church member who also served on the boards of various church institutions.

most Mennonites [were] deeply implicated in capitalism's exaltation of the individual."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, by the late 1970s a Vancouver newspaper could assert that "If God were a capitalist, the Mennonites would be his favourite people."<sup>7</sup>

In 1943 the book *Who's Who Among the Mennonites* listed scores of "business firms controlled or partly controlled by Mennonites," but most were small proprietorships – hardware stores, auto shops, groceries, and the like. Most large operators had been farmers at the forefront of expansive agribusiness and, in turn, became influential civic leaders and financiers of religious causes.<sup>8</sup> By the 1950s, for example, Henry J. Pankratz of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, had developed a sizable poultry business as well as sizable grain and cattle operations, served on the board of Production Credit Association and was a leader in the Minnesota Turkey Growers Association. Around town he served on the school board for twenty-one years, was active in the local and state 4-H organization, the Mountain Lake Community Club, the Rotary Club, and chaired many committees at Bethel Mennonite Church. His obituary noted his extensive travel with his wife Elsie, with whom he "traveled worldwide and spent many winters in Arizona."<sup>9</sup>

**Growing numbers of Mennonite farmers were treating farming as a business and a science**

Pankratz was among a growing number of Mennonite farmers on both sides of the border who were treating farming as a business and a science, replacing small-scale, diversified agriculture with intensive and specialized poultry, egg, dairy, or hog production. Farmers welcomed government "extension agents" or "ag reps" who provided the latest agricultural knowledge and advice on how to reduce costs and maximize profits.

Farmers also learned business principles by participating in rural production cooperatives. Co-ops combined the values of "good management, unselfishness, and mutual trust" with newer skills in finance and marketing, along with practical experience in running shareholder meetings. In Altona, Manitoba, for example, the Co-op Vegetable Oils Ltd. involved dozens of Mennonite farmers in an enterprise processing sunflower and canola oils, and changed the face of local agriculture by encouraging extensive cash crop farming and linking farmer-owners directly with national and international

markets. Co-ops flourished in western Canada, but were important elsewhere, too. In 1952 in Ohio the Kidron Swiss Cheese Company, “owned and operated by farmers” – including a good number of Mennonites – was turning out 1,550 wheels of cheese a year.<sup>10</sup>

The “shift to business principles on the farm” encouraged entrepreneurship more generally, and Mennonites who moved into other business pursuits often succeeded in labor-intensive manufacturing in which “their traditional values and family and community patterns could be applied with relative ease.” Clearly, the large Mennonite-owned businesses that emerged in the mid-twentieth century benefitted from new access to capital, loyal Mennonite labor pools, and expanding transportation and export markets.<sup>11</sup> But the accent in memoirs and company histories often rested on a founder’s personal work ethic.

The authorized story of Hesston Corporation, a huge Kansas farm machinery manufacturer, for example, reports that the firm rose “largely through [co-founder Lyle Yost’s] optimism, drive, and foresight.” A profile of British Columbia lumberman Jacob Redekop explained his success in terms of personal characteristics: resolute decision-making and the fact that he “exudes blunt integrity in all he does.” Similarly, a history of the substantial Martin Stone Quarry, in Pennsylvania, emphasized that developer Ivan Martin put in long days and did not shy away from manual labor even after he could have retreated to his CEO office.<sup>12</sup>

All these companies expanded rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s, and by then there were plenty of prosperous Mennonite firms. Often entrepreneurs were associated with their product or type of business, and not infrequently because the company boldly bore the family name. In Virginia there was Yoder Dairies; Raid Quarries was in Iowa; High Steel Structures in Pennsylvania; Janz Construction Ltd. in Alberta; and in Manitoba, Friesens Printers and Loewen Windows.

In other cases, communities themselves came to be identified by the Mennonite-owned businesses they hosted. From the 1950s onward, for example, the towns of Steinbach, Manitoba, and New Holland, Pennsylvania, became known for their remarkable number of Mennonite-owned car dealerships, which successfully cultivated images of down-home honesty that countered popular perceptions of crafty auto salesmen.<sup>13</sup> During these same years, Archbold, Ohio and its Fulton County environs were home to a number of large Men-

nonite-owned firms, several of which developed national reputations. As early as 1953 Archbold Ladder Company, founded by W. M. and C. L. Wyse, had a workforce of 300, 60 percent of whom were Mennonite and who turned out ladders for retailers far and wide. Nearby, Mennonite entrepreneurs had begun Bil-Jax scaffolding company, and Erie Sauder had launched Sauder Manufacturing and Sauder Woodworking.



Born in Saskatchewan, Ed Peters moved as a teenager to Bakersfield, California where, as an adult, he developed Maple Leaf Enterprises, a large agribusiness growing potatoes, cotton, and alfalfa. During the 1950s he was president of the National Potato Council and helped found Mennonite Economic Development Associates. Active in the Mennonite Brethren Church, he was a benefactor of MB higher education and other causes.

Compared with most Mennonite communities, Archbold was unusual in its warm embrace of Mennonites in business. In an era when lay ministers in rurally-rooted congregations were typically farmers, Fulton County's (Old) Mennonite and Defenseless Mennonite Churches had, by 1940, ordained leaders employed in town jobs: minister Philemon Frey had worked for Lugbill Brothers auction, Bishop Edward B. Frey bought and sold cars and tractors for the Dodge dealership and John Deere franchise owned by Mennonite Joe Liechty, and younger pastors D. Wyse Graber, Dan Sommers, Maynard Wyse, and Charles Gautsche were all employed in local businesses.<sup>14</sup> A town booster presented Archbold as an example of "the balance of industry and agriculture" that other communities might imitate so that "it is

not necessary for” Mennonite youth to move to the city “to seek the type of employment they desire.”<sup>15</sup>

### **“Ministers of Commerce”**

If offering employment to community young people was one service Mennonite business provided, some business people themselves had a more expansive vision. Despite the church’s tradition of ambivalence toward capital accumulation, they suggested that Mennonites might draw on the skills, experience, connections, and finances of their capitalists to fuel the post-war expansion of Mennonite institutions and international development work.

Orie O. Miller, long-time executive of Mennonite Central Committee and also a partner in the Miller-Hess Shoe Company of Akron, Pennsylvania, bridged these worlds, and he helped organize Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), which incorporated in 1954. Initially MEDA brought together North American business expertise and capital to assist fledgling Mennonite colonies in Paraguay develop their own industry so as “to become self-reliant and economically self-sufficient.” MEDA financed Saron Dairy Cooperative in Fernheim Colony, as well as a tannery, a shoe factory, and a foundry. Other MEDA projects, in Ethiopia and India, foundered



Ken Graber (r) of Archbold, Ohio was MEDA’s first full-time international staff member. From 1977 he worked in Bolivia with many different agencies, including La Merced credit union in Santa Cruz and El Progreso rural cooperative. He also led MEDA’s partnership with Asociación de Servicios de Cooperación Indígena Mennonita, a Paraguayan Mennonite development program.

or collapsed. But investment continued in more than a half dozen African nations, with more than fifty projects in Tanzania alone.

In the 1970s MEDA embarked on a partnership with Colombian General Conference and Mennonite Brethren churches. Roger and Marsha Friesen, Mennonite Brethren members from California who worked in Cali and Bogotá during 1973-1975, joined Colombian Luis Correa to pioneer a system of micro-finance, well before Muhammad Yunus had made the approach famous in his Nobel-Prize-winning work in Bangladesh. The Colombia project evolved into MENCOLDES, the Colombian Mennonite Foundation for Development. By the early twenty-first century, MEDA was involved with “a variety of micro-enterprise programs and production and marketing programs for rural producers” that involved “2.6 million families in forty-four countries,” and thereby helped “Mennonite entrepreneurs step to the plate to address global poverty.”<sup>16</sup>

**MEDA became an “inter-Mennonite fraternity” of businesspeople**

Back in North America, MEDA came to represent something more than an avenue for ethical international investment and development. By the 1970s it had become an “inter-Mennonite fraternity” of businesspeople, an outcome that was “quite unintentional at the outset.”<sup>17</sup> Wally Kroeker, a long-time MEDA staff member, argued that by the late twentieth century, business owners were “not content to simply sit in the church pew as second-class citizens who ‘pay, pray, and obey.’” Instead, they possessed a “hermeneutic of engagement [that] calls them to work in the trenches, and to be God’s Junior Partners in the ongoing work of creation and redemption.” In the face of churchly ambivalence toward financial success, MEDA offered a forum in which executives could become “ministers of commerce” who “see their responsibility more profoundly as including ‘wealth creation’ ... using money as a lever to produce sustainable outcomes (and hope) for others.”<sup>18</sup>

MEDA’s founders had included Ohio furniture manufacturer Erie Sauder, Ontario food processor Edward G. Snyder, and “potato king” Edward J. Peters, a Saskatchewan-born California farmer who *Life* magazine had profiled in 1951 as one of the San Joaquin Valley’s new “shirtleeve millionaires.” Leadership widened – though it

remained exclusively male until 1981 – and the general membership grew sharply after the mid-1970s.

By 2008 MEDA included a diverse array of 3,000 business people whose interests included supporting MEDA projects, networking within Mennonite business circles, and finding a community of affirmation. An annual convention provided a forum to champion the place of business people in the church and featured speakers such as Joyce Bontrager Lehman, who spoke in 2011 on “From Kalona to Kabul and Beyond: A Journey from an Amish Community to Global Economic Development,” combining themes of humble beginnings, international status, and reflections on her work for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Similarly, MEDA's glossy magazine, *The Marketplace*, highlighted the “Sunday-Monday connection” of entrepreneurs such as Milo Shantz, founder of the “St. Jacobs Market,” a regional farmers' market, tourist destination, and economic anchor for its Ontario community. There, “on a Saturday you can see [Shantz's] pride and joy – 600 vendors making a meaningful and wholesome living by following their muse in vegetables, baking and crafts. He sees them as family, perhaps a living illustration of democratizing capitalism.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Mennonite Labor**

Just how much Mennonite business was democratizing or otherwise transforming capitalism was something of a question. Even sociologist Winfield Fretz, who was a warm friend of MEDA's founders, publically worried in 1955 that “Mennonites in North America have fully and uncritically accepted the theory of capitalism and the profit motive in business.”<sup>20</sup> Scattered stories of ill-treated employees, especially of migrant workers employed in Mennonite businesses, fuelled this image and reaction to it. In 1969, for example, investigative reporting revealed very poor living conditions for Latino workers at a Goshen, Indiana, Mennonite-owned poultry processor and attracted out-of-town protestors. Local Mennonites, led by those with recent mission and service experience in Latin America, responded by launching a community development program known as LaCasa. But the place of migrant labor in the local economy was unchallenged.<sup>21</sup>

Yet some of the largest and highest-profile Mennonite firms became known for their distinctive approach to labor relations. As labor histo-



rian Janis Thiessen noted, the “success of Mennonite-owned business may be attributed in part to the effective integration of religious belief and economic practice” on the company floor. Especially when they employed a deferential Mennonite work force, owners were “able to use a paternalistic management style to equate the Mennonite work ethic with corporate values.” Entrepreneurs took a deep and personal interest in workers’ lives and employees, in turn, responded with loyalty and a refusal to unionize or otherwise make strong demands on management.

A. A. and Mia DeFehr, founders in 1944 of Palliser Furniture, made daily rounds to talk with employees, the vast majority of whom were Low German-speaking Mennonites. They offered workers advice and assistance with personal problems and even had unmarried employees live in their home. Even as the original woodworking business grew substantially, A. A. DeFehr operated it on the pattern of a large extended family, maintaining the role as authoritative father-figure of a highly-disciplined work force. The DeFehrs continued to live in the company’s North Kildonan neighborhood and avoided conspicuous consumption in their choice of clothes and cars, thereby



Entrepreneur C.A. DeFehr with his sons William, Abe and Cornelius, and son-in-law Bernard Fast in their retail store in Winnipeg in the 1950s. The store featured modern electric appliances that revolutionized homemaking after the Second World War. Another branch of the DeFehr family, A. A. and Mia DeFehr, founded Palliser Furniture, a major North American furniture manufacturer.

setting an example for employees and preempting any critique of their wealth.<sup>22</sup>

A similar style marked the management of D. K. Friesen, longtime president of Friesens Corporation located in Altona, Manitoba, and later Canada's largest printery. In the early years, the company's in-house newsletter mixed information about accounts and deadlines with features on employees' spouses and children, hobbies, and sporting activities. Notable was the firm's profit-sharing plan, instituted in 1960, and an employee stock ownership program started a few years later.

These were progressive moves that distinguished Friesens "from the majority of Canadian private companies" and stemmed from D. K. Friesen's belief that cooperation, rather than competition, was a Mennonite value. But just as surely, his desire to treat employees like an extended family reflected his practical concern to ward off interloping union organizers from Winnipeg, since it was common knowledge that profit sharing and stock ownership were "the best insurance for the free enterprise system, a bulwark against communism and socialism."<sup>23</sup>

In the end, it was Friesens' success that unsettled the company's labor patterns. In 1956 Friesens' workforce had peaked at 32 employees, but by 1981, it had increased to 360 workers – still "overwhelmingly Mennonite" – and it had \$22 million in sales. With "the weakening of personal relationships" and a decision to maximize production, the company initiated shift work in 1969 and soon thereafter installed time clocks to track employee work habits. The first serious effort at unionization followed within a year. Although a vote to unionize failed, "the paternalist bargain was no longer tenable."<sup>24</sup>

Mennonite labor unrest had also emerged at Hesston Manufacturing Company, a major producer of grain augers, combines, cotton harvesters, and hay equipment. Begun in 1947 Hesston soon employed hundreds of Kansas GC Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, Holdeman Mennonites, and (Old) Mennonite church members. Hesston laborers expressed a range of specific and general complaints about working conditions and management, including grumbling that president Lyle Yost, an (Old) Mennonite, made "nearly twenty thousand dollars per year" while workers averaged \$3,500. Yost, along with his executive team, especially Ray Schlichting and John Siemens, who

were members of local MB churches, sought advice on labor relations from Mennonite ethicist Guy Hershberger and the (Old) Mennonites' Committee on Economic and Social Relations.

For his part, Hershberger was keen to see Hesston become a model Mennonite workplace that rewarded workers and avoided violent strikes. After hourly employees rejected an organizing appeal from the International Boilermakers Union in 1957, Hershberger suggested that Hesston's labor force transform their Shop Committee into a full-fledged "workers' bargaining agent" that could be certified by the National Labor Relations Board. The resulting Hesston Manufacturing Workers' Association – a group that practically amounted to a Mennonite union – received government approval, and its elected leaders, GC Mennonites Richard Huxman and Irvin Reimer, met regularly with Hesston executives to negotiate conflicts and contracts. In 1977, as company sales broke \$142 million, the Italian industrial group Fiat purchased the firm. Mennonite ownership came to an end, but the Workers' Association continued to represent the plant's labor.<sup>25</sup>

**Mid-century Mennonite church leaders were wary of labor unions**

Friesen, Yost, and Hershberger were not alone in their unease with unions. Mid-century Mennonite church leaders had been highly wary of labor unions, concerned that organized demands undercut self-effacing nonresistance and that unions sometimes resorted to coercive strikes and occasional violence against strike-breakers. Beginning in 1935, (Old) Mennonites and Brethren in Christ had negotiated agreements with several unions that allowed nonresistant employees to work in union shops without formally joining the union or paying union dues, so long as the employees made a donation of wages equivalent to union dues and Mennonites did not act as strikebreakers. The agreements were honored by United Mine Workers in western Pennsylvania and by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers at a General Electric Plant in Waynesboro, Virginia, although union leaders in Waynesboro complained that Mennonite employees sometimes undercut the union's bargaining position.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1950s Archie Penner, a rising Evangelical Mennonite Conference leader in Manitoba, tried negotiating a union opt-out clause for his church members who were truck drivers, but found a cool

reception because “quite a few members of the Teamsters local were Mennonites” and the Teamsters had unionized disgruntled drivers at Reimer Express Lines, a firm owned, at the time, by Mennonites.<sup>27</sup>

Mennonite scruples began changing over time. In 1969 Mennonite Brethren conference delegates, meeting in Manitoba, continued to express concern about union violence, but decided that “we ought not to forbid union membership.”<sup>28</sup> Raised in a rural Indiana Amish home, Homer Nissley often heard his father warn that “strikers [were] violent disruptive people to stay away from.” So Nissley was surprised when, in the early 1950s while completing a term of alternative service in Indianapolis, he chanced on “telephone workers ... [peacefully] marching around the corporate offices with their placards. This seemed strange to me because the general reputation of strikers [from my childhood] was that they were coal miners who got nasty and beat up others. So the idea of seeing mature men on strike, marching for some cause, influenced me” to rethink how to reasonably “express a grievance.” By 1978, as a public school teacher in the city of South Bend, Indiana, Nissley would be president of the local teachers union.<sup>29</sup> To the degree that Mennonite workers were disproportionately concentrated in white collar jobs, public sector unions likely gained more Mennonite members than industrial unions.

### **Monetizing Everyday Life – and Life Itself**

Whatever their sources of income – wages, profits, or returns on investment – twentieth-century Mennonites found themselves increasingly swimming in a world of cash, credit, and savings. In places with significant Mennonite populations, financing often moved through Mennonite-controlled channels. In the 1940s at least twenty towns and small cities had one or more Mennonite-owned or -managed banks, such as Merchants State Bank of Freeman, South Dakota, presided over by J. J. Wollman of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, or Archbold, Ohio’s Farmers and Merchants Bank, run by Alvin Stamm, a member of the town’s Defenseless Mennonite Church.

But in some places Mennonite employees and entrepreneurs, especially in Canada, pooled their resources to begin cooperative credit unions. Steinbach Credit Union, organized in 1941, eventually evolved into the second largest credit union in Western

Canada, despite being based in a small town. In 1944 working-class Mennonites in Winnipeg formed Crosstown Credit Union, which restricted membership to Mennonites. By the mid-1950s president N. J. Neufeld reported the institution had more than a thousand members. Employees at the Mennonite Publishing House, in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, formed a credit union in 1955, and other credit unions followed, including ones in Hesston, Kansas (1960), and Waterloo, Ontario (1964).<sup>30</sup>



Guest House Restaurant, one of many Mennonite-owned businesses in Newton, Kansas, was opened about 1955 by entrepreneurs James Rutschman and J. Winfield Fretz. It was the first restaurant in Newton to break local segregation customs and serve patrons of color.

As disposable incomes rose, so did household consumption. In 1950 British Columbia berry farmers Johann and Maria (Martens) Klassen were able to buy a vacuum cleaner from a traveling salesman, and Maria noted with satisfaction that “The girls find the Electrolux very handy to keep this big house clean.” In the years that followed, advertisements in *The Mennonite Community* magazine, a short-lived, but influential monthly, suggest something of a rising consumer culture, even among the generally rural readers the periodical targeted. George Leaman Appliances used large illustrated ads to market the “New Wilson Reach-In Freezer” with two doors and plenty of space

for frozen food storage, while Wenger Supplies of Dryden, Michigan advertised the Webster-Chicago Tape Recorder “with more features than any other recorder,” and with which owners could listen to recorded sermons.<sup>31</sup>

Even as fewer and fewer Mennonites owned farm acreage, they continued to invest in real estate. In 1972, 80 percent of households in the largest acculturating Mennonite groups across North America owned their own home, and by 2006, 86 percent did. That same year more than three-quarters of Mennonite Church USA households had a computer, almost 70 percent owned two or more automobiles, more than a quarter had a video game system, and 13 percent owned at least one large screen television.<sup>32</sup>

Money was not evenly distributed. Data from the early twenty-first century revealed a wealth gap in the United States between white Mennonites and Mennonites of color. Sixteen percent of Mennonite households had annual incomes over \$100,000, but only 8 percent of so-called racial/ethnic church members did, and a full 18 percent of racial/ethnic members earned less than \$15,000.<sup>33</sup>

Income data for Canadian Mennonites is not comparable, but statistics from Census Canada seemed to suggest a gap of a different sort: the average income of Mennonites lagged behind that of other Canadians. In 1990 the average Mennonite individual (not household) earned only \$23,406, which was 9 percent less than the national average, despite popular perceptions that Mennonites’ work ethic, entrepreneurship, and social networking boosted their financial success. When researchers parsed the numbers, however, they concluded that the income gap largely disappeared when adjusted for the fact

**By 2000 the Old Orders  
were moving rapidly  
toward a business-based  
economy**

that Mennonites were disproportionately rural. The earning disparities remained, however, for Low German-speaking Mennonites from Mexico and Old Order Mennonites who had

limited education and for whom women were an integral part of the household economy but rarely worked for wages outside the home.<sup>34</sup>

Even so, in most parts of North America during the final decades of the twentieth century, Old Order Amish and horse-and-buggy Mennonites were moving rapidly away from a barter-based farm

economy and toward a business-based cash economy. Rising land prices and surging Old Order populations, stemming from large families and high retention rates, created a demographic squeeze that left fewer and fewer households able to secure farmland. Some families moved in search of affordable acres, but most stayed put and turned to entrepreneurship. The result was a “sharp turn to business in the late 1970s” that “ballooned into a thousand [micro-enterprise] ventures by the 1990s.” Furniture shops, metal-working shops, dry goods stores, greenhouses, plastics extruding, and building contractors of all sorts sprouted from Aylmer, Ontario, to Arthur, Illinois.<sup>35</sup>

The Old Orders’ move from “plows to profits” provoked change and social stress. Church leaders – who were, increasingly, small business owners themselves – struggled to match traditional ways of life to the new logic of expansive entrepreneurship. Most Old Order businesses remained small and relied on multi-generational family labor. But that sort of frugality and low overhead often had the effect of generating larger profit margins on sometimes millions of dollars in annual sales.

Success bred other changes, despite owners’ limited formal education and their church’s constraints on technology. In the large Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Amish settlement, for example, one fifth of Old Order businesses were owned and managed by women, which had the potential of upending traditional gender norms. Meanwhile, in parts of Indiana and in Geauga County, Ohio, the economic shift had been from the barnyard to the factory floor. In both places hundreds of men took jobs in non-unionized manufacturing. By the 1990s, a majority of working-age Amish household heads in northern Indiana were employed in industry, working on assembly lines making recreational vehicles and manufactured housing, and earning sizable weekly paychecks.<sup>36</sup>

Old Order periodicals, such as the monthly magazine *Family Life*, published in Aylmer, Ontario, issued nervous warnings about the “easy come, easy go” money and the corrupting combination of rising cash income and the free time that accompanied a forty-hour work week.<sup>37</sup> Some wealthy Old Order members invested in hunting cabins and state-of-the art hunting, fishing, and camping gear. Others, especially older adults, began wintering in Pinecraft, Florida, an Old Order resort, of sorts, on the Gulf of Mexico.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, Pinecraft hosted up to 4,000 “snow birds” a week during January and February. Six or seven buses arrived each Tuesday. Some vacationers spent a week or two, while others lived in Pinecraft all winter, leaving their northern communities after the fall communion service and returning home just in time for communion in the spring. The real estate market in Pinecraft bore testimony to the new wealth in Old Order hands. In 2005 a 720 square foot bungalow could sell for \$200,000. Even for those who never ventured to Florida, a new worldview was in the works, one that increasingly measured everything in monetary terms. One Old Order shop owner, writing about “wasted motion,” figured that if eight employees waste several seconds with each move, it adds up to a \$5,760 annual loss for the owner, concluding “if you avoid needless moves, your profits will increase.”<sup>38</sup>

But would Mennonites monetize life itself? That question fueled a heated debate among more progressive Mennonites during the 1940s-1960s as they considered the ethics of life insurance. The debate was also a chapter in the evolution of mutual aid over the course of the century. Mutual aid had

### **Would Mennonites monetize life itself?**

a long history in Mennonite communities, one that sociologist J. Winfield Fretz researched and celebrated in his

travels across western Canada in the 1930s, documenting producer cooperatives and church-based fraternal funds that had evolved from deacons’ alms boxes and the *Waisenamt* (church trust fund for orphans and the transfer of inheritance).<sup>39</sup> But mutual aid was changing, sometimes in ways that even Fretz seemed slow to recognize. Instead of reciprocal relationships of shared time and labor, church members increasingly calculated obligations in monetary terms and formalized relationships in premiums, insurance contracts, risk assessment, and hospital aid plans.

The Mennonite Aid Union of Ontario, begun in 1866 as an association of reciprocity “to restore fire loss among the brethren,” was among the traditional mutual aid groups that underwent dramatic change after 1950. As Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in the province sought to insure a host of new institutional properties – from Rockway Collegiate and Niagara Christian College, to a new MCC depot in Kitchener, the Ailsa Craig Boys Home, and Fairview Mennonite Home – the Aid Union was pushed into new arenas of liability





Ailsa Craig Boys Farm (later Craigwood Youth Services), near London, Ontario, opened in 1955, under the auspices of Mennonite Central Committee as a home for “delinquent” youth. Ailsa Craig was one of many Mennonite institutions begun in the 1950s-60s.

and risk. Harold Schmidt, the group’s executive beginning in 1947, professionalised the program against stiff resistance from older members, explaining on more than one occasion that “word of mouth is as good as paper, but we write it down so we know what the word of mouth was.”<sup>40</sup>

The largest foray into monetized mutual aid was the establishment of Mennonite Mutual Aid (in 2010, renamed Everence) in 1945. Initially an (Old) Mennonite entity, MMA was enrolling General Conference and Mennonite Brethren members by 1955 and later added other churches into its fraternal family of Anabaptist-descended constituents. Church leaders launched MMA in the aftermath of the Second World War to provide small business loans to demobilized Mennonite conscientious objectors and thereby match, in some way, the financial package of loans and scholarships that American and Canadian governments were awarding to millions of veterans. Soon, however, MMA turned to offering more typical insurance products, especially hospitalization plans that appealed to middle class Mennonites who were beginning to expect access to advances in medical treatment.

From the beginning, MMA’s board had understood its mandate as “providing for aid in case of property loss, sickness, or death,” but there was sharp resistance to anything resembling life insurance. Life insurance, generations of Mennonites had learned, made

a commodity of human life, reduced a human being to a dollar value, and mitigated reliance on the church in times of greatest need. Nevertheless, in 1947 MMA took a proposal for a death benefit plan to the (Old) Mennonite General Council for approval. As Guy F. Hershberger later recalled, the plan was receiving a favorable review when a bishop from Wayland, Iowa, objected “fearing the proposal looked too much like commercial life insurance.” Hershberger sought out the bishop and asked, “You wouldn’t be opposed to helping a widow or her family if her husband dies, would you?” No, the bishop conceded, so long as it was called burial aid. Under those terms, the plan passed.<sup>41</sup>

But assigning monetary value to life still struck tradition-minded Mennonites as misguided. Only in 1957 would MMA begin to offer term life insurance, and even then it was called Survivors Aid. By 1979, however, life insurance was coming to be regarded as a middle-class necessity, and an MMA brochure asked provocatively “If You Die, Can They Count on Your Neighbors?” suggesting that households needed to take responsibility for their own futures. “In another age, when relatives lived in close proximity,” MMA materials intoned, “when land, livestock, and machinery represented financial security, life insurance was superfluous. But the answers that worked so well in the past do not work so well today.” Indeed, a new generation of MMA constituents, increasingly comfortable with financial planning, was ready to buy life insurance from almost any insurance company, and MMA had to begin more aggressive marketing campaigns to convince Mennonite families that there was a “margin of difference” in a church-sponsored program.<sup>42</sup>

### **From Deacons to Investment Advisors**

Traditional practices of mutual aid were not the only aspects of community life that were transformed by the new economy. Older systems for facilitating church finances and charitable giving were being displaced in acculturating Mennonite groups. For example, in the 1940s more than 60 percent of (Old) Mennonite congregations had an ordained deacon who managed the church’s financial affairs, coordinated congregational giving, and distributed alms funds. By 1965, however, only about a quarter of churches had deacons and the numbers continued to slide in the years that followed. The office of deacon declined for several reasons. Some congregations, for example, sought to flatten

church leadership hierarchies by replacing ordained figures with lay members who now chaired variously-named finance or stewardship committees. But the office of deacon largely withered because of Mennonites' changing financial situations.

As middle class and business-owning Mennonites thought about the future, they turned not to the deacon but to a trust officer or lawyer.<sup>43</sup> By 1959 articles in church periodicals acknowledged the need for more sophisticated estate planning, and the next year MMA hired John H. Rudy, a former chemical engineer, corporate manager, and Mennonite pastor, as traveling consultant.

Years later, Rudy recalled the eagerness he met in one community after another as he traveled the continent addressing financial questions, explaining

**Middle class Mennonites increasingly turned not to the deacon, but to a trust officer or lawyer**

probate, and mediating family disputes over new types of assets that did not fit the traditional habits that had governed the transfer of a family farm. Rudy and his financial services staff prepared materials such as *How an IRA Can Help You Retire* and a "Money Matters" column that appeared in *Mennonite Weekly Review*.<sup>44</sup>

Rudy's work built on an emerging network of Mennonite institutions and professional advice. Already in the early 1950s, J. A. Schowalter, a GC Mennonite from Harvey County, Kansas, who had amassed a fortune from wheat farming, real estate, and oil, set up Schowalter Foundation to manage his estate for the benefit of mission and education programs. About the same time, a Manson, Iowa, businessman, Edwin E. Swartzentruber, raised the possibility of establishing a charitable foundation to serve philanthropic interests of the living and minimize their capital gains taxes. His son-in-law, Chris L. Graber, an entrepreneur who was also an MMA manager, developed the idea into the Mennonite Foundation, which incorporated in 1952. Similar programs emerged in Ontario and Manitoba in the 1960s – the lag likely due to the less stringent Canadian capital gains penalties at the time – and they combined in 1973 to form Mennonite Foundation Canada. The Jacob Engel Foundation (Brethren in Christ) and the Mennonite Brethren Foundation had formed in 1972.<sup>45</sup>

By the early twenty-first century, Mennonite Foundation had \$328 million in assets under management, and had financial advisors in thirty-six offices from California to Virginia. Meanwhile, Mennonite

Foundation Canada, with assets of \$133 million, promised to put “you in charge of your charitable giving and estate planning,” and on its website offered the testimonial of an Ontario pastor: “I can talk about stewardship and biblical principles, but I certainly don’t know the details of wills, tax laws, estate planning ideas and strategies as they apply to charitable giving.”<sup>46</sup> For that kind of advice, church members were supposed to turn to Mennonite investment counselors who sought to place economic concerns in a holistic framework that included stewardship of material goods, spirituality, health, and environmental resources.



First meeting of the board of directors of Mennonite Indemnity Inc., 1957. As mutual aid plans across Canada and the United States grew more complex and accepted more risk, Mennonite Indemnity organized to act as a reinsurance corporation standing behind sixteen regional and conference-based Mennonite aid agencies. Back row from left, Jacob G. Wedel, Lloyd Hershey, Harold L. Swartzendruber, Jacob Redekop, Harold Schmidt, Howard Raid, William Snyder; seated from left, Wayne S. Martin, Wayne W. Martin, Samuel Wenger, Elvin Souder.

Navigating the increasingly globalized and highly complex realms of investment and tax law was challenging enough for even a sophisticated investor. But Mennonite ethical concerns added another layer of discernment to the process of retirement savings. In the late 1980s some church members exerted pressure on MMA to reconsider the guidelines it followed when investing Mennonite Foundation assets. Although the Foundation had avoided military, gambling, tobacco, and alcohol business, activists pressed for adding social justice

“screens” that would require divestment from firms operating in apartheid-run South Africa.

The ensuing debate raised questions of direct and indirect social responsibility, as well as the fiduciary responsibility of Mennonite Foundation to its investors. Eventually MMA did divest its South African portfolio, and in 1992 it launched Praxis Mutual Fund with clear socially-responsible investment guidelines.<sup>47</sup> By 2010 Praxis was managing \$697 million. A decade earlier, Mennonite Saving and Credit Union, Mennonite Foundation Canada, and MMA had launched Meritas as a socially-responsible investment fund for Canadians. It was sold to a privately-held company in Vancouver in 2009.

By the late twentieth century, even Old Order and culturally conservative Mennonites and Amish who had retained the traditional office of church deacon were developing new lines of churchly financial expertise. Members of twenty-two “plain” groups in the United States and Ontario formed Anabaptist Financial, Anabaptist Foundation, and Financial Solutions. The Foundation’s mission was to provide “financial counsel consistent with conservative Anabaptist beliefs and values,” and its board represented “a mix of business experience, professional training, pastoral experience, and nonprofit administration.” Investors in Anabaptist Financial earned interest on funds “reinvested within conservative Anabaptist circles for mortgages and business loans,” but not “consumer loans for automobiles and other consumer items.” Financial Solutions, “a sister organization,” provided “business seminars, one-on-one business advising, and other educational resources for businesses” that found themselves operating in a competitive twenty-first century environment.<sup>48</sup>

### **Church Budgets and Charitable Giving**

Another feature of the new economy was the emergence of charitable giving as a central feature of Mennonite church life. In the early 1900s households typically made annual or semi-annual contributions to a congregational alms fund, or donated to occasional requests for a mission fund or one of a handful of charitable institutions. Taking up an offering was not a standard part of weekly worship, although some Sunday schools took children’s donations for designated mission projects.

After 1940 giving became more frequent, cash-oriented, donor-directed, and could be channelled to increasingly specific causes. Churches were called upon to finance an extensive system of alter-

native service during the Second World War, and afterward the rapid “expansion for denominational program boards coincided with the start of the post-Second World War economic explosion” of middle class income. Church institutions now relied on cash flow and measured their health in terms of budgets and fundraising ability.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, North American tax codes began to provide incentives to middle class givers. Tax deductions or credits for giving have been part of income tax law since 1917 in the United States and 1930 in Canada, but only in the 1940s did income tax systems expand to cover most Mennonite households.

Nevertheless, giving did not develop overnight. Shocked by the findings of researcher Melvin Gingerich, that Mennonites gave only 3.8% of their income to charity, several Mennonite conferences launched

**Mennonite conferences  
launched stewardship  
education drives**

“stewardship education” programs during the 1950s and 1960s. (Old) Mennonites commissioned former Hesston College president Milo Kauffman for an extensive

speaking mission to make a case for giving.<sup>50</sup> A 1955 statement urged “all our members to practice ‘graduated giving,’ that is, increasing the percentage returned to the Lord as the income becomes greater.”<sup>51</sup> A 1965 booklet, “Our Mission is *One*,” distributed to every household, urged regular giving and explained the “planned distribution program of the Mennonite Church [as] an attempt to put our understanding of ‘one-ness’ of the church’s mission into practice.”<sup>52</sup>

Individuals warmed to giving, but despite the bold claims of “Our Witness is *One*,” they often directed their dollars to causes of their own choosing. For lay members, both the well-heeled and those of more modest means, giving was an important new way of being involved in the work of the church, and a way of playing a direct and active role. As such, giving was also a form of power, and dollars had a democratizing effect to the degree that giving signalled commitment or disaffection. At one time a disgruntled member might have abstained from communion; now she or he could withhold funds.

Local church budgets consumed much of the new giving. Churches put pastors on payroll, hired support staff, and initiated community service and local outreach programs that all cost money. They upgraded and remodelled their buildings, paved parking lots and, in some cases, created their own congregational endowment funds.

During the 1980s and 1990s, regional conference newsletters regularly included front-page stories about church building projects like the \$200,000 educational wing added to Sunnyslope Mennonite Church in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1985, or a \$400,000 addition to Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, in 1993, not to mention dozens of entirely new structures with construction costs of more than a million dollars each.

In 1964 among American and Canadian (Old) Mennonites – reorganized as Mennonite Church (MC) in 1971 – some 51 percent of offering plate receipts had stayed in local church budgets, but by 1995 almost four of every five dollars (78 percent) did.<sup>53</sup> During the same years General Conference Mennonite giving across North America displayed a similar shift, from congregations keeping about 55 percent of monies received to about 70 percent.<sup>54</sup>

For its part, Mennonite Brethren per capita giving in 1996 was impressively higher than that of many other denominations, but 77 percent of that money stayed in local budgets where givers had the most control over how it was used.<sup>55</sup> It seems that in the midst of a society dominated by homogenizing retail markets and transnational commerce, the relationships Mennonites cultivated through their giving were increasingly those that were close to home. In 2000, as stories emerged of budget slashing and staff layoffs at national and regional conference levels, members of U.S. General Conference and Mennonite Church congregations told surveyors that their congregational budgets were in better shape in 2000 than they had been in 1995.<sup>56</sup>

North American Mennonites also gave to a wide range of non-Mennonite causes, religious and non-religious, that tied them to their local communities through United Way campaigns, arts underwriting, environmental conservation causes, or political campaigns. As well, Mennonites provided financial support to family or friends who served with other-than-Mennonite religious ministries. Exactly how much Mennonite giving went to such causes is impossible to know, but in 2003, among large donors, 31 percent of the \$31 million distributed to charity by the Mennonite Foundation, and 35 percent of the \$3 million distributed by Mennonite Foundation Canada went to non-Mennonite entities. There is little reason to believe that smaller donors gave less to such causes.<sup>57</sup>

Mennonite institutions seeking Mennonite dollars had to adapt to the new environment that was increasingly local, individually-

directed, and highly competitive. They hired development staff and employed ever more specific project solicitations. As giving to general mission funds dropped off, mission boards began requiring missionaries to raise their own support, pledged from individuals who knew them personally and who formed their “mission support team.”

Rosedale Mennonite Missions, a Conservative Conference agency, adopted the strategy in 2004 “hoping with this model there will be a lot of designated giving,” according to financial officer Keith Scheffel. In doing so, Rosedale joined Mennonite Brethren Mission/Services, Eastern Mennonite Missions, and Mennonite Mission Network.<sup>58</sup> Yet too often, other agencies complained, Mennonite giving was being driven by short-lived, high-profile media stories on natural calamities. In 1987 Ronald R. J. Mathies, MCC Ontario board chair, called for “long-term, considered, compassionate responses,” but the fact was that following dramatic disasters and “consequent public silence, MCC giving for hunger relief had fallen.”<sup>59</sup>



Canning meat for Mennonite Central Committee relief programs to distribute worldwide, First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio, early 1950s.

Meanwhile, Mennonite givers continued to donate on their own terms. MCC Relief Sales were one such avenue, and one quite different from the charitable foundation or the consolidated congregational budgets. The first well-publicized MCC sale had been held in 1957 in Morgantown, Pennsylvania, and by 1970 the sales had often evolved into multi-day, festival-like events around the auctioning of donated



items to raise money for MCC.<sup>60</sup> The Michiana MCC Sale at Goshen, Indiana, drew 15,000 participants in 1970, and among the thousands of items auctioned were over 300 quilts, the highest fetching \$310. By 1975 fourteen sales were scattered across the continent. In 2009-2010, MCC received about \$5.3 million from two dozen North American relief sales.<sup>61</sup>

Although the sales raised money for MCC, they were each independent and accountable to their own local boards. The popular, grass-roots nature of the sales was of some concern to MCC elders who worried that the sales resembled “fairs and bazaars which use a lot of gimmicks,” including a shameless consumption of “ethnic foods” – 17,000 *verenikje* (cottage-cheese-stuffed perogies) and 75 gallons of apple butter at the 1985 Hutchinson, Kansas sale alone. MCC staff knew that even if they wanted to “bring relief sales to a halt,” it would be difficult, since “too many people are finding deep satisfaction in the sales.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, as scholar Ervin Beck explained, the relief sale phenomenon allowed those who were less-well-connected to the new, professionalized post-war giving structures – women who contributed sewing or cooking, and modest-income folks who bought food – to be active players in the philanthropic drama of exciting bidding.<sup>63</sup>

By the beginning of the twenty-first century the relief sale model had migrated and morphed into auctions for other local or international causes. In the years after 1978 many Old Order and culturally conservative Mennonites, often disregarded by the progressive Mennonites who dominated local relief sale boards, began to employ the relief sale model in their own network of “Haiti Relief Auctions” that raised money for development projects in that Caribbean nation. By 2000 the auctions, held across the U.S. Midwest and in Florida and Pennsylvania, rivalled MCC relief sales in size.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, despite their continued reliance on some traditional modes of charitable giving, such as deacon’s alms funds, Old Order Mennonites and Amish also saw their giving transformed by larger forces. Throughout the United States and among those Ontario Amish who refused to participate in Ontario Health Insurance Plan, the unprecedented rise in health care costs redirected charity and reinforced religious identity in new ways.

Although Old Order leaders in larger settlements often negotiated with area hospitals to receive modest discounts in exchange for cash payment within thirty days, the need to find that cash remained

nearly constant. It became common for the announcement time that followed Sunday morning worship to include the deacon reading five or six major requests for funds from outside the local church district. Yet giving, in this case, pointed to patterns that were deeper than the exchange of money. Modern health care may inspire everything from awe to outrage among middle class Mennonites, but for many Old Orders health care had become a new focus of giving, and thus a new source of religious identity measured in monetary terms.<sup>65</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the second half of the twentieth century North America's economic landscape changed profoundly, transforming Mennonite life and community in fundamental ways. Money, whether in the form of capital investment or cash income, increased the possibilities of individual choice and inequality. Business owners, with access to capital, rose to new prominence in Mennonite communities, and often acted as local benefactors, international investors, and paternalistic caretakers of their employees. Workers now traded their time for monetary wages or salaries, and used their incomes to purchase new consumer goods and, to the degree that their labor was their only transferrable asset, they increasingly insured their families against the possibility of a wage-earner's illness or death. In most places Mennonite leaders urged their people to avoid labor unions, which they saw as potentially violent and competing with the church for members' loyalty.

Mennonite churches also responded to the advent of the cash economy with religiously-informed, but professionally expert financial and estate advice, and increasingly asked for new money to fund burgeoning institutional and local congregational budgets. For both acculturating and Old Order Mennonites, the world of charitable giving offered new means of participating in church life and new ways to construe Mennonite identity, often in more local and autonomous ways, all of which played a part in keeping congregations lively and vital.

# Worshipping Communities

*It was a typical Sunday evening at Family Mennonite Church in Los Angeles, and Norma Sanchez was singing with the rest of the congregation. Sometimes Sanchez still marveled that she was at a Mennonite church. She had first met Mennonites as a girl in her hometown of Hattieville, Belize. Sanchez had fond memories of caring women missionaries, but not of the mission's leaders, who had excommunicated her because she attended Pentecostal worship in addition to the more staid Mennonite services. Disillusioned, she vowed, "Only God can put me back in the Mennonite church." In 1981, after she had immigrated to California, a friend invited Sanchez to church, promising the worship would be energetic. The church turned out to be Family Mennonite, a congregation as exuberant as the Pentecostals she had known in Belize. But there would be other surprises at Family Mennonite. On this evening, the pastor announced, "We have a new speaker tonight." By now Sanchez had been a member of Family Mennonite for some time and knew all the regular attendees. She was puzzled: "I was looking around, wondering, who is the new speaker? I didn't see anyone unusual. And then he said 'Sister Norma will bring the message tonight.'" Sanchez was stunned, but she began to pray and slowly made her way to the pulpit. "I walked up and I asked the Lord to guide me and put the words in my mouth so that I would speak only what he says," she recalled later. "I had been studying Isaiah 53 [at home]," and so that night "I just opened my mouth and started talking: 'Everyone that thirsteth, come to the water. If you have no money come and buy without money and without price ... God died for us. On the cross he gave his life. He said whosoever will, may come. We don't need to have money, we don't need to have riches. But we need Christ in our life.'"<sup>1</sup>*

*When Jonathan Dueck began attending First Mennonite Church of Edmonton, Alberta, he was immediately impressed with the choral music, especially*

that performed by the children's choir. Dueck was a graduate student in the Music Department at the University of Alberta in the same city. On this Sunday morning in November 2000 the children's choir, which included fifteen voices, sang three pieces of music. They opened the service with "We will sing for joy," by the eighteenth-century composer Domenico Scarlatti, a difficult piece that Dueck knew was not usually "regarded as kid's music." About halfway through the service the children returned to the front of the sanctuary and sang an arrangement, from memory, of "Abide in me," a nineteenth-century hymn that was not in the congregation's hymnal. With obvious parental satisfaction, a woman sitting next to Dueck and who had a daughter in the choir, "leaned over and said 'the reason they're doing that is because [of] my daughter.' The woman explained that the girl had seen the musical score "lying on the piano bench [at home]" and asked the choir director "if they could do it and so they are!" At the close of the service the children sang yet again – this time "Go now in peace," as a round. "They sang in tune, and in tempo – memorized," Dueck marveled. Although he thought it was "remarkable what such a young group is able to perform," he soon learned that the members of First Mennonite simply expected as much from the children and from the congregation's other two sacred music choirs, one made up of youth and another of adults. Most attendees were professionals – of roughly 180 members at least twenty held doctoral degrees and others were "classically trained as musicians" – and they wanted worship programming that was planned in advance, thoroughly rehearsed, and carried out with care.<sup>2</sup>

### **Where two or three are gathered together**

Family Mennonite of Los Angeles and First Mennonite of Edmonton are two windows onto the diversity of contemporary Mennonite congregational life in North America. By the early twenty-first century there were 962 Mennonite, Amish, and Brethren in Christ churches in Canada and another 4,472 in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Many of these worshipping communities were concentrated in historic Mennonite population centers, but increasing numbers were located in urban areas, on the west coast, and in the southern United States. Mennonite churches existed in all Canadian provinces except Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, and in every U.S. state but New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Nevada. Although Mennonites remained a largely white denomination, church names pointed to emerging diversity: First Hmong Mennonite in Kitchener, Ontario;

Lao Christian Fellowship in Abbotsford, British Columbia; Jemaat Kristen Indonesian Anugrah in Pasadena, California; and Iglesia Menonita Arca de Salvación in Fort Meyers, Florida.

#### Congregations in North America, 2010

<b>Canada</b>		<b>United States</b>	
Amish	34	Amish	1,693
Brethren in Christ	48	Brethren in Christ	270
Mennonite*	880	Mennonite*	2,509
<b>Total</b>	<b>962</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>4,472</b>

\*all groups/conferences

Source: *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites*, ed. by Donald B. Kraybill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 251-52, 256-58.

Most congregations were small. Across all groups and conferences, Canadian Mennonite and Amish churches averaged 135 baptized members and those in the United States had an average of 90. Numerically typical were modest-sized urban congregations, such as 60-member Hyde Park Mennonite Fellowship of Boise, Idaho, or rural churches with shrinking populations, such as Eigenheim Mennonite Church near Rosthern, Saskatchewan, which counted one hundred fewer members at the turn of the twenty-first century than it had in the 1950s. In 2000 only a handful of churches had memberships of more than a thousand, including Reedley Mennonite Brethren in California, First Mennonite in Winnipeg, and Bethesda Mennonite in Henderson, Nebraska. The largest congregation on the continent was Calvary Community Church, in Hampton, Virginia, a largely African-American church. In 2000 Calvary's membership stood at 1,672 and by 2005 it had topped 2,200.

There was some variation in average congregational membership from one Mennonite group to another. Statistics from 2010 revealed that Mennonite Brethren churches in the United States had one of the highest with an average of 180 members each, while the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference average stood at 159; Canadian MBs and Mennonite Church Canada, 150; Mennonite Church USA, 116; and Brethren in Christ, 85. The Old Order Amish, who gather for Sunday worship in the homes of members and, with very few exceptions, never construct church buildings, have one of the lowest

average memberships. Whenever an Amish church grows too large to meet in members' homes, the church divides. Given this pattern of perpetual division, all Amish churches are roughly the same size, at around 60 baptized members.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, Mennonites' demographic diversity was matched by increasing variety in congregational activity, as revealed in a sampling of letters published in *Mennonite Weekly Review* and *Mennonite Reporter*. In January 1975, for example, the Church of God in Christ (Holdeman Mennonites) in Linden, Alberta reported seven evenings of revival meetings with visiting preachers from Florida and Ohio and concluded with the ordination of a new lay minister, Harvey K. Toews. Across the continent, in Ontario, Zurich Mennonite Church described the athletic competition between its youth group and that of neighboring Exeter Christian Reformed Church.

A decade later, Glennon Heights Mennonite in Lakewood, Colorado and Milford Mennonite in Nebraska were both offering educational seminars. The session at Glennon Heights was instruction in women's nonviolent self-defense, while that at Milford was on friendship evangelism. In 1995 men from Bahia Vista Mennonite Church in Sarasota, Florida attended a Tampa gathering of the ecumenical Christian men's movement known as Promise Keepers, and in Langham, Saskatchewan Zoar Mennonite Church was hosting Paul and Onkabetse Mogomela, church leaders from Botswana, for an entire month.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, a host of new community ministries had sprung up. Preschools, although attracting little attention in denominational reports or periodicals, were one of the most common forms of community ministry from the late 1960s onward. Churches such as Hoffnungsau Mennonite in Inman, Kansas; Carlisle Brethren in Christ in Pennsylvania; and Killarney Park Mennonite Brethren in Vancouver, sponsored preschools, while others, such as Immanuel Mennonite in Harrisonburg, Virginia, hosted child care centers that were managed by others. By one quite conservative count, in the early twenty-first century there were at least two hundred Mennonite-linked preschools and child-care centers, with a combined constituency that dwarfed other forms of Mennonite-sponsored education.<sup>5</sup>

In almost every case, the preschools had been launched by women, and women were also the driving force behind congregationally-sponsored thrift stores, which mushroomed during the 1970s. In March 1972 Selma Loewen, Linie Friesen, Susan Giesbrecht, and Sara Stoesz



The restored Detweiler meetinghouse (above), built near Berlin (today, Kitchener), Ontario in 1855, represents the interior architecture of Old Order Mennonite worship spaces today. Worshippers sit on three sides, facing one another and the “plural ministry” (bishop, preachers, and deacon) who sit on the bench behind the pulpit. Many windows assure ample lighting. The pegs on the walls and suspended from the ceiling are used to hang hats and coats.

Upland Brethren in Christ Church in California (below), shown here in 1965, represented contemporary church architecture. Worshippers face a divided chancel in which the pulpit is at the side. Here, Bishop Charlie Byers is in the pulpit, which is on the left. (Because this photograph records a session of BIC general conference, various speakers and reporters are seated at a table across the front of the sanctuary, but they would not occupy that space during Sunday worship.)



opened a thrift shop in Altona, Manitoba with the aim of raising money for Mennonite Central Committee through the sale of secondhand clothing and other used goods. Within two years the idea of MCC thrift stores sponsored by local churches had spread to Ohio, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, and launched a movement that would result in more than one hundred shops in the next thirty-five years.<sup>6</sup>

Preschools and thrift stores served a wider public, but occasionally churches partnered quite directly with civic groups to meet community needs. In 1968 Alice Mennonite Church, located in the Rancho Alegre barrio of Alice, Texas, opened the Rancho Alegre Youth Center "with cooperation and help from the community, city, county, businesspeople and other churches." Alice Mennonite's entrepreneurial Mexican-American leadership, along with several Mennonite voluntary service participants, started "a boys club, girls club, arts and crafts program, Bible quiz competitions, volleyball ... and a very popular weightlifting program."

For Lisa Guedea, who was a middle school student in the 1970s, the center "provided youth with something to do to pass the time under the hot South Texas sun." At the center she "played on a girls softball team appropriately called 'Las Chicanas,' made up entirely of young women from the Rancho Alegre barrio." Throughout the center's quarter century of existence, its programming generated "broad support from community members, politicians and other church groups" and received funding from the United Way, the county government, and the Catholic church.<sup>7</sup>

Local ministry could also challenge the civic order and some congregations engaged in collective civil disobedience. In the 1980s as civil wars rocked Central America, often exacerbated by United States military aid and intervention, a number of Mennonite congregations from Texas to Ontario participated in the Overground Railroad, a network that illegally shuttled Central American asylum seekers through the United States to safety in Canada, using church buildings as sanctuaries. Between 1983 and 1989 the movement assisted some 1,200 refugees.<sup>8</sup>

Adding to the variety in Mennonite church life was the formation of dozens of new congregations that were visibly committed to maintaining conservative modes of dress and traditional gender roles. During the 1960s and 1970s groups of mostly young families withdrew from what they perceived to be quickly-assimilating Mennonite churches. A sympathetic cartoon from 1973 portrayed the



larger Mennonite community as a ship breaking up on the rocky crags of worldliness, divorce and remarriage, misdirected education, and political involvement. As the ship's officers optimistically announce "All's well, full steam ahead," clusters of passengers launch life boats and row in the other direction.

Although many of these new "plain" congregations were small, by the 1990s they collectively represented more than 30,000 members in bodies such as Nationwide Mennonite Fellowship Churches, Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario, Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, and Western Conservative Mennonite Fellowship, among others. This new wave of churches is keen to engage in evangelism and looked to institutions such as Rod and Staff Publishers in Crockett, Kentucky or Faith Builders Educational Programs in Guys Mills, Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup>

Given all the diversity in the late twentieth century, perhaps it took an outsider to notice common themes. In the early 1990s a religious studies professor from Temple University who was observing congregations across a spectrum of denominations, found the people at West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship remarkable in their approach to the Bible and in their relationships with one another. Mennonites "knew a great deal about the Scriptures," he discovered. Repeatedly "the people



Samuel Walters, left, pastor of Burnside Mennonite Church in the Bronx section of New York City, speaking with Michael E. Banks. Walters had been pastor of First Mennonite Church in Kingston, Jamaica before accepting a call in 1977 to move to the United States and lead the Burnside congregation. Banks, a native New Yorker, succeeded Walters as Burnside's pastor in 1984. Eight years later Addie Banks joined her husband as co-pastor. Burnside, which later changed its name to King of Glory Tabernacle, is active in its neighborhood and in the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches.

at the fellowship surprised me – even intimidated me a little – with how much they knew.” They simply “assumed ... that serious Christians would know how to flip from one scriptural passage to another and then to a third as they were discussing religious matters. These people knew, for example, how to get from the fifth chapter of the Letter of James to the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew to the sixth chapter of Amos in an eyeblink.”

The professor knew that such facility was unusual, even among “Bible-carrying Christians” in other denominations, but what he “found particularly striking [about Mennonites] was the degree to which their Bible reading was ... explicitly and self-consciously communal. They habitually gathered *together* to read the Bible and to talk about how the Bible should influence their thoughts and actions.” Each Sunday there was also a time for sharing responses to the sermon or sharing “things that were sources of joy or of concern” and asking for prayer. And although the pastor was well educated, church members did not address him with any title, such as “reverend,” nor did they assume that he alone was responsible for the work of the church.<sup>10</sup>

Although aspects of West Philadelphia Fellowship’s structure, budget, mission, and theology may not have been typical of other Mennonite congregations, the central roles of the Bible and of community were discernible themes across North America, from Old Order districts and urban house churches to large suburban congregations and rural missions. At the same time, there were important and sometimes dramatic changes in leadership, worship, music, and youth ministry during the last decades of the twentieth century.

## Leadership

Although Mennonites did not possess elaborate hierarchy and historically made use of non-salaried pastors without formal theological training, ordained ministers had long played key roles in local church life. During the nineteenth-century some Mennonite churches elected (and then ordained) pastors, while other groups chose leaders through a process of “drawing lots,” based on the apostolic example of Acts 1:26 – a system of leadership selection still used today by Old Order Amish and some Old Order Mennonites. Nineteenth-century Mennonites also spoke of ordination as “making a preacher,” a phrase that emphasized a candidate’s willingness to submit to divine calling rather than to any particular skills or ability.

Whatever the process of selection, leaders were important. Dozens of Mennonite congregational histories were organized around pastors' tenures and praised the character of beloved ministers long after they died. This did not mean that many people recalled specific sermons topics or even themes. More common was the sort of memories that persisted about George Gundy, a mid-century minister at Meadows Mennonite Church near Chenoa, Illinois. People "who remember him say he was a good preacher, down-to-earth and full of conviction," his grandson learned from interviewing older members. Yet few recalled the actual content of Gundy's sermons, though "everyone remembers the time when his son Don and another boy didn't come back into the sanctuary for the second half of the evening service. George was up preaching when the other boy's father got up to find his own son, and without missing a beat [George] said, 'Jake, bring mine in too!'"<sup>11</sup>

**The rise of salaried and seminary-educated pastors was a theme among progressive Mennonites**

Gundy was largely self-trained and earned his living as a farmer. The rise of salaried and seminary-educated pastors was a theme among progressive Mennonites as the twentieth century wore on, though there were important pockets in which these characteristics did not become the norm. Smaller Mennonite churches – of which there were many – often could not afford a salaried pastor, at least not fulltime. The Canadian system of public health insurance made it somewhat easier for congregations of modest means to support a pastor financially, but in the United States many small congregations struggled to offer meaningful benefits to paid staff. Meanwhile, groups such as the Old Colony, Sommerfelder, and Old Order Mennonites retain unsalaried leaders on principle.

One change in last half of the twentieth century was the decline in the office of bishop, or *Ältester*, among the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and among (Old) Mennonites. Bishops were ordained ministers who had received a second ordination to this senior office, which granted them authority to baptize and preside at communion – as well as to administer church discipline by withholding those ordinances. Significantly, bishops exercised their office for a cluster of congregations, which had the effect of binding worshipping communities into a wider sense of church as they received baptism and communion from

the hand of one who had directed these same rituals in neighboring congregations. In such a system, local churches were not sacramentally self-sufficient, but relied on their bishop, who rotated from one congregation to another and whose periodic presence symbolized that the church stretched beyond any single meeting place.

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the office of bishop went into sharp decline among (Old) Mennonites, who between 1969 and 1971 reorganized their conference structure and took the name Mennonite Church (MC), and among the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. There were several reasons, but certainly one was a new

**During the 1960s and 1970s the office of bishop went into sharp decline**

emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers” – a Reformation-era term which Mennonites now began using as shorthand for the notion that all members

possess ministry gifts of equal significance. This theme had emerged from the neo-Anabaptist theological renaissance of the 1950s, when advocates such as sociologist Paul Peachey warned against “temporal power structures” and theologian John Howard Yoder argued that the apostle Paul had presented a vision of universal ministry in which it made no sense to reserve for a few the authority to baptize or serve the Lord’s Supper.<sup>12</sup>

Seen in that light, bishops were problematic figures who represented specialized leadership and an authority that was not egalitarian. In 1952 the South Central Conference, a regional (Old) Mennonite body, announced that the office of bishop would be discontinued in two years.<sup>13</sup> All pastors, who were now to be hired on three-year contracts, could baptize and preside at the Lord’s Supper, a step that symbolized greater congregational autonomy. Over time other regional conferences followed suit. For its part, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada appointed a commission in 1962 to study “The calling, ordination, and functions of ministers and *Ältesten*.” The group’s report was inconclusive, but by the mid-1970s most CMC congregations had abandoned the bishop structure.<sup>14</sup>

Some voices even began to suggest that “the concept of ordination” may need to be “dropped altogether.” At the very least, “the image of the pastoral office is presently very fluid,” one study group concluded in 1967.<sup>15</sup> Baptism and communion may have devolved from bishops to local pastors, but as some congregations began to practice “open”

communion and to accept as members those baptized as infants in other traditions, it was clear that larger patterns of authority, and a pastor's place in that pattern, were not what they once had been.

It was striking, then, the way the authority vested in ordination was reasserted when women requested leadership roles. Pioneer women pastors were called by local congregations that then petitioned conferences – sometimes for years – to allow ordination to proceed. In 1973 Emma Sommers Richards was ordained and joined her husband, Joe, as co-pastor of Lombard Mennonite Church, an MC congregation in Illinois. In 1978 Martha Smith Good was commissioned as pastor for Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario, and the following year Doris Weber was ordained, along with her husband Rod, as pastor of Avon Mennonite Church in Stratford, Ontario.<sup>16</sup> Brethren in Christ formally approved women's ordination in 1982, and several BIC women were ordained five years later. In the groups that became Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA the number of ordained women rose slowly but steadily, though few women found jobs as senior or lead pastor.<sup>17</sup>



Emma Sommers Richards was ordained in 1973 at Lombard Mennonite Church in Illinois.



Grace Kim was ordained in 2008 at Pacific Grace Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Vancouver.

Women's ordination remained contested among Mennonite Brethren, although MB conferences had ordained women missionaries through the 1950s. In 2008 Grace Kim became the first woman to be ordained for congregational pastoral ministry in the Canadian MB Conference. She served Pacific Grace Church, an ethnically Chinese congregation in Vancouver. Shortly thereafter Bev Peters was ordained at Northview Community Church in Abbotsford.<sup>18</sup> MBs in the United States, as well as the Conservative Mennonite Conference and the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, continue to restrict ordination to men, though the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren has often licensed women for ministry in roles other than lead pastor. Official polity in EMC and EMMC circles also reserves ordination for men, but women have occasionally and informally functioned as pastors in those groups when called by a congregation.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Movement of the Spirit**

Questions of spiritual authority were also at the heart of Mennonite responses to the charismatic renewal movement that pulsed through the second half of the twentieth century. Emphasizing the contemporary gifts of the Holy Spirit for personal and congregational vitality, the charismatic movement bore a historic relationship to Pentecostalism of the early 1900s. Pentecostals had championed the idea that the dramatic power of the Holy Spirit described in the Book of Acts, including speaking in tongues and performing miracles of healing, should be expected by the church today. Pentecostalism often empowered women's ministry – since the Spirit could not be confined by traditional boundaries – as well as interracial fellowship, pacifism, and end-times expectation.

Other Christians often looked askance at the new Pentecostal groups, such as the Assemblies of God and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, but beginning in the 1950s, Pentecostal impulses and expressions began to manifest themselves within mainline denominations, from Methodist to Roman Catholic and beyond. This interdenominational expression of “signs and wonders” taking place beyond traditional Pentecostal circles became known as the charismatic renewal movement.<sup>20</sup>

Initially, most Mennonites greeted the charismatic movement with skepticism, unconvinced that speaking in tongues was necessary or questioning whether it was even possible. Earlier in the century most

Mennonites had been equally cool to Pentecostalism. Back in 1914 Mathilda (Kohn) Stevenson, who had been a missionary in Africa from 1896 to 1911 under the auspices of the Defenseless Mennonite Church (today Fellowship of Evangelical Churches), “received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues and was asked to leave the Mennonite church she was attending.”<sup>21</sup>

Later, in a situation that received wider notice, Gerald Derstine, an (Old) Mennonite pastor at Strawberry Lake, Minnesota, was forced to resign in 1956 when he refused to say that speaking in tongues and being “slain in the Spirit,” which were being manifest among some members in his church, were not the result of demonic activity.<sup>22</sup> Derstine then moved to Florida where he established a non-denominational charismatic healing ministry that attracted a wide following.

**Initially, most Mennonites greeted the charismatic movement with skepticism**

During the 1960s Mennonites sympathetic to charismatic teaching and worship often did not reveal their views or experiences to fellow church members. For example, Roy S. Koch, long-time minister in St. Jacobs, Ontario, had taken a pastorate in West Liberty, Ohio when a church member there cautiously invited him to attend a charismatic meeting in the city of Columbus. Koch “knew that the ... organization was unabashedly charismatic” and “was afraid” that attending would “jeopardize my reputation.” Nevertheless, Koch went and “heard a message in tongues for the first time in my life.” When he and his wife Martha subsequently received the gift of tongues themselves they were sure that this was “the movement of the Spirit of God in our time.”<sup>23</sup>

Soon thereafter, in 1970, Nelson Litwiller, a retired missionary who had served in South America, read a book by Kevin Ranaghan, a leader in the Catholic charismatic movement. Litwiller then attended a charismatic worship service at Saint Joseph Catholic High School in South Bend, Indiana, where he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with tongues, surrounded by the prayers of Roman Catholic charismatic worshippers.<sup>24</sup>

As Koch and Litwiller made bold to share their experiences publicly, others who had kept their charismatic devotional life a secret began to come forward. The Festival of the Holy Spirit, the first large gathering of charismatic Mennonites, took place in 1972, organized

by Harold Bauman, a Goshen College campus pastor. Two thousand people attended, about half of whom were “young people, many in bare feet and blue jeans, mingling freely with the primly-dressed and the elderly.”<sup>25</sup>

Ron and Elsie Eigsti, grain farmers from Morton, Illinois, described the experience as a spiritual turning point. “The Word became alive

**The first large gathering  
of charismatic Menno-  
nites took place in 1972**

and Jesus seemed so real,” Ron reported. He saw “women in little white [head] coverings ... raising their hands and saying things like ‘Praise the

Lord’ and ‘Hallelujah’ out loud” and Elsie “saw people healed and other things happening that are recorded in the Book of Acts.” Back in their home church, however, Ron “learned quickly what things I shouldn’t say and many times not to say anything at all.”<sup>26</sup>

By 1975 a network known as Mennonite Renewal Services had formed to connect charismatic Mennonites, like the Eigstis, who insisted the movement “is a legitimate representative of the Anabaptist heritage.”<sup>27</sup> A 1977 MC Mennonite statement on “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church” clearly emphasized the movement’s “positive contributions” but in a way that suggested how contentious the issue was in many congregations, where critics claimed it was either unbiblical or that an emphasis on individual spiritual gifts ran counter to an Anabaptist theology of community, or both.<sup>28</sup>

Controversy sometimes clouded recognition of the extent of the movement’s influence, especially among pastors. A 1986 survey found that 10 to 15 percent of MC members had experienced charismatic gifts of the spirit, as did 25-30 percent of pastors. Rates among GC Mennonites were lower except in western Canada where there were “a significant number of people with the charismatic experience.”<sup>29</sup> But aggregate numbers also obscured patterns that followed racial and ethnic lines. Latino Mennonites, for example, rarely saw any conflict between the charismatic movement and Anabaptist theology and, in fact, were puzzled as to why so many white Mennonites seemed surprised by, or even opposed to, dramatic expressions of divine activity.

Women attending a Hispanic Mennonite women’s retreat in Moline, Illinois, in April 1973 did not hesitate to lay hands on pastor Mac Bustos, who had difficulty walking, and prayed for his healing.



As one woman remembered, “He hobbled to the front of the sanctuary, obviously in great pain, where his brother Mario and several women laid hands on him. ... A few moments later, just after he took the communion wine, Mac said, slowly and with amazement in his voice: I have no pain!” For Latinas, “the miraculous healing of Pastor Mac Bustos” as well as speaking in tongues, “proved that they were on to something larger than themselves.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, a 2006 survey of Mennonite Church USA found that although only 4 percent of white members chose “charismatic/Pentecostal” as a primary “religious identity,” 16 percent of African-American and Latino members did.<sup>31</sup>



Born and raised in Puerto Rico, José Ortíz became a key leader among Latino Mennonites in North America, serving for four decades, beginning in the 1960s, as a pastor, college and seminary professor, and church administrator. From 1975-1982 he was the first executive secretary of the *Concilio Nacional de Iglesias Menonitas* (National Council of Hispanic Mennonite Churches) and edited *Ecos Menonitas* (Mennonite Echos), a periodical distributed throughout the Western Hemisphere.

By the turn of the twenty-first century the charismatic movement had lost much of its controversial cast. Many Mennonites considered it a genuine form of church renewal, even if they had not experienced specific Spirit-inspired gifts themselves. The wider legacy, it seems, was a broader appreciation for what might be termed a charismatic worship *style* that included contemporary praise songs and worshipers lifting outstretched hands. Such changes were among the trans-

formations in worship and music that swept over many Mennonite congregations during these years.

### **Worship and Music**

Recalling Sunday morning worship in the Franconia Mennonite Conference in eastern Pennsylvania around 1950, historian and pastor John L. Ruth could, years later, summon the rhythmic cadence and “formulaic opening phrases” of sermons that followed predictable patterns regardless of the preacher or congregation:

As we look to the Lord for a message, we crave an interest in your prayers, that we may be given liberty to declare the whole counsel of God, without fear or favor of men, to a lost and dying world. And that all that is said and done here today may be to the honor and glory of Almighty God. As our mind went back during the past week, over many precious scriptures, we were made to think how often the Lord reminds us of what he expects of his children. How great a love he has shown toward the children of men, and yet, how often his love is rejected, as our minds become filled with the things of this passing world. Beloved, my hope and prayer this morning is that we may hearken unto the voice of our Lord, while it is called today. I would like to call your attention to the fifth chapter of . . .

“At this point,” Ruth noted, “there would be an audible riffling of Bible pages – of thin ‘India paper’ – that served to unite the conscientious part of the congregation in a common experience of scripture.”<sup>32</sup>

Although specific aspects of Ruth’s memory might not be generalized across the North American Mennonite scene, his vivid recollection points to the presence of recognizable patterns that defined worship at midcentury. With the exception of Old Order churches, almost all Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, including mission churches that often replicated the habits of long-established congregations, gathered on Sunday mornings for worship that began with harmonized congregational hymn singing and then centered on a sermon that lasted at least a half an hour (and often longer) and was preached by an ordained man. Sunday school with age-graded classes occupied an hour before or after worship. Sunday evening

worship services were all but universal, and many congregations also had Wednesday night prayer meetings. By the 1990s no such generalization was possible.

Denominational surveys, published church histories, and monthly reports from dozens of congregational scribes that appeared in periodicals such as *Mennonite Weekly Review*, testify to the changes that took place across the Mennonite congregational landscape during the 1970s and 1980s. Although Sunday morning attendance in the largest Mennonite conferences remained steady from 1972 to 1989, adult Sunday school attendance declined and small group participation rose.<sup>33</sup> College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, was among the first to adopt small groups – or *koinonia* groups or k-groups, as they were then called – in the early 1950s, where pastor John H. Mosemann Jr. supported them as a structure for pastoral care rather than “as loci of discernment, commitment, and accountability.”<sup>34</sup>

By the 1970s as the “small group movement” swept the North American evangelical world, many Mennonites were a part of it.<sup>35</sup> Some groups were structured around Bible study, others offered support for individuals with chronic needs, and still others focused on interpersonal connection. Some congregations institutionalized small groups and made them places of decision-making that replaced traditional church business meetings. The nature of small groups made them difficult to quantify, and some people participated in more than one small group at a time, but in 2007 the Canadian MB conference reckoned its nearly 250 congregations included at least 1,763 small groups.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the statistics in other places, small groups had become a significant, if sometimes fragmenting, aspect of Mennonite church life.

**By the 1970s  
Mennonites were  
part of the “small  
group movement”**

Reports from congregational scribes writing to Mennonite newspapers suggest that Sunday evening church services declined during the 1980s, although there was a remarkable burst of interest in showing films by congregations that retained an evening service time. Many of the films came in series, with episodes for several weeks in a row, and included popular evangelical speakers, such as Francis Schaeffer, James Dobson, Joyce Landorf, and Tony Campolo. On

New Year's Eve 1984 the GC, MB, and EMB churches around Mountain Lake, Minnesota offered their community three inspirational film choices with which to bring in the new year.<sup>37</sup> By the late 1990s both film series and Sunday evening services had become rare, but soon multimedia elements – film clips and PowerPoint slides – were supplementing Sunday morning sermons in technologically savvy sanctuaries.

Gatherings on Sunday morning remained a consistent practice for Mennonite congregations, but worship evolved along divergent lines. In some quarters, the closing years of the twentieth century witnessed a new interest in worship rituals, use of the Revised Common Lectionary as the basis for scripture reading, and observation of Advent, Lent, and other seasons and days of the liturgical Church Year.

No one was more closely associated with these changes than Marlene Kropf, who held various appointments in MC and GC denominations from 1983 to 2010 and for most of those years also taught at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. As she traveled across the continent listening to pastors, participating in worship, and presenting seminars, Kropf believed that Mennonites' "central need ... was the lack of a direct encounter with God. There was too little scripture

and too little prayer in corporate worship. We were content to talk about God and reluctant to encounter God .... The absence of the arts in worship kept many doors closed to encounter with God. Our fear of ritual kept other doors closed."

Kropf and others produced new worship resources and hymn collections, and interacted with Roman Catholics and others from historically liturgical traditions. The results were difficult to measure, but looking back Kropf saw the outlines of significant change. "We're no longer afraid to anoint one another and pray for healing," she noted in 2010, and "we come to the Lord's Table more often; we can create rituals for joyful occasions or times of lament and sorrow when we need them; we can even dance. We've lost our fear of sacraments and are ready to acknowledge that God works and speaks in

**Sunday gatherings remained a consistent practice, but worship evolved along divergent lines**

material ways, in words, silence, relationships, symbols, mystery – in fact, in any way God chooses.”<sup>38</sup>

Although North American Mennonites had traditionally observed communion twice a year, by the end of the twentieth century 42 percent GC and MC Mennonite congregations in the United States reported celebrating it four times a year, and another 11 percent did so at least monthly. Very few churches included a weekly recitation of a creed in their worship, but two-thirds included a time for members to share joys or concerns with the congregation.<sup>39</sup>

Music remained a central aspect of Mennonite worship, from urban to Old Order settings. “When we sing together there’s some sort of energy that grows out of who we are,” explained New York City pastor Ruth Yoder Wenger, “out of the music, out of the words, out of being together, out of God’s presence...”<sup>40</sup> Among the Amish, one particular hymn – the sixteenth-century *Loblied* or song of praise – is the second hymn in virtually every church gathering. The song leader, a man who remains seated in the congregation, sings the first syllable of each line, after which the rest of the congregation joins in unison. The *Loblied* has become foundational to Amish spirituality, its slow tempo a collective protest against the hurried state of the world. Sung from a German hymnbook that includes no musical notation, the tune has been transmitted orally over time, and it typically takes almost twenty minutes for a church to sing the hymn’s four verses.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike the Amish, most other Mennonites had “blessed singing in four parts as a healthy metaphor for spiritual harmony,” nurturing a tradition that, in some places, had made Mennonite music synonymous with harmonization.<sup>42</sup> Certainly some congregations, especially GC and some MB churches, had incorporated organ or piano playing into worship, but such accompaniment did not replace congregational participation in music making. Laura Weaver, an academic living in Evansville, Indiana, far from a Mennonite church, relied on music to sustain her spiritually, and considered “four-part *a cappella* singing as a survival strategy for a Mennonite-in-exile.”<sup>43</sup>

For North American Mennonites recently arrived from the Soviet Union or from Paraguay, German hymnody was a treasured source of faith and transnational identity. In 1960 when the Canadian MB Conference produced an English hymnal they simply translated all

555 hymns from the 1955 *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde* and numbered them “exactly as in the *Gesangbuch*,” thus “making it possible for bilingual congregations to sing in both languages at the same time.” The demand for German remained strong enough that in 1965 the Conference of Mennonites in Canada issued a new German-language hymnal, *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten*.<sup>44</sup>

In communities where a shift to English had occurred much earlier, it was often a challenge to expand musical repertoires. In the 1960s, as music editors from Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church worked to produce *The Mennonite Hymnal* they selected some 650 hymns, but that number included only two songs of African-American origin, and only five non-Western hymns.

Mary K. Oyer, who chaired the group and favored more diversity, recalled that several committee members objected to including even these five hymns, which were from China, India, and Japan. Eventually the critics relented, saying the Asian songs would never be sung on Sunday morning, but perhaps they could be useful for an occasional program of a women’s mission auxiliary.<sup>45</sup>

During the 1970s musical styles began to vary considerably and the influence of folk music, choruses popularized in charismatic worship, and songs rooted in Latino and African-American experience became more common. The new Mennonite Brethren

**During the 1970s  
musical styles began  
to vary considerably**

*Worship Hymnal* (1971) included a “Youth” section with “rounds, folk hymns, [and] hymns in the style of contemporary popular music.”<sup>46</sup> During these same years,

Lawndale Choir, a mixed Hispanic-Anglo choir based at Chicago’s Lawndale Mennonite church and featuring soloists Gracie Torres and Seferina Garcia DeLeón, traveled widely, singing in Mennonite churches and conferences, selling recordings, and introducing English-speaking Mennonites to Latin-Gospel rhythms.<sup>47</sup> By 1992 when *Hymnal: A Worship Book* appeared, sponsored by GC and MC bodies and the Church of the Brethren, it included many hymns from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as music that reflected North American ethnic diversity, contemplative music from the Taizé community in France, and a large selection

of Catholic hymns written in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.



The Lawndale Youth Choir, early 1970s, in a photo that appeared on the cover of their album "Everything is Beautiful."

Meanwhile, a growing number of Mennonite congregations had moved away from traditional hymns entirely, drawing on the thriving world of what was known in the 1980s as "praise and worship music" and in the 1990s as "contemporary worship music." Typically, such music featured an ensemble of electric and acoustic instruments and an amplified vocalist who led the congregation in lyrics that were projected onto a large screen, freeing worshippers from having to hold a hymnal and allowing them to clap or raise their hands in a gesture of praise. Some congregations employed remarkable technical sophistication in sound systems and audio "mixing boards." In such settings, the "sound person," although rigged with earphones and not actually singing, "should have the keenest musical ear and technical understanding" of anyone in the church, one worship leader explained.<sup>48</sup>

River West Christian Church, an MB congregation in Edmonton, Alberta, was typical of congregations employing this style of worship. Its music "is always accompanied by a popular-music

style worship band” that plays “Christian contemporary worship music,” including some scores written by River West’s own praise band members, such as a song one visitor to the church described as “a catchy praise song with a honkytonk piano part and a funky break in the guitar bit.” The congregation occasionally sang a traditional hymn, but only “in an arrangement for ... unison singing and praise-band accompaniment.”

As River West’s worship leader explained in 2001, “We usually start out with fast songs, pretty much praise songs, songs praising God on a level that’s very much corporate ... horizontal worship, then bring it to the vertical worship. We bring it into more personal, usually the more personal songs tend to be more medium speed or slower speed.” He continued, “I see worship as one continuous prayer, we’re singing our prayers, and I don’t have any problem with singing songs that are personal, that are *I*-focused.”<sup>49</sup>

By the 1990s many MB congregations had adopted this approach to music, as had noticeable numbers of EMC, EMMC, and Conservative Conference churches, and about one in five Mennonite Church USA congregations reported often using synthesizers and percussion in worship.<sup>50</sup>



A worship band leading contemporary praise music at Mountain View Gospel Chapel, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Mission, British Columbia, during the 1980s. Pastor Victor Stobbe stands with his hands raised while the congregation sings along.



Musical influences ran in multiple directions, illustrated strikingly in the ways Mennonites not only borrowed from the contemporary Christian music scene, but also contributed to it. During the 1980s, for example, Jim Croegaert, then an elder at Reba Place Fellowship, a Mennonite intentional community in Evanston, Illinois, wrote songs such as “Was it a Morning Like This?” which won a Grammy award when evangelical artist Sandy Patty recorded it in 1986. Likewise, in the 1990s Brian Doerksen, who was raised in an Abbotsford, British Columbia Mennonite Brethren church, turned out dozens of contemporary Christian songs, including “Come, Now is the Time to Worship” and “Your Love is Amazing” – songs that thousands of Mennonites sang when they purchased Vineyard Music for use by their congregational worship bands.<sup>51</sup>

### Youth Ministry

Mennonites cared about music. They also cared a great deal about the young people in their midst. Baptism in the Anabaptist tradition had highlighted the fact that the faith of the next generation could not be assumed. The spiritual journey of youth had, as its goal, baptism and incorporation into the church. For much of their history in North America, Mennonites had expected baptism to occur in a person’s late teens or perhaps even early twenties, because baptism was not only a formal rite of entry into church membership, but also ushered one into the world of adulthood.

Old Order Mennonite and Amish churches have continued this pattern, but it became problematic for most other Mennonites. Decisions to join the church, take up a trade, and select a marriage partner might have formed a cluster of interdependent choices in stable, multigenerational, rural communities. But during the course of the twentieth century, as Mennonites embraced town life and professions, the transition to adulthood came to be marked by moving *away* from one’s home community – perhaps for college, and often for distant job opportunities. Society had restructured young adulthood as the most transient and individual-centered segment of life, while Mennonite theology assumed these were years of integration into a stable community.

Most Mennonites responded by redefining “youth” as the high school years, and then, in many cases, lowering the expected age of baptism and sometimes formally incorporating children as young as ten years of age into the church. When coupled with a style of revivalism that celebrated dramatic conversion from lives of sin, these approaches produced a sometimes tangled adolescent psychology of guilt and forgiveness that may have reaped early baptism, but also risked subsequent confusion and alienation. In 1957 one (Old) Mennonite statement sought to balance the conviction that “before conversion the ‘natural’ man is lost spiritually” with a caution against pressuring young people to claim faith, since no one will “turn to Christ ... unless convicted by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>52</sup>



A  
Mennonite  
Brethren  
baptismal  
service,  
Coaldale,  
Alberta,  
1950s.

By the 1970s a growing number of churches had initiated rituals of baby dedication that signaled a nurture-centered, rather than a conversion-centered, approach to raising children in the faith.<sup>53</sup> Marlin Jeschke, who had been reared in a Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church in Saskatchewan, explained in *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church* (1983) that “the experience of children in the church will ... be one of appropriation and ownership of the faith in which they have been brought up” rather

than dramatic conversion attained through the techniques of child-evangelism.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, a commitment to spiritual nurture raised questions about how churches should most effectively go about the task. Congregational youth groups continued to play many of the same roles they had for earlier generations: providing opportunities for socialization, recreation, and even dating with peers from the church. Ice skating parties, Sunday evening devotional meetings, and intense “Bible quizzing” competitions with neighboring churches were among the activities adults recalled from their own teen years and recorded in congregational histories.<sup>55</sup>

Still, during the 1970s, as popular youth culture celebrated informality and at times seemed to assume an air of adolescent rebellion, pastors and youth group leaders groped about for exciting, even avant-garde, youth ministry resources. Editors of Mennonite Sunday school curricula incorporated a chic look in materials such as *Holy Now* (1970), which was a montage of modern photography and provocative quotations, packaged in a trapezoidal-shaped book. Similarly, *Which Lord?* (1974), “written for youth and by youth,” presented a series of informal but passionate conversations on faith by an interracial American and Canadian group of young people.<sup>56</sup>

In 1977 Brethren in Christ, GC, MB, and MC Mennonite conferences, along with the Church of the Brethren, cooperated in planning and later producing *The Foundation Series*, a four-year high school curriculum that drew explicitly on neo-Anabaptist theology, matched with contemporary photos and polished formats. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence from conference ministers suggested that by then many congregations were using the extraordinarily popular materials issued by non-denominational outlets, such as Youth Specialties and Group Publishing.<sup>57</sup>

Summer youth camps remained well-attended and several dozen Mennonite camps began during the second half of the twentieth century to join the handful that had been initiated in the 1930s and 1940s. Likewise, summer “service trips” grew in popularity, particularly among suburban congregations whose youth were not tied to routines of summertime farm labor. During the 1980s short-term mission projects and service trips ballooned among North American Christians of all sorts, including Mennonites.



Camp counselor Spencer Taylor-Wingender spends a few moments in quiet reflection during a 2009 summer youth program hosted by Camp Peniel in the Laurentian Mountains north of Montreal. Each summer the Mennonite churches of Quebec and MCC Quebec partner to organize week-long camps for children and teenagers.

In February 1984 a group of GC and MC Mennonite leaders responsible for youth ministry noted that congregations were sending youth groups on short-term mission trips with Presbyterian, Methodist, and para-church organizations like Teen Mission, and they called for Mennonite-sponsored alternatives. The following year MCC U.S. initiated SWAP (Sharing with Appalachian People) and then DOOR (Denver Opportunity for Outreach and Reflection) as rural and urban service settings, respectively, in “response to congregational demands for an educational service program.”

Some critics dismissed short-term service as “Band-Aid” work, but the programs aimed to instill a sense of reciprocity and to educate participants about the structural dimensions of poverty. After a week with DOOR in 1988, a participant from Elmira, Ontario, concluded, “We don’t need soup kitchens and shelters. We need to solve those problems [that create homelessness].”<sup>58</sup>

Short-term mission trips were not the only experiences churches sought to give their youth. During the 1980s and 1990s thousands of youth attended large youth conferences – long weekend or full-week schedules packed with large-group worship and concerts, as well as smaller seminars and workshops. Sometimes these events were held on college or Bible school campuses, but others were located in expensive urban convention centers.

Back in the middle decades of the century, gatherings of the GC Young People’s Union, the MB *Jugendverein*, or the (Old) Mennonites’ Mennonite Youth Fellowship had brought young people together from across the continent. But the late twentieth-century youth conventions, such as the quadrennial National Youth Convention of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren or the annual Abundant Springs

Youth Conference of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, were larger, focused on high school-age students, and self-consciously drew on the currents of popular culture. By far the largest conventions were conjoint MC-GC Mennonite Youth Conventions, which attracted 2,200 participants in 1983 and 6,300 in 1999.<sup>59</sup>

After each convention, youth “returned to their churches excited about their experiences and pumped up for future conventions,” one adult coordinator enthused.<sup>60</sup> For the home churches, that enthusiasm could become a problem, since some youth found it difficult not to draw negative comparisons between their small, traditional congregation and the hip, high-voltage experience of a major youth gathering. Paying for youth conventions was another challenge. In 1995 the MC publication, *Gospel Herald*, devoted two pages to describing scores of fundraisers that had been held across the continent to underwrite tens of thousands of dollars in costs associated with the youth gatherings.<sup>61</sup>

For congregations made up largely of recent immigrants, youth convention costs could be prohibitive, and ministry to rising generations centered on other issues. Young people in immigrant churches were often focused on learning English (or French, in Quebec) and adjusted to North American culture more quickly than their elders. When Neng Chue Vang founded Hmong Mennonite Church of Saint Paul, Minnesota in 2004, he knew the congregation would place a “high value on intergenerational support,” both as an expression of Hmong culture and also because many older Hmong relied on the wages of younger people. But multigenerational ministry meant that it was “important for English to be spoken in the worship services in addition to the Hmong language to retain a connection with the youth of the church.”

For the youth, life in North America was all they knew, and older adults’ stories of terror and fleeing war in Southeast Asia were sometimes lost on the younger generation. For Neng, that potential generational divide became the focus of the congregation’s ministry: “We want everybody to become Christians. We want them to live peaceful lives, to love each other. No more fighting. No more war. We want everybody to be baptized, to be saved. ... We are to live in community and love each other and help each other. This is the way we want to be the church.”<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

During the course of the twentieth century North American Mennonites had created an array of formal institutions, denominational boards, and schools that offered structure to their collective identity and mission. But Mennonites' primary spiritual home remained the local congregation, a community of people who gathered weekly for worship and whose members supported one another in practical ways and together engaged in a widening array of community ministries. Amid the diversity of styles, languages, and commitment to either innovation or tradition, Mennonite worship highlighted the importance of the Bible and of the gathered body of believers. Worshipers discerned biblical application through sermons or Sunday school classes, shared their joys and concerns, and prayed for one another. Music seemed an especially important expression of church life, which connected worshipers with God and one another as music-making called on the participation of everyone.

To be sure, unifying statements of faith put forward by national denominations still mattered – BIC revised their *Articles of Faith and Doctrine* in 1986, GC and MC Mennonites approved a new *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* in 1995, and four years later MBs had drafted and accepted a new *Confession of Faith*. But these documents now bore witness in a local churchly context shaped by the rise of small groups, the influence of charismatic renewal, and more egalitarian patterns of leadership. Apart from Old Order and decidedly conservative groups, congregational life was now less formal and assumed less uniformity. In a rapidly changing world youth ministry remained central and sometimes took on new urgency as churches competed with popular culture and mass media that offered powerful and attractive images aimed at children and teens. But media images were not limited to youth or to “the world.” Mennonites had begun to embrace opportunities afforded by media and turned to the arts to express their faith or to manage their own image as they saw it reflected in wider society, themes we explore in the next chapter.

# Media, Arts, and Mennonite Images

*In 1984 the elderly David Dyck of Niverville, Manitoba sat down to tell his story. He had been a boy in the Mennonite settlements in southern Russia when the Bolshevik revolution broke out. During the days of anarchy, rebels overran Dyck's village and plundered his family's farm. They entered at night, shot and killed the farm manager and David's pregnant mother, and seriously wounded David's father. David and his siblings then huddled around their father's bedside and listened for his final words. He told them of his deep struggle to keep the faith in these times of terror and pled with them to resist thoughts of retaliation, and to forgive their enemies and see them as children of God. It was a powerful story. But what made it especially poignant was that David told it in front of a movie camera. With light shining into his face against a dark background, viewers could see David's tearful recollection many decades after the event. And David had a large audience since his story was part of the docu-drama *And When They Shall Ask*, an account of the Mennonite sojourn in Russia with a special focus on suffering during the Russian Revolution. The movie was produced at the height of Cold War tension with the Soviet Union, before many thousands of North American Mennonites who had been born in Russia were allowed back to visit. The film, shown widely in Mennonite church halls, schools, and private homes, helped those who saw it remember. Dozens of subsequent screenings on television brought this story of suffering and peace to a wider North American audience. David had told his story to the world.<sup>1</sup>*

*In June 1998 police in Lancaster, Pennsylvania arrested two Amish-reared young men on charges of intent to distribute cocaine for a drug ring tied to a national motorcycle gang. This story instantly became a global news item, from the New York Times to Australian National Radio and hundreds of points in between. Television talk shows took up the story, news magazines*

*commissioned feature articles, and late night comedians found fodder for stand-up routines. Through it all, commentators in the 1990s could assume that their audiences knew who the Amish were and that this drug-bust was inherently fascinating because it involved an Old Order Anabaptist group. All the attention was in sharp contrast to the public's reaction in June 1953 when three Amish teens capped off an evening of mischief in Geauga County, Ohio, by tying a fourth Amish boy to the back of a car and dragging him down the road and to his death. That incident had shocked the Amish community but sparked no national headlines or wire stories buzzing around the globe. The event was local news, and the fact that unbaptized Amish youth were involved made the story that much more parochial and uninteresting to editors elsewhere. But now, in 1998, the very presence of the Amish in a story made it newsworthy. During the second half of the twentieth century a remarkable transformation had occurred. Without an organized public relations campaign, promotional budget, or celebrity spokesperson, a small and publicly self-effacing religious group had become exceedingly well known.<sup>2</sup>*

### **Imaging and Imagining the Mennonites of North America**

During the twentieth century North American Mennonites began to communicate their faith and identity in significantly new ways. Where once the vast majority of Mennonites had rejected fiction, film and popular music as tools of the devil, the majority now began to use those very tools to tell their story.<sup>3</sup> In some ways it was simply another form of story-telling, continuing a long-standing pastime of "going visiting," dropping by neighbors after church to share a meal and, of course, tell stories. They told funny stories of the hapless neighbor, tragic stories of distant kin, instructive stories from history. Family historian Katherine Martens recalled that her father told stories of the everyday "as a substitute for the fairy tales [other] children [were] told at bedtime. He disdained novels and fiction, but a true story could be told." And as she recalled, "I listened to it spellbound."<sup>4</sup>

For progressive Mennonites during the second half of the twentieth century those stories moved from kitchen table and bedside to magazine, radio, screen, and the pages of fiction. They moved from artistic expression in quilts, wooden toys and elaborate *Fraktur* drawings, to abstract paintings, poetry and musical recordings. It was a transition that seemed to follow the shift of Mennonites from a parochial to a cosmopolitan setting, from being the "quiet in the land" to openly



exhibiting Mennonite society to the wider world (which sometimes responded with a critical appraisal or a tourist's gaze). Increasingly, even those who wished to remain the "quiet in the land," the plain people – the Amish, Old Colony Mennonites and others – came in for media scrutiny and Hollywood fanfare.

Mennonites in the United States and Canada employed the new media in different ways, to tell a rather divergent story, but so too did the media of these countries use a variety of new communication devices to portray Mennonites in specific ways. In the United States the feature films (from *The Radicals* to Hollywood's *Witness*), the plays and poetry, the quilts and visual arts were of special importance, as was the phenomenon of Old Order-themes tourism. In Canada it was the documentary, the novel and nationally-broadcasted music programs that came to the forefront. But in both countries most of the common media – radio, television, film, literature, photography – became tools to communicate the nature of the Mennonite community to national and even international audiences.

### **Mass Media and Music in Canada**

Mennonites throughout North America met the arrival of electronic media – the radio in the 1920s and television in the 1950s – with a great deal of skepticism. Many churches forbade members these electronic pathways or warned against them. Examples from Canada tell the wider story. In Alberta the Northwest Mennonite Conference issued a statement in 1954 on the dangers of great "indecentcy" on television, and noted that "only one percent of television programs were definitely religious, and some of these were merely a snare for the evil one."<sup>5</sup>

But times were changing rapidly and soon many modernizing Mennonites lined up to acquire the new receiver sets. Some, like Peter Dick of Kitchener, did so at once in the 1950s, making "our own decision" as we "wanted to know what was going on in this world."<sup>6</sup> Others like Ronald Friesen of Kleefeld, Manitoba, recalled that in the 1970s when "brother Laurie brought home a TV, thereby pushing the envelope of accommodation forward once again," their Dad grieved that "the age of cultural isolation was ending" and Ronald rued that "our innocence ha[d] been stolen by technology."<sup>7</sup>

Statistics from a survey of North America's five largest progressive Mennonite denominations suggest that such hesitancy had dissipated by 1972 when only 15 percent of members reported "that they never

watched television.” By 1989 a full 95 percent reported owning a television and 47 percent had a new-fangled VCR, enabling them to watch movies at home.<sup>8</sup>

Radio was another matter, for some Mennonites had embraced this affordable medium from the start. In 1940 the Mennonite Brethren (MB) began a radio program in Saskatoon that was “devotional in style” for church members unable to attend services. The program quickly spread to other cities and, under the name “Gospel Tidings,” it also signaled an aim of evangelistic outreach. In the words of British Columbia’s MB conference youth director, Herman Voth, the radio could be used “to bring the joyful news of salvation to the lost world.”<sup>9</sup>



A small radio choir, with Herman Lenzmann as radio speaker, from Yarrow, British Columbia, broadcasting over Radio Station CHWK. Church radio broadcasts became common in a number of Mennonite communities in North America during the 1940s and 50s.

Similar developments unfolded in Ontario, where Mennonite radio also began in 1940. Here a lay person from Kitchener broadcast a short-lived “musical program by the Nightingale Chorus for shut-ins.” In 1945 the Mennonite Conference of Ontario began sponsoring radio broadcasts including, after 1951, a Virginia-based program known as the “Mennonite Hour” that was aired in Mennonite communities across the continent. “Mennonite Hour” listenership in Ontario was so large by 1961 that the program opened an office in Kitchener.

By 1952 General Conference (GC) Mennonite congregations were also moving into radio, hosting four programs in western Canada. In

1955 the Manitoba branch even formed a Mennonite Radio Mission committee which began airing the "Mennonite Devotional" program on a Winnipeg station. In 1957 when the uniquely Mennonite-owned and operated radio station, CFAM, went on air in Altona, Manitoba, the Radio Mission committee, under director Frank Epp, introduced the "Abundant Life" program.<sup>10</sup>

At about the same time several German-language programs, including *Frohe Botschaft*, featured "ministers and speakers from Manitoba."<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Ens, the director of this program, eventually gave one thousand Mennonite history lectures, all in Low German, on CFAM. These programs succeeded with Mennonite audiences, but by 1969 the Radio Mission committee, renamed Faith and Life Communications, had also begun conceptualizing television ministry, specifically "television spots on family life," for non-Mennonite audiences.<sup>12</sup>

Over time, Canadian Mennonites also used choral and orchestral music to reach beyond old boundaries. Choir singing had long been popular among acculturated Mennonites. In Yarrow, British Columbia, few residents were as revered during the 1940s as the choir conductor, George Reimer, whose MB Church choir became an inspiring and "main social outlet" for its young couples.<sup>13</sup> But the second half of the century introduced Mennonite choirs and orchestras for the broader, non-Mennonite audience.

In Winnipeg Benjamin Horch's Mennonite Community Orchestra, as well as a number of community choirs, singing old, pietistic German *Kernlieder*, performed to large audiences. A biography of Horch by Peter Letkemann reveals a remarkably gifted, energetic and controversial musician, raised a Lutheran and then joining an urban Mennonite church.<sup>14</sup> In Winnipeg, too, Helen Litz's Mennonite Children's Choir first sang to a non-Mennonite public at the city's Rainbow Stage in 1957, and in the following decades in every large concert hall in Winnipeg, and by the 1970s was touring throughout North America and Europe. In 1977 the choir won first prize at the International Music Festival in The Hague, Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> Also performing regularly at the city's main stages were Bernie Neufeld's Mennonite Male Choir and Henry Engbrecht's Winnipeg Philharmonic Choir, which drew wide Mennonite participation.<sup>16</sup>

In Kitchener the Menno Singers of Ontario began in 1955 under the direction of Abner Martin. A high point in Ontario Mennonite choral history was the community's bicentennial celebrations in 1986 when an ad hoc choir performed Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*

in Toronto, a composition “especially suited to express Mennonite pacifism.”<sup>17</sup> That rendition gave birth to the Toronto-based Pax Christi Chorale which grew over the next decade from 35 to 80 singers and expanded to include “both Mennonites and singers from various faith traditions and cultures.”<sup>18</sup>

Increasingly, Mennonites also took their music to the airwaves. By the 1940s Mennonite singing was broadcast across western Canada.

**Increasingly,  
Mennonites took their  
music to the airwaves**

In British Columbia, for example, Rudolph Boschmann’s Gospel Messengers Quartet sang on Chilliwack Radio’s Wayside Chapel, an event sponsored by the local Yar-

row Freight and Fuels Company.<sup>19</sup> But by the 1970s it became common also to hear Mennonite choirs on national radio, and even television.

Winnipeg choral master, George Wiebe, explained the expanded medium: “Mennonites are leaders in the choral field in our city,” and without “lowering our musical standards we should accept these gifts humbly of God, being convinced that our prime calling is the communication of our faith.”<sup>20</sup> Such thinking undergirded the March 1974 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s (CBC) airing of Bruckener’s Mass in F Minor performed by the Mennonite Oratorio Choir under Wiebe’s conducting. The recording itself had been made when the choir, an annual amalgam since 1966 of the Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Mennonite Brethren Bible College choirs, performed at Winnipeg’s state-of-the-art Centennial Concert Hall.<sup>21</sup>

Many other Mennonite-connected musicians debuted on television during the 1970s and 1980s. Numerous Mennonites, for example, sang on the nationally-televised, sixteen-person CBC Hymn Sing in the years that program aired between 1965 and 1995.<sup>22</sup> Others sang in CBC host Howard Dyck’s Kitchener-Waterloo Philharmonic Choir in Ontario.

Perhaps the best-known national radio rendition, played frequently on CBC and BBC, and on National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States, was the 1975 “Mennonite Piano Concerto,” in which composer Victor Davies utilized a number of old, emotion-laden German hymns treasured by Dutch-Russian Mennonites. The concerto, played by Winnipeg Mennonite pianist Irmgard Baerg and the London Symphony Orchestra, was described as “thoroughly extroverted” and a work possessed of “predominantly exuberant high spirits.”<sup>23</sup>

Canadian Mennonite artists also gained publicity, especially after the artistically-inclined *Mennonite Mirror* magazine was launched in 1971. Winnipeg seemed to possess a remarkable number of nationally acclaimed Mennonite artists, with Les Brandt, Gerald Loewen and Alvin Pauls linked to new expressive forms; Aganetha Dyck, Wanda Koop and others were associated with sharp critiques of human-environmental relations, or were politically engaged in other ways.<sup>24</sup>

But large crowds of art admirers were generated by dozens of local artists in Winnipeg. During the 1970s, for example, a special attraction in the city was the Mennonite Pavilion at Winnipeg's annual summer celebration known as Folklorama, featuring "ethnic Mennonite" foods, crafts and folk songs in Low German. The single biggest draw, however, was the annual Art Festival organized by the Women's Committee of the Mennonite Educational Society, held in the city's large Polo Park shopping mall. The 1974 exhibit, funded by a Canada Council for the Arts grant, boasted 100 exhibitors and 8,000 visitors; in 1975, 5,000 visitors came despite blustery weather. They saw "hand embroideries, wood carvings, miniature furniture, glass blowing and pottery."<sup>25</sup>

The artists thought of the festival as more than a show of talent, indeed, they saw it as an engagement with hard questions of Menno-



Canadian artist Peter Etril Snyder completing a landscape scene of southern Ontario at an art festival while the organizer of the event and Prince Phillip look on. In 1978 Snyder published *Mennonite Country: Waterloo County Drawings*. Traditional Mennonite art forms often celebrated the beauty of North American landscapes or pastoral farm scenes while more contemporary forms often captured themes of conflict and dissonance.

nite identity. Esther Horch, who opened the festival in 1978, hoped it would give a basic legitimacy to art for Mennonites. "We all live in two worlds," she noted, "the one we ... experience objectively, and ... the one which is intuitive and born out of our imagination and stimulates creativity ... is often crowded out."<sup>26</sup> Art was the tool with which to express the deeper sense of being Mennonite in the modern world.

The artists also grappled with questions of destiny. In 1975, for example, artist Alvin Pauls won first prize for his ceramic mural that seemed at once to "express the simplicity, the faith, the foibles and the strength of Mennonites of the past century." The mural, he said, showed "Mennonites as a group which has exploited the promise of a new land only to discover that it does not know in what direction it is going, and as a people who have aspired to, but not gained the strength of Christian unity."<sup>27</sup>

Museums drew the attention of perhaps even more people than music did. Museums in various points in Canada drew tens of thousands of visitors and conveyed to the wider national public a particular perception of Mennonites as stalwart, agrarian icons. Manitoba Mennonites told their story at Steinbach's Mennonite Heritage Village, centered around a replicated Mennonite farm village and a Dutch



The central feature of the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba, is a replica of a Dutch windmill serving to symbolize the 19th century pioneer times of the community as well as the Dutch roots of many western Canadian Mennonites.

windmill and by the end of the century drawing some 70,000 visitors annually.

Ontario Mennonites had an especially powerful story to tell, having pioneered the forests of Upper Canada in the late 1700s. To commemorate this effort, Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundation in 1981 created the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum and Gallery, described as “a dynamic community museum” centered in a “fine Georgian frame farmhouse built by one of the area’s first pioneers, Joseph Schneider, a Pennsylvania-German Mennonite.” The 1816 house was heralded as Kitchener’s most historic dwelling and purported to reveal just how Schneider and his wife Barbara and their four children had lived after arriving in Canada in 1807. As the museum presented it, the Schneiders turned an “intimidating landscape of uncleared bush” into farm land with the help of “their Mennonite religion and assisted by their closely-knit brotherhood.”<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the stories they told were a little romanticized, but both the Ontario and Manitoba museums, and other exhibitions of material culture elsewhere, were important avenues toward the honing of historical awareness among Canadian Mennonites.

### Canadian Novelists and Filmmakers

The Mennonite artists who received the most attention from the wider nation of Canada were the novelists and poets. It seemed that few communities were without local writers who lent their imaginations and verbal skills to a favorite ancestor, a tragedy, or even a moral teaching. But especially in the latter decades of the twentieth century, writers of regional and national stature emerged to present their view on Mennonites, and did so without the blessing of either church or community. Although many Mennonites chafed at the way they were depicted in these best-selling novels and works of poetry, these writers nevertheless often became the arbiters of Mennonite identity within the nation.

The first works of fiction in Canada were friendly in nature; some were hagiographical, others comical. Mabel Dunham’s *The Trail of the Conestoga* (1926) was a widely touted first Mennonite novel in English, set in the pioneering times of Upper Canada. Its fame was secured by none other than Canada’s sitting Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, who wrote the foreword to the book and lauded the Swiss-American Mennonites for their “initiative, patience and self-sacrifice.” Dunham’s main subjects, pioneers Christian and Nancy Eby, fit the bill: they were model Mennonites, Nancy “an industrious

housewife" who "knew how to hold her tongue," and Christian a man who "walked in the ways of his fathers," with a "heart ... as large as his home" and a "reputation for piety and hospitality."<sup>29</sup>

During the 1930s, according to critic Harry Loewen, newly-arrived *Russländer* immigrant writers – Fritz Senn, Jacob H. Janzen, Gerhard Loewen and Georg de Brecht – formed a new literary corps.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the best known was Arnold Dyck who wrote in the everyday, ironic and earthy Low German dialect. His novelettes, very widely read among Mennonites especially in western Canada, featured two hapless southeastern Manitoba farmers named Koop and Bua. Together, they travelled "in ever-widening circles,"

**Mennonite fiction writing in Canada came into its own in 1962**

to Saskatchewan, Chicago and even Europe. Popular among Low German speakers for their "side-splitting" humor, these works gently poked fun at petty, crude, rural ignorance. Here, as literary

critic Al Reimer put it, were "innocents abroad on a quest for experience and knowledge; but ... the innocence is not attractive and the horror ... of the outside world seems ill-placed."<sup>31</sup> It was a kindly prodding for Mennonites to embrace a wider world.

Mennonite fiction writing in Canada came into its own in 1962 with the publication of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, by Rudy Wiebe. It was the first of a dozen novels by the MB author with roots in Coaldale, Alberta, and within a short time Wiebe became one of Canada's best-known authors. The book was heralded for combining "seriousness of purpose with energy and craftsmanship." It also marked a critical examination of Mennonite leaders who had failed to live up to Anabaptist ethical standards.<sup>32</sup>

In this story, a Second World War-era Saskatchewan Mennonite community, Wapiti, is torn apart by internal violence, real and imagined, present and past. The novel depicts a time when warplanes flew ominously overhead, shows violence among local boys, and tells of an unmarried woman's miscarriage following an affair with an Indigenous worker. But most poignantly, the temper and self-righteousness of a religious leader, Deacon Block – unforgiving, hypocritical, accusing – signaled that the "ways of the fathers are false."<sup>33</sup>

What made the novel especially controversial was that it was published by a major Canadian press, thereby putting out a story of failed Mennonite leadership for the entire nation to read. As one woman wrote to Wiebe: "We both, me and you, promised before God and



people not to talk about church happenings to the world, but take them in prayer before God. With this book you scattered it like opening a pillow with feathers and worse, hanging it on a pole."<sup>34</sup> Wiebe's later works explored uprootedness, marital infidelity, Indigenous cultures, and childhood, but arguably his first book was the most significant.



A scene from the fifth North American "Mennonite/s Writing" conference held at the University of Winnipeg in October 2010. At the center is author Rudy Wiebe.

A second generation of young, nationally-acclaimed writers from Manitoba followed Wiebe – Patrick Friesen, Di Brandt, David Bergen, Armin Wiebe, Miriam Toews and others – and were even more brazenly critical of Mennonite religious culture.

Poet Patrick Friesen criticized the practice of excommunication in his 1980 *The Shunning*, and in other works castigated what he saw as a hypocritical religious faith playing to capitalist values. "Is this what faith in the Fathers has led to, a way of life that prefers bungalows to imagination?" he asked in another poem.<sup>35</sup>

In her award-winning book of poetry, *Questions I asked my mother*, Di Brandt was said to write "with a knife pulled out of a woman's heart" and to have produced a book with "considerable poetic verve (and nerve) at the very heart of the spiritual-sexual nexus," a feminist book of "finely crafted rage."<sup>36</sup> In a later essay she subversively suggested that she "got saved," not through manipulative Mennonite churches, but rather by "getting lost" in naming an abusive, unimaginative and dishonest male power structure.<sup>37</sup> David Bergen's first novel, *A Year of Lesser*, followed this template, in which the main character, Johnny,

aged 30, battles with a mixed obsession of sexuality and spirituality, the latter taking “the form of a strong lust for conversion and redemption, the more dramatic the better,” reflecting a “quest to experience the ultimate high.”<sup>38</sup>

By the turn of the twenty-first century another set of writers used the medium of humor to portray the ironies and foibles of the Mennonite community.<sup>39</sup> Humor in Mennonite culture, of course, was

**By 2000 another set of writers used humor to portray the Mennonite community**

not new. Doreen Klassen's *Singing Mennonite* analyzed the singing of bawdy street songs in yesteryear, Jacob Janzen and Arnold Dyck's writings had employed humor in

the 1930s and 1950s, and numerous Low German singing groups and playwrights of Low German drama drew gales of laughter from packed audiences in the 1980s and 90s.<sup>40</sup>

But in 1984 Mennonite humor found a wider, national audience in Armin Wiebe's award-winning *Salvation of Yasch Siemens*. As one critic put it, in this work the “outside world is strange, but not inviting and certainly not dangerous or liberating.”<sup>41</sup> Yasch finds his salvation not so much in church, “a restful place,” but in fighting to establish respect within the community, in finding true love in overweight Ota, and in inheriting a piece of land through Ota.

In 2004 Miriam Toews' internationally acclaimed *A Complicated Kindness* told the story of a perplexed teenaged girl, Nomi, who finds faith in a Mennonite town overly moralistic and confining. Nomi casts Menno Simons as an apocalyptic killjoy and pines to leave her small Mennonite town of East Village, strongly disagreeing with townsfolk who see the outside world, the city, as “the dark side, the whale's stomach” and preach that urban life “was the worst thing that could happen to you.”<sup>42</sup> Perhaps Yasch and Nomi were exaggerated figures, but both displayed keen eyes for incongruent claims of the community, and certainly for universal themes of freedom and acceptance.

If fiction and poetry tended to be critical of the Mennonites, calling them to task for failed communities, film was used for the opposite effect. Movie attendance had, of course, been discouraged by even many acculturated North American Mennonites until such films as *The Sound of Music* and *Gandhi* suggested that movies could be both instructive and entertaining. And soon thereafter, film production became a

sanctioned and honored medium of expression. In Canada almost all were documentary in nature.

Otto Klassen's dozens of movies, usually shown in church basements or community halls, told stories of heroism and survival. Among his films was one on the so-called Great Trek during the Second World War when Mennonites fled the Soviet Union under the protection of a retreating German army. Using rare film footage gathered from archives in Germany, he told a dramatic story, one with a happy ending for those who made it to safety in Canada. But this was only one documentary among many in which Klassen heralded the historical tenacity of the Mennonite people.



Filming a scene for the 1984 docu-drama "And When They Shall Ask."

Film was also used to positive effect by more official bodies. In 1986 when Ontario Mennonites celebrated their bicentennial at Toronto's Harbour Front amusement park, their government-funded artistic expression included "storytelling, crafts, art work, music, ethnic food, and films," all "aimed at increasing public awareness of Mennonite beliefs."<sup>43</sup>

In 1998 the Prairie Public Broadcasting Service produced a documentary, *Mennonites in Manitoba*, which surveyed the success of the Mennonites in their adaptation to modern, urban society, enumerating achievements in business, education, music and philanthropy. The film suggested that the Mennonites had become a cosmopolitan and urban people, no longer resembling the rural, Low German-

speaking people of old, and now fully integrated into the Canadian marketplace and artistic world, and reaching beyond the provinces to overseas mission and development projects.

Films were also produced by the wider media, but some were more laudatory of Mennonites than others. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) produced a variety of works on Mennonites and Hutterites. *Born Hutterite* was highly critical of tightly-knit and authoritarian communal life on Hutterite colonies in Alberta and North Dakota. It suggested that Hutterite leaders failed to deal with social problems and exercised too strict a control over their youth. The film highlighted two ex-Hutterites – Mary Wipf and Sam Hofer – who had successfully negotiated their way into the world of nursing and book publishing, dealt with their searing personal problems, and concluded that leaving the colony was for their own good.

Another NFB production, *The Pacifist who Went to War*, raised the question of the right response to the call to arms in the Second World War. The film portrayed Mennonite conscientious objectors as sincere, but innocent and even petty chaps; those who volunteer for war seem happier, more generous and even heroic. In the film the divergent responses of two brothers, John and Ted Friesen, compare



Dust jacket for *The Pacifist who Went to War*, a documentary film produced by the National Film Board of Canada. The film interpreted one facet of Mennonite culture for a wider North American audience through interviews with two brothers, John and Ted Friesen, one a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War, the other a conscientious objector.

sympathetically, the first having enlisted, the other having declared himself a pacifist. But in the end, through the voices of high school students, the film questions the pacifist option. Canadian Mennonite artistic expression in film and photography extended beyond national borders. Canadian-descended Mennonites in Mexico as well as Mexican Mennonites who traveled between the two countries, were documentary subjects.

No doubt the most poignant of various national stories on these sojourners is Canadian award-winning photojournalist Larry Towell's *The Mennonites*. It traces the migration paths of impoverished Mexican Mennonites as they drove from their homes in Chihuahua, Durango and Zacatecas states to southern Ontario to find work for the summer. Towell traveled with them, documenting the exploitive labor situation in the gardens of the southernmost point in Canada, photographing children at work, teenagers drinking, parents in do-or-die situations. He followed them back to Mexico, "against all hostilities imposed by the outside world – rain, mechanical breakdowns and exhaustion," and found the pathos of human existence in simple clay brick houses on wind-swept semi-arid plains. As one of the subjects says, "Christ never changes ... so I must withstand the drought and exodus of my people."<sup>44</sup>

Mennonites also turned this story of return migration from Mexico to Canada into film. Produced by MCC Canada, *Migration North* (1995) follows a story similar to Towell's, although it was especially concerned to explain why Low-German Mennonites were abandoning their homes in Mexico after seventy-five years. The documentary concluded that church teachings against technological progress, deeply rooted social problems, a primitive education system and unchecked fertility rates had put the Mennonites into a cycle of poverty that ultimately drove many north to Canada. Here, the story suggested, they found hope in the public school system, state-supported welfare, and opportunities for work in small factories in the province's Mennonite communities.

Several other Canadian films gave the Mennonite sojourn in Mexico a significantly different spin. Otto Klassen's *75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Mennonites in Mexico, 1922-1997*, for example, spoke of the hurdles of settling in Mexico's unfamiliar mountain climate and the technological and agricultural contributions Mennonites made to their new homeland.

Finally, Canadians especially were intrigued by a Cannes Jury Award-winning film, *Stellet Licht*, produced by nationally acclaimed

Mexican film producer, Carlos Regaldo, and featuring the Canadian writer, Miriam Toews, as the jilted Mennonite woman of an adulterous husband. The fact that the internationally renowned movie was produced in Low German and shot at Los Jagueyes, the colony founded by Canadian Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in 1948, added to its intrigue. These films told stories that maintained ties between Canadian-descended Mennonites in Mexico and their Canadian cousins, and allowed the northern Mennonites to see themselves in contrast to their Mexican kin.

### **Plain and Fancy Tourism in the United States**

While Canadian Hutterites and Old Colony Mennonites were the subject of documentary and independent artistic films, the Old Order experience in the United States was most often interpreted through the lens of tourism and the news media. In the early twentieth century, Amish characters had appeared in local-color novels that, not infrequently, offered condescending or even lampooning images of the “plain people.”

The 1955 hit Broadway musical, “Plain and Fancy,” which set Amish tradition against a celebration of American self-determination, stirred interest in the Amish in the wider U.S. society. The characters were at once sturdy yeomen and also “hard-hearted” people whose barbaric practice of shunning was a futile effort at keeping the world at bay. The script allowed Papa Yoder to critique Cold War society – “Look at your world. Poor people you have plenty, and worried people and afraid” – but in the end, Yoder had to admit that modern ways were better and he hinted that sooner or later his people would have to surrender their sectarianism and join the mainstream.

“The Amish Farm and House,” the first paid-admission Amish-theme attraction, opened in Lancaster County the same year that “Plain and Fancy” debuted. By the 1950s, as middle class tourism mushroomed, “Pennsylvania Dutch Country” had become a destination for eastern urbanites. They came to gaze at old-fashioned farmers who existed not far from the sprawling post-war metropolises peopled with the children and grandchildren of European immigrants nostalgic for a peasant past and simultaneously certain that Old Orders represented a world destined to disappear. Bus and car tours to the hinterlands of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, offered quaint remind-

ers of a vanishing way of life that, tourists and academics alike, agreed would collapse in the face of progress and assimilation.

Amish tourism in the Midwest picked up in the 1960s, with bus tours to Holmes County, Ohio, and in 1970 with the opening of “Amish Acres” in Nappanee, Indiana. Each of these venues presented Amish communities as quaint relics, but as the environmental movement and the energy crisis of the 1970s grabbed headlines, Amish tourism also now began to hint that Old Order people might be the keepers of some sort of traditional wisdom in an atomic age of science and suburbia.



Beginning in the 1970s Amish quilts became popular with serious art collectors and casual tourists alike. Here, an Amish woman completes a quilt at her home in northern Indiana in 2000.

Such sentiments were apparent in a 1970s revival of interest in Amish quilts. In 1971 New York City’s Whitney Museum included Amish quilts in an exhibit and traveling show of “Abstract Design,” treating functional fabric as boldly-designed modern art. Collectors began flocking to Amish communities to buy this suddenly-appreciated art form. Within a few years, Doug Tompkins, founder of the Esprit clothing company, filled his San Francisco headquarters with Amish quilts and opened the building to Californians eager to glimpse a bit of Amish culture that seemed both Americana and avant-garde.<sup>45</sup>

Hollywood boosted the Amish profile in 1985, thanks to the Academy Award-winning film *Witness*, starring Harrison Ford. The

unlikely plot revolved around a clash of cultures that occurred when a hardened police detective hides out on an Amish farm. *Witness* presented Amish people as peaceful, but naive and totally unfamiliar with modern ways or technology

**Hollywood boosted the Amish profile in 1985**

of any sort, creating a popular image of the Amish as principled rural craftsmen in a nation then

undergoing a revolution of personal computers and telecommunication. In the twenty years that followed the release of *Witness*, the number of visitors to Lancaster, Pennsylvania and other Amish-destination sites skyrocketed.

In 1998 and again in 2006 high-profile crime stories wove together images of pastoral innocence with hard-edged drama. In 1998 when the *New York Times* broke the story of the two Amish-reared drug dealers it simultaneously introduced images that made any Amish misdemeanor a national sensation. Soon thereafter, an independent film entitled *The Devil's Playground* tracked drug use among Amish teens in northern Indiana. Stories of alleged child abuse or animal abuse at Amish hands also emerged, suggesting that the Amish had been too good to be true and, in fact, they were not very good at all.<sup>46</sup>

Then, in 2006, a non-Amish man entered an Amish school near Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania and shot ten girls, five of them fatally, before killing himself. Reporters who swarmed to the crossroads village struggled to make sense of why and how members of the Amish community expressed forgiveness toward the gunman and reached out in compassion to his family, mourning with them at his funeral, and treating his clan as fellow victims.

The incident created an image of Old Orders as unbelievably forgiving people, broadcast in hundreds of media stories. For their part, the Amish were as uncomfortable with this new status as they had been with the drug bust story. "The news reports have set a high standard for us," one confided. "We don't want to be exalted," a young father explained. "Now we're under the public eye ... We wonder: can we Amish people really be what the public expects of us now?"<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, by the early twenty-first century the image of the Amish was tied up with the expectations, fears and dreams that other Americans projected onto them. As religion scholar David Weaver-Zercher argues, tourism and media representations present the Amish in two ways, both as a "saving remnant" – a simple and pious community



living life as it once was and still could be – and as a “fallen people” – the subject of exposés and the butt of jokes that reveal the hypocritical and misguided nature of Old Order life.

These two interpretations, Weaver-Zercher contends, must go together for the Amish to remain “useful” to outsiders searching for their own meaning, reassuring modern observers that they need not feel guilty if they admire but then dismiss the Amish way.<sup>48</sup>

### **Storytelling and Mennonite Arts in the United States**

Most Mennonites in the United States drew little popular or artistic attention, at least when compared with their Amish or Old Order Mennonite cousins, and they were slow to cultivate their own artistic creativity or recognize the artistic value of even traditional folk-crafts. And “until the latter part of the twentieth century,” poet Ann Hostetler notes, “Mennonite readers had to get the news of literature, if they sought it at all, from writers who knew nothing about being Mennonite.”<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, as in Canada, an American Mennonite artistic world emerged in the mid-twentieth century and soon thrived to such an extent that its variety made generalization difficult.

Storytelling was the dominant mode, but it was storytelling that generously represented the faith community’s history and values to outsiders. Any critical message was directed at the shortcoming of worldly capitalism or militarism – prophetic challenges to the world more than to the church. Such presentation animated the heritage centers and museums that opened in the United States: Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust in Philadelphia (1953); Mennonite Heritage and Agricultural Museum in Goessel, Kansas (1974); 1719 Hans Herr House in Willow Street, Pennsylvania (1975); Menno-Hof in Shippshewana, Indiana (1988), and others.

Some Mennonite artists also understood their purpose in such terms. In 1976 John L. Ruth articulated a theory of “Mennonite Identity and Literary Art” which begged “to hear my heritage expressed by voices ... who speak from a center of conviction and commitment to that heritage.” Ruth was a Mennonite pastor who continued to wear somewhat “plain” clothes, despite holding a Ph.D. in literature from Harvard and working as a professor, writer, and filmmaker. “We need story-tellers,” Ruth argued, who understand the artist’s “calling to transfigure rather than merely debunk the scruples which make up the integrity of the soul of their tradition.” “When a Mennonite

cannot remember why his grandparents went ‘to meeting’ rather than ‘to church,’ or why there is no steeple on the meetinghouse, or why they paid fines rather than join the army ... should we be surprised that he succumbs, all too often, to the blandishments of ‘personal salvation’ on the one hand, or, on the other, salvationless humanism?”<sup>50</sup> Although other Mennonite artists would later question Ruth’s approach, he spoke for an important slice of publicly creative American Mennonites.

Two creative entrepreneurs who took up the story-telling role that Ruth articulated were Merle Good and Phyllis Pellman Good,

**Dramatic storytelling  
could celebrate con-  
ventional community**

creative writers from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who championed theater arts during the late 1960s and 1970s. Merle, the son of a conservative-leaning minister and

Phyllis, whose family had embraced higher education and middle-class town life, married in 1969, just after Merle had begun producing original drama on Mennonite themes, aimed at tourists visiting Lancaster County.

At the time, theater was a questionable endeavor in the minds of many local Mennonites who regarded stage acting as either frivolous or inherently deceptive, but Good received the financial and moral backing of Orië O. Miller, longtime Mennonite Central Committee executive director. The Goods continued theatrical productions during summers, spending the academic year in New York City, where they both earned graduate degrees and Merle represented Mennonites on the Department of Radio and Television of the Council of Churches of New York, while taking in the city’s cutting-edge art scene.

From one angle, the Goods seemed to be challenging Mennonite boundaries through theater. Yet their message was one that celebrated conventional community, as in the musical drama, “These People Mine,” which Good wrote and produced for Mennonite World Conference in Curitiba, Brazil, in 1972, and later took on tour across North America.

The emphasis was also unmistakable in Good’s 1971 novel *Happy as the Grass Was Green*. The story’s plot revolves around a “hippy” named Eric, who traveled to a rural Mennonite community to attend the funeral of Big Jim, a Mennonite-reared young man who had become Eric’s comrade-in-arms in New York’s anti-war protests, and

who had been killed by the police. During Eric's sojourn on Big Jim's family farm, he at first is put-off, but then increasingly attracted to the close-knit community with its profound simplicity and peace. Along the way, Good acknowledged flaws and hypocrisies in Mennonite life, but the thrust of the book is a critique of sophisticated metropolitanism, especially clear at the end of the story when Eric returns to the city, only to find himself "caught between a day that's going and a day that's coming. Caught. And alone and afraid."<sup>51</sup>

What made Good's novel different from that of other Mennonite writing from the same time was its conversion into a feature film. In 1973 a California studio produced *Hazel's People*, an adaptation of the book starring Broadway actress Geraldine Page as Anna Witmer, Big Jim's mother. The movie opened in Lancaster where it attracted 20,000 Mennonite and non-Mennonite viewers. From there, the movie played in theaters in Mennonite-populated small towns – anecdotal accounts reported it was the first feature film some older Mennonites had ever seen – and in secular California film festivals and cities such as Houston and Atlanta, receiving positive reviews from critics such as Rex Reed and the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>52</sup>

In 1974 the Goods launched *Festival Quarterly* (FQ), with Phyllis as editor, a magazine devoted to Mennonite art and culture. The magazine was a modest one by any measure, and yet it evoked a remarkable response from Mennonites across the continent who said they had been waiting all their lives for "a forum on the arts that deals with Mennonites who are trying to express themselves in a world that has little understanding [of them]." Dozens of breathless letters to the editor – "FQ is one of the most exciting things I've ever seen!" – gave voice to this grassroots yearning. From Mountain Lake, Minnesota: "To our knowledge this is the *only* publication which draws together such interests [and emphasis on the arts]." And from Kansas: "Fantastic! I learned about the arts in my area [and] mimeographed the movie reviews for my congregation."<sup>53</sup> The reference to film reviews pointed to another feature that generated a warm response. *Festival Quarterly* reviewed Hollywood movies, *New York Times* bestsellers, and even gave passing attention to primetime television programming – all with the assumption that Mennonites were interested in such media and that it could be critically appraised.

In the early years the magazine seemed to give special attention to visual arts. Articles profiled a variety of potters, including Paul

Friesen from Newton, Kansas, Darvin Luginbuhl, from Bluffton, Ohio, Marvin Bartel, from Goshen, Indiana and Margaret Hudson, from Fresno, California.<sup>54</sup> Some artists featured on its pages, such as painters Waldemar Neufeld and Oliver W. Schenk, no longer worshiped in Mennonite congregations, but were included under the generous definition of “Mennonite peoples” that *FQ* employed.



An early issue of the arts magazine *Festival Quarterly*.

In the Spring 1975 issue, the editor asked a conductor, a poet, a glassblower, a composer, a cook, a filmmaker, and an author: “When do you experience your most creative moment? Can you describe how you feel in that moment of creation?” Some months later, pastor John Rudy mused, “Should Our Artists Be Ordained?” Mennonites have been “too practical,” he told the *FQ* audience, and “I have this haunting conviction: We may be overlooking some of God’s gifts” of creativity.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, Mennonites artists, such as Bob Regier, an art professor at Bethel College, critiqued his tradition’s impoverished aesthetic. Although he applauded the “resurgence of the arts, including visual arts,” that “is

sending positive vibrations across the Mennonite landscape,” he feared the larger Mennonite community would respond by “repeat[ing] the fraktur-quilt syndrome, a syndrome of the didactic and functional” that demands to know “What does it say? What is it for?” Regier called for coming to terms with abstraction that “transcends labeling” and “takes us beyond our mental storehouse of experiences.” A new interest in art, he hoped, would show that finally “we are becoming people of the sensitive eye, as well as people of the Word and words.”<sup>56</sup>

When *Festival Quarterly* asked readers whether “our Anabaptist forefathers [would] be grieved or pleased by the current burst of art among Mennonite peoples today,” musician Carol Ann Weaver, of Harrisonburg, Virginia, asserted that “to compromise our art into watered-down, popular art is to compromise our Anabaptist theology . . . Our music or painting may not please, our drama may disturb, but truth is rarely cozy.”<sup>57</sup> For her part, sculptor Esther Kniss Augsburg, who had fashioned a wide variety of pieces for churches and private individuals and would go on to create large works on public commission, took up the question: “Why Nudity in Art?” “If the nude form is necessary to make meaning visible,” she argued, “then it would be a mistake not to use it.”<sup>58</sup>

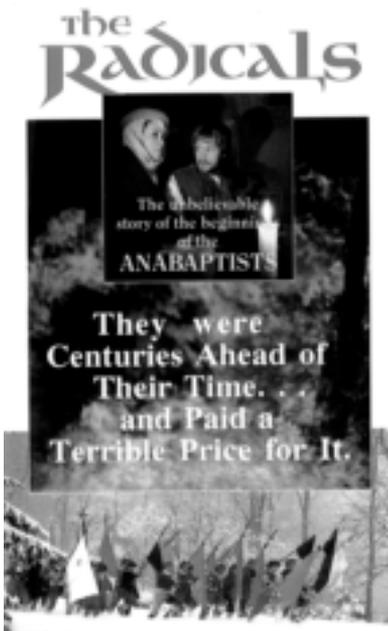


Ezra Hershberger (1904-2000) was among the first North American Mennonites to make a career as an artist. He studied painting at the Art Institute of Chicago and at several other schools. A native of Milford, Nebraska, Hershberger also taught in India and was an art professor in Kansas and Indiana for twenty-five years.

By the mid-1970s it was clear that a world of artistic interest, latent in U.S. Mennonite communities, was emerging as a vigorous and

self-conscious movement. In 1975 and again in 1980, the Goshen College Art Department sponsored major exhibitions, with attractive catalogues of “Mennonite Artists, Contemporary.” These were, in the words of painter Abner Hershberger (who was also a nephew of Mennonite artist Ezra Hershberger), “the first of [their] kind,” and brought together several dozen pieces of two- and three-dimensional work by “past or present members of the Mennonite church who are serious about being artists.” The 1978 Mennonite World Conference in Wichita, Kansas, gave special attention to visual art displays and musical performances.<sup>59</sup>

The story-telling, community-building stream of Mennonite artistry remained alive and well. In 1989 historian James C. Juhnke wrote *Dirk's Exodus*, a drama imagining conversations with Anabaptist martyr Dirk Willems. The next year the most impressive Mennonite-produced feature film, *The Radicals*, hit theaters. A dramatization of



Poster advertising the film *The Radicals*, released in 1990. Leigh Lombardi and Norbert Weisser played Margareta and Michael Sattler.

Swiss Anabaptist origins built around the lives of Michael and Margareta Sattler, it was widely viewed in North America and also internationally. The film portrayed Anabaptist conflict with Swiss reformer

Ulrich Zwingli, the plight of Swiss peasants, and the drafting of the Schleitheim Confession by early Anabaptists. "To a world of fear, Anabaptists introduced freedom ... a crime punished by death," and the film's climax was an emotional and graphic execution scene.<sup>60</sup> Historian Walter Klaassen praised *The Radicals* as "to date, the best Mennonite effort at film-making, and a very good beginning."<sup>61</sup>

*The Radicals* was produced by Sisters and Brothers, a group of young Mennonite filmmakers, including executive producer D. Michael Hostetler and writer Joel Kauffmann. In the early 1980s Kauffmann had helped create a film version of his book *The Weight*, which explored the choices of a fictional Illinois Mennonite facing the draft in the closing days of the Vietnam War. But *The Radicals* was a vastly bigger and more professional project, filmed on location in France, Switzerland, and Germany, and involving a cast of more than a thousand, including professional actors Norbert Weisser and Mark Lenard. *The Radicals* opened on May 5, 1990 and soon had commercial showings in thirty towns and cities, in addition to scores of private screenings in Mennonite churches and schools. It quickly became a staple in many Mennonite catechism classes and at youth events. Twenty years on, it had sold some 30,000 DVD copies.<sup>62</sup>

### **Mennonite Poets and Mennos on the Margins**

Yet even as Mennonite artists and writers increasingly found public space and voice, a growing number became uneasy with the storytelling paradigm articulated by John Ruth, and exemplified in *Hazel's People* and *The Radicals*. Artists in the United States increasingly understood themselves not simply as creators whose gifts should support the church's traditional tasks of preaching and evangelism, but as prophets whose purpose was to critique the church and explode its tradition's boundaries. By the early 1990s poet Jeff Gundy, a professor at Bluffton University, reported that he no longer sent poems to *Festival Quarterly* because "my poems tend to be too quirky, jittery, and lacking in the essential Mennonite markers: no coverings, quilts, or zwieback."<sup>63</sup> Some writers took up the task of community criticism through the plots of their novels, such as *The Collaborators* (1986) by Janet Kauffman, while at other times the critique came through irreverent wit, as in the memoir *Mennonite in a Little Black Dress* (2009), by Rhoda Janzen.

But it was in poetry that American Mennonite literature saw "its primary achievements."<sup>64</sup> Anna Ruth Ediger Baehr, raised on a Chey-

enne reservation in Oklahoma where her parents were GC Mennonite missionaries during the 1910s-30s, began writing poetry after her retirement from school teaching in suburban New York City. Her poem, "I am Dancing with my Mennonite Father," won the *American Scholar's* poetry prize in 1985, making it "the first poem by a Mennonite writer on an overtly Mennonite topic to receive a major literary award."<sup>65</sup> In 1992 Julia Kasdorf, two generations younger than Baehr, published a collection of poetry entitled *Sleeping Preacher*, which drew on themes from her family's Amish heritage. The book won the Agnes Lynch Starrett prize, and four of her poems were published in *The New Yorker*, "a landmark for the recognition of Mennonite literature by a wider reading public."<sup>66</sup>

Jean Janzen, based in California, also began publishing poems during the 1980s and 1990s, many of which alluded to her MB heritage, including the shame and silence of those who lived on the community's margins. In 2005, when poet and scholar Ann Hostetler edited *A Cappella*, an anthology of North American Mennonite poetry, she noted the growing list of award-winning U.S. authors, including Juanita Brunk, Jeff Gundy, Keith Ratzlaff, and Betsy Sholl. In 2006 Sholl was named the state of Maine's poet laureate, and other poets continued to garner awards, including G. C. Waldrep, a creative writing teacher at Bucknell University who had converted to the Old Order River Brethren church, and whose book *Goldbeater's Skin* won the Colorado Prize.

Alongside such poems was a growing body of critical reflection on the function of the Mennonite literary voice. In "Writing Like a Mennonite," Kasdorf urged writers to bear witness to grief and pain that had too often silenced the vulnerable. "Rather than stir up trouble, draw unnecessary attention to themselves, or risk ostracism, individuals – especially if they were women – have often chosen to keep their most troubling thoughts to themselves," she wrote. In the face of Anabaptist martyr stories that encourage Mennonite victims to accept suffering without murmuring, today's Mennonite writers must present compelling counter-narratives.<sup>67</sup> Gundy, Janzen, and others also used their pens to give voice to those suffering from depression or from the abuse of authoritarian constraints of various kinds, along the way reveling in contradictions and questioning the grand narratives of Mennonite life and thought.

But if poets questioned traditional community constraints they also fostered new Mennonite communities. Kasdorf and Gundy were instrumental in cultivating a network of Mennonite-connected poets.



Dallas Wiebe, the Kansas-born, long-time editor of the *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, had quietly nurtured ties among Mennonite writers until his death, and beginning in 1995 the Cincinnati (Ohio) Mennonite Church hosted a biennial Mennonite arts weekend, inviting performers and producers of all stripes to gather for a celebration of creativity. A series of academic conferences on “Mennonite/s Writing,” first convened in 1997, attracted a noticeable number of new faces into an audience of old hands. Then, in 2009 Goshen College English faculty launched an online Center for Mennonite Writing, an interactive, international community of Mennonite writers and scholars active in all genres.

At the turn of the century the internet was creating space for other gatherings, including connections among Mennonites on the margins of conventional congregational or ethnic community life. In 1992 Sheri Hostetler, a poet and later also a pastor at a decidedly progressive Mennonite congregation in San Francisco, launched *Mennot: A Zine for Menos on the Margins*, which featured cultural critique, satire, and poetry. It initially appeared in print form, but soon moved to the web. During the mid-1990s “Virtualmentos” who were “irreverent in tone, passionate in language, liberal in political and theological outlook” found one another on a listserv dubbed MennoLink.

Later, MennoNeighbors became an online gathering spot for progressive discussions of “justice and peace ... biblical authority and interpretation, women in leadership, and the welcome of persons regardless of differences in gender, culture, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation or other characteristics.”<sup>68</sup> Of course, in the twenty-first century the possibilities for connection and cohesion on the web were boundless, and cyberspace provided a means of networking for theologically conservative Mennonites, Beachy Amish, and others as well. The communication revolution was far from settled.

## Conclusion

One of the fundamental changes that occurred among North American Mennonites during the twentieth century was that they came to be more fully noticed by the wider world. Certainly in earlier centuries they had drawn attention for their farming skills, their missionary activity, and their refusal to bear arms, but now the attention came with new means of communication. Electronic media – radio, television, sound recordings and film, as well as fiction – carried new messages to the outside world of who the Mennonites were. Often

Mennonites themselves appropriated new tools of communication, once condemned as “worldly,” and crafted a message of peace and hope for their own people, and also for national audiences. Sometimes journalists and the fashioners of tourism and entertainment visited Mennonite, Amish and Hutterite communities to mediate stories as outsiders saw them, responding to and creating a public desire to commodify and consume distinctive expressions of Anabaptist faith.



Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI High School) students painting a mural in 1995 on the Disraeli Freeway Underpass near their school in Winnipeg. Urban living in North America often led Mennonites to embrace a wider world of diverse populations and to express themselves in new art forms.

Meanwhile, Mennonite literary voices gained a broad hearing, and artists debated whether their task centered more on supporting community norms or exposing their faults. Often artists and writers who found themselves at odds with aspects of their Mennonite upbringing told stories that were sharply critical of Mennonite shortcomings. Whatever the medium or the source, and regardless of whether the portrayal was positive or negative, the fact was that by 2000 in North America, Mennonites became known through these media of communication. And the way they became known was also sometimes the way they began seeing themselves. At the very least it showed many Mennonites the work they needed to do to make their witness as a people of peace, love and service a credible one.

## Discovering a Global Community

*In 1978 Mattie Cooper, a member at Philadelphia's inner-city Diamond Street Mennonite Church, hosted a young woman from Kenya for a weekend. The Kenyan was a member of a musical group en route to the Mennonite World Conference in Wichita, Kansas. The two women became friends at once. Mattie, a direct descendent of African-American slaves, had always been fascinated by Africa. She was deeply moved to hear that the young Kenyan's mother had recently died in childbirth and saddened to learn that many rural Kenyans suffered from lack of good health care. As a Licensed Practical Nurse, Mattie resolved to help. "I don't have money to change the situation," she thought, but "I do have a skill that I could give. I could go." She upgraded her credentials to the Registered Nurse level, and then, as a single woman aged 42, she headed to Africa under Mennonite Central Committee to work in a hospital in Djibo, Burkina Faso. Here, in serving others, she found new meaning in life, and also a local man, Ed Nikiema, whom she married in 1982. A year later she returned to inner-city Philadelphia with her new husband and "reconnected quickly" to a neighborhood of historic buildings and vibrant people. Soon she was "back in her comfortable lay leadership roles," teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir and even thinking that one day she might preach. While deeply committed to a particular place, seeing herself as a person who "forms ties and puts down roots," she had been transformed in Africa into a globally-conscious person. But, significantly, she found Africa only when Africa came to America. The idea that she "could just pack up and go as a tourist" to Africa [had] never occurred to her," but to go as an "MCC worker" in response to a personal encounter seemed right. She had acquired a transnational life.<sup>1</sup>*

*A different transnational world imposed itself on Jake Bolt, the retired owner of a successful Abbotsford, British Columbia, construction firm, when he visited Haiti in 1991. He had answered a request from an evangelical con-*

gregation in the town of St. Michele, north of Port-aux-Prince, to build and gift them with a church building. His drive to help was shaped by his own history. His parents had fled Communist-run Soviet Union, found refuge in the Paraguayan Chaco at Fernheim Colony and then migrated to Canada in 1953. Here young Jake was able to purchase a fellow Mennonite church member's business. Jake never forgot his roots in Russia and Paraguay. In 1969 he even took his elderly father to his birth place, near Donetsk in Communist Siberia, and visited Low German relatives and a secret Mennonite baptism service. But Jake and his wife Erna's first interest was missions and social service in places new to them – Sudan, Zaire, Germany, Greece, Japan and then, in 1991, Haiti. Jake's 1991 scouting trip to St. Michele left him with mixed feelings. He felt called by the lively children who thronged around him, but feared the gun shots he heard at night. His fears faded, however, upon returning to Canada where Erna recounted a dream she had had. Deeply worried for Jake's safety she had vividly seen an image of him "surrounded by the children of St. Michele," begging him to come to Haiti. She suddenly knew "that this was from the Lord" and that Jake would be safe no matter what. Jake took Erna's vision as his "leading" and at once began planning a return to Haiti to construct the new church at St. Michele.<sup>2</sup>

### Finding a Global Village

The idea that they lived in a global village took a powerful hold of North American Mennonites in the last decades of the twentieth century. Their keen international interest was readily apparent. A single issue of *Mennonite Weekly Review*, March 12, 1970, for example, carried no fewer than six front-page stories featuring Mennonites in a transnational world. Two reported on American Mennonites collaborating with overseas partners. One story from Salunga, Pennsylvania, told of an International Youth Team – consisting of an Asian, African, Latin American, Puerto Rican New Yorker, black Floridian, and one white "Pennsylvania Dutch" person – visiting youth groups in Lancaster County. A second reported that the Kansas-Paraguay Partnership Program was sending three U.S. mental health practitioners – administrator Elmer Ediger, Dr. Vernon Neufeld, and Dr. Augusto Esquibel – to "survey mental health needs in Paraguay."

Other stories related to India, Paraguay and the United Kingdom. One reported on the creation of an inter-denominational Mennonite Literature and Radio Council in India. Another told of the Pennsyl-

vania Oil Company's drilling near the Fernheim Mennonite Colony in Paraguay. Yet another announced that Steinbach, Manitoba had just been selected to host Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip on an upcoming summer tour. A final international story, of concern to many Mennonites, was the historic signing of the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty. And inside the same issue were stories from places as diverse as Indonesia, Jordan, Vietnam, Congo, Tanzania and Switzerland.<sup>3</sup>



Phan Thi Phuong-Hang from Vietnam, a participant in Mennonite Central Committee's International Visitor Exchange Program, working at the day care center sponsored by Grace Mennonite Church, Lansdale, Pennsylvania, in 1975. Between 1950 and 2010 nearly 3,500 young people from around the world participated in IVEP, each spending a year with North American Mennonite or Brethren in Christ host families. The IVEP program introduced thousands of North American hosts to new cultures, perspectives, and expressions of Christian faith.

The North American Mennonite interest in overseas matters, of course, was not new. As chapter seven notes, by the middle of the twentieth century half a dozen different Mennonite denominations had built strong foreign mission organizations, and more recently such organizations as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) had taken off, moving "development to a different drummer."<sup>4</sup> Still, the scope of transnational activities mushroomed in the last decades of the twenti-

eth century. Not only did the organizations grow in size, they affected more ordinary North American Mennonites in more visceral ways.

The global Mennonite village was no longer the domain only of the missionary and service worker, but also of the tourist, the entrepreneur, and the young person. Most importantly it created a stirring transnational identity, indelibly linking a local and national culture with a global one. Many became aware that in their relationships within the global community, North American Mennonites had once seen their non-western counterparts as part of the “exotic other” and so they now strove for feelings of kinship, a oneness with fellow sojourners of faith. Increasingly, a North American Mennonite identity was shaped by these global interactions: to be a ‘Mennonite’ in North America meant being part of a global community.

### **The Canada-Mexico-United States Border**

The first line of transnational activity for North American Mennonites was travel across their own borders, the Canada-United States border, but also the United States-Mexico border. From a global perspective Canada and the United States may have shared the northern third of the American hemisphere, but both were closely linked to the immediate neighbor to the south, Mexico. Indeed, the three countries were tied together geographically and also economically in treaties such as the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The Canada-United States border was unique by world standards in that it separated two countries that were quite similar; both were advanced capitalistic, predominantly English-speaking countries, possessing similar cultures and partaking of similar media – TV, movies, magazines. Both had significant historic cultural ties to Britain, both had been the closest of military allies since the 1920s, and each was the other’s most important trading partner.

But within the continent, national borders made a difference: Mennonites identified themselves as American or Canadian before doing so as North American. National identity within the general populace of the United States was especially pronounced, oftentimes taking on the symbols of “civic religion,” patriotically cherishing the American Revolution, celebrating the fact that the United States had been the world’s first republic, waving the U.S. national flag and claiming divine favor.<sup>5</sup> The identity was shaped, too, by seemingly unchecked U.S. economic, cultural and military might, but also by an inherent

contradiction: for all the talk of a “melting pot” society, culture in the United States was both enriched and troubled by distinctive African-American and Latino minorities.

Canada’s national identity was based on a narrative of gradual, step-by-step, independence from Britain amid the waning prestige of the British Empire. But it was also shaped culturally by its massive and stark northern geography, the world’s second largest country in terms of total land mass, a fact Canadians celebrated poetically as a “true north.” Culturally, the presence of a large, French Canadian population in Quebec, was of equal importance. During the last third of the twentieth century particular national policies – socialized medicine, multiculturalism and peacekeeping – attained significant symbolic value in shaping a reinvigorated Canadian nationalism.

For both American and Canadian Mennonite communities, Mexico held special importance. Thousands of Latino Mexicans who lived in the United States found their way into Mennonite churches. Tens of thousands of Low German-speaking Mennonites in Mexico were related closely to Canadian Mennonites, and many lived as transnational residents in both countries, typically in Canada during the summer months, in Mexico during the winter months.

**For both American and Canadian Mennonites Mexico held special importance**

Mennonites had long noted national differences between Canada and the United States, but the question almost always had been whether a nonresistant people should care about national distinctives or take pride in them. In a 1971 sermon, American Mennonite historian Guy F. Hershberger agreed that “there is a sense in which Christians may be American citizens, or British or Canadian citizens [or] citizens of Mexico.”<sup>6</sup> But ultimately, declared Hershberger, as Mennonites “our citizenship is in heaven,” the first loyalty is to a particular “way.” It was “the way of the Suffering Servant, the way of love and nonresistance ... with the state, and even our enemies.”<sup>7</sup>

Mennonite writers from many different quarters seemed to agree. From the small Canadian group, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, came the book *The Christian, the State and the New Testament*, by pastor Archie Penner. Originating as a Bachelor of Divinity thesis at Wheaton College, the book was published in 1959, and argued strongly that Anabaptists must separate themselves from government and avoid the

electoral process.<sup>8</sup> Other books by Mennonites became prominent features of a continent-wide Mennonite discourse. One of the most widely discussed was Donald Kraybill's *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (1978) with its "thesis that the kingdom of God is an inverted or upside-down way of life in contrast to the usual or prevailing social order." Instead of the conventional symbols of North American political power – "V.I.P. suites," "armored limousines," and "international applause" – Jesus offered "a manger, stable, desert, donkey, thorns, basin, cross, and tomb."<sup>9</sup>

These emerging ideas on citizenship were exhibited within the North American community in multiple ways. In 1974, for example, the centennial of the Mennonite migration from the Russian Empire to the U.S. plains and Canadian prairies emphasized the willingness of Mennonites to move around the globe in search of freedom of conscience and without a strong identification with a particular national homeland.<sup>10</sup>

For years Mennonites had described themselves with the biblical language of strangers and pilgrims whose true citizenship was not in this world. That language subtly began to change, suggesting that, as part of a transnational Christian community, they were citizens of the *whole* world whose Christian allegiance was not tied to a single nation-state. The message was concisely presented in a 1984 MCC poster, widely displayed in Mennonite homes and churches, which



This poster, widely displayed in Mennonite homes and churches during the 1980s, was inspired by a quotation from Church of the Brethren leader M. R. Ziegler. The poster was designed by MCC staff members Jim King and John K. Stoner.



featured a photograph of two people embracing, and the words “A modest proposal for peace: Let the Christians of the world agree that they will not kill each other.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite the utterances that Anabaptism and cultural citizenship were at odds, it seemed to matter a great deal to Mennonites in just which of the two countries one was born.<sup>12</sup> In fact, over time, the Mennonite reticence to vote waned, and by the end of the twentieth century, a general pattern of voting seemed to have been established. Mennonites from professional classes in the United States tended to lean toward the Democratic Party, and in Canada toward the Liberal Party or the New Democratic Party (NDP), parties that promised to use state power to address social problems. Business, farm and working class Mennonites in the United States tended to support the Republican Party, and in Canada the Conservative Party.<sup>13</sup> These parties seemed to side with the well-to-do, but the non-intrusive ideologies of both corresponded best with the abiding “two-kingdom” theology of many ordinary North American Mennonites.

Border crossings within the North American continent were thus made self-consciously. One group of North American Mennonites who crossed such a border, but maintained a very strong sense of roots with the old homeland, were those Hispanic Mennonites in the United States who had arrived from Latin American countries. Some came as refugees from bloody civil

**Hispanic immigrants wanted to hold on to their defining cultural traditions**

wars in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua.<sup>14</sup> Most, however, came from Mexico, fleeing economic instability; in fact, according to one 2006 study of Mennonite Church USA almost 40 percent of all Hispanic Mennonites in that denomination had been born in Mexico.<sup>15</sup> In any case, writes Mennonite historian Gilberto Flores, “the most recent immigrants who came to the United States as adults ... want[ed] to hold onto their defining cultural characteristics.”

This was also true for second generation Hispanics from the south who “established themselves in urban areas, bringing along their cultural and social systems ... speaking the Spanish language as a means of maintaining identity and resisting the dominant culture.” Moreover, those Hispanics whose ancestors had lived in Texas and California well before these Mexican territories were conquered by the United States in the 1840s also identified with Latino cultures.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, Hispanic Mennonite churches grew rapidly, from 52 Mennonite Church (MC) and General Conference Mennonite congregations in 1984 to 153 in 2001<sup>16</sup> and reflecting an “evangelistic encounter between Mennonites and Latinos/as,” they also grew in the Mennonite Brethren (MB) denomination. With a strong cultural self-awareness the Latino Mennonites cherished their story and sought a history “told by one of their own.” During the 1980s works by Rafael Falcón, *La Iglesia Menonita Hispana en Norte América: 1932-1982*, and José Ortíz, *Reflections of an Hispanic Mennonite*, provided just that.<sup>17</sup>

Low German-speaking Mexican Mennonites also crossed the Mexico-U.S. border with regularity. Many did so for business purposes. During the 1990s, for example, a firm owned by Peter Rempel shipped apples, and one owned by Richard Reimer, shipped textiles from Mexico’s Manitoba Colony and Los Jagueyes Colony into the United States. Many others created trucking and import firms to import farm machinery and other wares from the United States to Mexico.

Even more Mennonites crossed both the United States and Canadian border to “return” north to the land their parents and grandparents had left in the 1920s and 1940s. Most often they moved north to find work, in fields and factories. By 2000 some 60,000 Mennonites with roots in Mexico lived in Canada, mostly in southern Ontario, but also in such places as Winkler (Manitoba), Taber (Alberta) and Northfield (Nova Scotia), and in south central states in Seminole (Texas), Liberal (Kansas) and Boley (Oklahoma).<sup>18</sup> At each of these places they built churches, usually in the Old Colony Mennonite tradition, but also Sommerfelder and Kleine Gemeinde congregations, and then, too, more progressive bodies, in particular the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC).<sup>19</sup> In many communities they also established English-language private schools, often using Virginia-based Christian Light Publications education curriculum.

Many of the immigrants came after 1975 when the Canadian federal government responded favorably to MCC Ottawa representative William Janzen’s request that Canadian descendants in Mexico be recognized as Canadian citizens. Many, however, came north as sojourners, earning a summer income in the north, returning to familiar villages in their beloved Mexico for the winters.<sup>20</sup> Even when fully settled in Canada, many kept their ties to Mexico alive through newspapers, especially via the Canadian-based, MCC-funded *Mennonitische Post*,



An Old Colony Mennonite family from Mexico working in a vegetable field in southern Ontario. During the second half of the 20th century tens of thousands of Low German-speaking Old Colonists made Ontario their permanent or seasonal home, “returning” north to the land their grandparents left in the 1920s. The black overalls of the father and boys, and the dark dresses of the women are typical Old Colony dress.

which had a circulation of 6,000 by 1980. The *Post* created a diasporic community, a discursive space in which Low German Mennonites in Canada and Mexico could “interact intimately and spontaneously” with Old Colony and other Low German-speaking Mennonites in places such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Belize and Argentina.<sup>21</sup>

Ironically, as border crossings between Mexico and its northern neighbors increased, crossings between the United States and Canada seemed to decrease. True, the border had always kept American and Canadian Mennonites apart. It had separated conservative Manitoba-bound and progressive Kansas-bound Mennonites, both from Russia, in the 1870s. Then, too, it came to separate United States MBs who arrived from Russia in the 1870s from Canadian MBs who tended to arrive in the 1920s. It created distinct communities for the predominantly Dutch-Russian GCs in Canada from a more Swiss-American-oriented church in the United States. Indeed as early as 1903 the Conference of Mennonites in Canada was formed, linking GC and Bergthaler churches, and in 1954 the MBs created distinct United States and Canadian area conferences within their continental general conference.<sup>22</sup>

Yet the importance of the Canada-United States border seemed to grow over time as Mennonite identities became intertwined with those of their respective nation states; older institutions that had once been bi-national in scope either disappeared or became separated. Among such institutions were educational facilities that had encouraged not only border crossings but numerous instances of cross-border courtship and bi-national marriages. The 1969 closing of Ontario Mennonite Bible School, for example, ended a stream of Mennonite young adults who had once come up north from the American Midwest, while the opening of Conrad Grebel College during the same decade put a damper on the tradition of Canadians heading to Goshen College in Indiana.

Other institutional developments made for more distinctive national Mennonite expressions. In 1963, for example, MCC Canada was established, distinct from MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania. The impetus came, in part, from the wish for a “unified voice for Canadian Mennonites when they spoke to governments ... about their peace position.”<sup>23</sup> Then in 1966, on the cusp of Canada’s centennial, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada organized to help create a unified historical voice for Canadians. Soon its central task became the writing of the multi-volume *Mennonites in Canada* history series. It was an act that paralleled the later *Mennonite Experience in America* history book series, and one that created a very specific nation-centered perspective. Richard McMaster, the author of the first American volume, said it most clearly: the series would tell “one interwoven story, a story intricately bonded with national history.”<sup>24</sup>

Finally, in the late 1990s, the two largest church bodies – the Mennonite Church (MC) and the General Conference (GC) Mennonite Church – redefined their historic cross-border ties. The decision,

**Within the MC/GC merger lay a new national division between Canadian and US churches**

in a joint convention in Saint Louis in 1999, to amalgamate the two large historic bodies may have erased some differences – persisting cultural Swiss-American and Dutch-Russian traits, eastern and western foci, conference and congregational polities – but

within the very terms of the new union lay a new division, one along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>25</sup> The result of the merger was the creation of two new bodies: Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. At the same time, in 2002, the North American Conference of Men-



Groundbreaking for the MCC Ontario building in 1964, a time when MCC dramatically expanded its programs in Canada. L-R: Charles Kraemer, unidentified person, Elven Shantz, unidentified person, J. B. Martin, Harvey Taves, unidentified person, Bishop E. J. Swalm (with shovel), Naomi Martin, Leona Schmitt, Alice Snyder, unidentified person, Gladys Grove.

nonite Brethren Churches dissolved, leaving only separate Canadian and U.S. MB conferences.

Ironically, the increasingly separate American and Canadian bodies reflected the rising cosmopolitan, urbanized and transnational nature of Mennonites in both countries. As many Mennonites embraced mainstream cultures – state schools, public welfare, and national media – it seemed natural that they also identified more strongly with their respective nation-states. But those same activities also exposed them to global cultures, international events, and a worldwide Mennonite community. Strangely enough, nation-centeredness and transnationalism seemed to arise hand-in-hand.

The opening of Mennonite advocacy offices in Washington and Ottawa, in 1968 and 1975 respectively, was an especially powerful example of this ironic coupling. Mennonites had, of course, always addressed their governments, mostly on issues of war-time conscientious objection and immigration. But between 1970 and 2000 both American and Canadian Mennonites developed programs of sustained advocacy for the rights of minorities, and most significantly, for peace and disarmament in the world. As Mennonites left the farms for the cities and attained higher levels of education, they also increasingly asked about the relevance of their faith in the wider, global world.

The first MCC director in Washington, Delton Franz, a “soft spoken” Kansan who became politically engaged during seminary and subsequently by a pastorate in Chicago’s racially-divided south side, saw his task as seeking to “sensitize the powerful to the impact of their actions on the world’s powerless.”<sup>26</sup>

Coincidentally, as post-Second World War global outreach programs such as MCC grew, Mennonites’ knowledge of the wider world increased. As historian Paul Toews explained, during the 1970s MCC service workers were “coming and going to every corner of the earth” and could “talk knowledgeably about virtually every global issue.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, MCC’s headquarters in Akron was a hub of world information, as each day “telexes relay[ed] urgent messages to and from Nicaragua, Vietnam, Lesotho, India and many other places.”<sup>28</sup> As Keith Graber Miller noted, “the stories, whether told by service workers or MCC staff persons [in other countries], have implications for American policy.”<sup>29</sup>

A somewhat different dynamic directed Canadian Mennonites when they opened an office in their capital, Ottawa. Mennonites in Canada seemed more comfortable in government and working with government than their American counterparts. In Canada, an increasing number of Mennonites sat in the federal parliament and provincial legislatures, with Jake Epp, a high ranking federal cabinet minister between 1984 and 1993, and a one-time member of the MB church in Steinbach, Manitoba, the most prominent.<sup>30</sup> And, as ethicist Keith Graber Miller has suggested, not only did “Canadian Anabaptists view the state more positively” than their American counterparts, they readily entered “into joint ventures with state authorities, including everything from foreign aid to publication to victim-offender programs.”<sup>31</sup>

Still, as historian T. D. Regehr has demonstrated, Canadians also found themselves drawn into advocacy roles that could lead to confrontation with government. An historic meeting in 1970 between an MCC Canada delegation and Canada’s Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, was symptomatic of a new era. Instead of offering thanks for the government’s recognition of their own peace stance, as in the past, the Mennonite leaders asked for a national open door policy to refugees, for the establishment of “peace chairs” at public Canadian universities and, most brazenly, for official recognition of Communist China.<sup>32</sup>

Over the years the Ottawa MCC office worked closely with government to change policy, especially in the areas of immigration, refugee and food aid policy. Across Canada, Mennonite-shaped immigration



Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau meets with MCC Canada executive secretary J. M. Klassen (1929-2010) in 1970.

policy enabled thousands of Asian newcomers to find new homes in Mennonite and other communities, associations that led to the founding of several Chinese and Vietnamese Mennonite churches.

### **Grassroots Transnationalism**

During the last third of the twentieth century, globalization began affecting large numbers of “ordinary” Mennonites – students and elderly volunteers, conservative and Old Order groups, farmers and retailers. The new general interest in global issues took these Mennonites beyond the reach of well-established mission boards or the well-known economic and service agencies of MCC and MEDA described in chapter seven.

In fact, an interest in a wide variety of personal and organized initiatives seemed to grow at the very time that older traditions of volunteering for service overseas with high profile organizations such as MCC were undergoing a transformation. In 1998, for example, MCC reported a decline in volunteers for overseas service, from 66 percent of all MCC workers serving overseas in 1969, to only 37 percent of total personnel doing so in 1998; in the meantime, the proportion of the overseas work being done by paid professionals, that is, by agronomists, economists, teachers and business administrators, rose to more than 20 percent of total MCC personnel.<sup>33</sup> Yet other indicators were that interest in overseas charity and personal participation in economic development was on the rise, and certainly was not limited to a small group of thinkers, mission board executives or professionals.

One especially popular organization was SELFHELP Crafts. It particularly affected ordinary Mennonite women, even transforming their wardrobes and home décor. By the 1970s, for example, Mennonite women who had long eschewed jewelry because they were “plain people,” began assisting poor women from around the world, their “sisters” in developing countries, by marketing their hand-made necklaces and earrings. These efforts, originally known as SELFHELP Crafts of the World, and later as Ten Thousand Villages, emerged when women travelled to Puerto Rico and Jordan for MCC service.

Mary Hottenstein Lauver, of Pennsylvania, and Olga Reimer Martens, of Kansas, were to teach sewing classes in Puerto Rico, but soon recognized that women there already knew how to do impressive embroidery; what they needed was access to markets. Meanwhile, Ruth Lederach, on assignment in Jordan, began a sewing project among Palestinian refugees. When Edna Ruth Miller Byler, who often traveled with her husband on MCC administrative trips, met Lederach, Martens, and Lauver, she began having the arts and crafts shipped back to North



In 1988 a Filipino basket weaver shows a SELFHELP Crafts volunteer, John Sawatzky of Gretna, Manitoba, how frameworks for hampers and magazine racks are made. SELFHELP, now known as Ten Thousand Villages, purchased goods abroad for sale in North America, promoting economic development overseas and encouraging transnational sensibilities among Mennonite consumers.



America to sell to church women's groups. One of Byler's advertisements frankly acknowledged that Mennonite homemakers would likely find Arab needlework to have "unusual colors and designs," but stressed that purchases "contribute toward relieving the abject poverty under which these thousands of refugees exist."

In 1968 Byler's Canadian coordinator, Margaret Cressman, explained her approach to boosting sales: "we have to spend time ... [emphasizing] the fact that we have a responsibility and a duty to our needy sisters. 'Women help women' – speak of sisterhood – we are part of the sisterhood." By 1970, Byler wanted "to really push India" even if the colors were unusual by North American standards.<sup>34</sup> Sales grew and in 1972 SELFHELP opened a retail store; soon there were more than 100 such outlets, almost all in Mennonite-populated, rural small towns – locations in which professional marketers undoubtedly would never have chosen to sell world art. Nevertheless, the stores generated sales of more than \$6 million a year by the mid-1990s, encouraging and demonstrating Mennonites' self-perception as world citizens.<sup>35</sup>

A very different, but also popular new program was the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. It began in 1976 as the MCC Food Bank to confront world hunger with gifts of wheat, directly from the fields of Mennonite farmers. The first permanent executive director, C. Wilbert Loewen, a former school administrator and hobby wheat farmer, was keenly aware of the satisfaction Canadian grain farmers attained from providing simple food aid, especially when it became known that the Canadian government matched all donations four to one.

Mennonite farmers also warmed to the concept after changes were made to the Canadian Wheat Board Act that allowed direct delivery of wheat donations to local elevators. Farmers now often grouped together to designate a particular field in the community as the "Foodgrains Bank Field," an act culminating in the festive assembly of a dozen or more combine harvesters on a given afternoon.

Even though the Foodgrains Bank was careful to ship grains only to net food importing countries, the program faced criticism for distorting local markets and seeing international development in simplistic terms. Nevertheless, the program was immensely popular at the local level and grew quickly. In 1983 the program expanded to include non-Mennonite denominations under the name Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and by 2007 it reported that it had shipped almost a million

metric tons of grain to hungry people in more than 80 countries and found support among 9,000 congregations across Canada.<sup>36</sup>

An especially noteworthy late century development was the rise of Christian Aid Ministries (CAM), a relief arm of Conservative and Old Order Mennonite and Amish churches. Founded in 1981 by David N. Troyer, a New Order Amish lumber retailer from Berlin, Ohio, CAM grew out of a desire to assist the “suffering church” in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, and a belief that left-leaning MCC administrators soft-pedaled persecution in the Communist world. Thus CAM initially focused on shipping food, clothing, and Bibles through the “Iron Curtain.” As the Cold War came to an end, CAM expanded into relief work and Christian literature distribution in Nicaragua, Haiti, Liberia, and elsewhere.

During the 1990s CAM grew rapidly and by 2008 was operating in thirty-five countries and distributing literature in an additional fifty-four. In all, CAM estimated that its work touched more than six million people that year with \$150 million (U.S.) in medical and nutritional supplies, more than 75,000 food parcels, almost 30,000 pair of new shoes, and some 24,700 comforters, even though it relied on only a small number of volunteers to distribute relief supplies overseas. Hundreds of volunteers did process donations at a network of warehouse and shipping facilities in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Nova



Volunteers prepacking beans at a Christian Aid Ministries warehouse in 2003. CAM volunteers, primarily Beachy Amish and conservative Mennonites, prepare thousands of boxes of food and other goods each month for distribution in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

Scotia, Ohio, Ontario, and Pennsylvania, the last of which also housed a meat canning operation not unlike MCC's.

Unlike more progressive development agencies, CAM linked relief supplies and simple material aid with evangelistic concern to "bring the Gospel to a lost and dying world." The traditional approach to foreign aid was also indicated by an insistence that field staff dress to reflect conservative Mennonite values, that is, in plain dress, and especially that women wear head coverings that express "separation and nonconformity."<sup>37</sup>

**Christian Aid  
Ministries estimated  
that it reached more  
than six million  
people in 2008**

At the other end of the political spectrum were two globally-oriented peace organizations, Mennonite Conciliation Service, founded in 1977, and Christian Peacemakers Teams (CPT), established in 1989. Tapping into the impulse for international justice inspired by alternative service programs of the 1950s and 1960s, these programs emphasized the need for Christians "to address systemic conditions that created injustice and violence."<sup>38</sup> Mennonite Conciliation Service (MCS), for one, provided professional mediators and often focused on racially-sensitive social conflicts in the United States. But it also approached its agenda in democratic fashion; in the words of one of its visionaries, Brethren in Christ peace activist John K. Stoner, MCS sought to prevent a "deleterious trend to professionalism," and rather took its cue from Mennonite Disaster Service's model of "hundreds of volunteers directed by trained leaders."<sup>39</sup>

In 1984 at the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France, this vision of addressing violent social structures widened. There, theologian Ronald J. Sider called "Mennonites to form groups of Christians who were to physically place themselves as peacemakers between hostile people." Sider declared that such a program would be nothing less than the culmination of the Mennonites' 450 year history as a people of peace.<sup>40</sup> He decried the historical tendency among Mennonites to withdraw from the wider society and called for Mennonites to "be prepared to die by the thousands as they willingly placed themselves in the dangerous but holy space between the weak and the violent."<sup>41</sup>

Within months the idea had taken off and 6,000 letters flooded into MCC headquarters to ask for more information. By 1988 an organization, directed by Gene Stoltzfus, was emerging, with the support

of progressive Canadian and U.S. Mennonite bodies, committed to the idea “that by using the creative energy of organized nonviolence, ordinary people could stand in front of the weapons and encourage less violent ways for change to happen.” In 1989 the first CPT volunteer, David Weaver, was sent to Israel to “document the many deaths of Palestinians involved in the Intifada.”<sup>42</sup> Eventually CPT Corps members and Reservists (the military language was intentional, suggesting the commitment to put one’s life on the line was no less than it was for a soldier) were in Haiti, Palestine, Bosnia, Columbia, Iraq, and Mexico. They engaged in grassroots witness and daily acts of solidarity with the poor and socially marginalized.<sup>43</sup>

### Global Mentality

The rise of these various institutions coincided with an increasingly sophisticated debate on the ethics of outreach. Just what did it mean to be a global citizen or neighbor? What was the truly Anabaptist – humble, non-violent, quiescent – approach to aid? Should food be given “in the name of Christ,” an evangelical badge that might draw recipients to the Christian faith, or should food be given simply to comply with the biblical injunction to “love your neighbor” with that “cup of water” and without any condition? Should foodgrains and secondhand clothing be sent abroad without acknowledging how they affected local economies or personal dignities? Should the aid be in the form of highly technologized tractors and generators, or should it be with a simpler economy in mind, that is, with animals and hand-pumps? Should MCC send experts to take action or should it embrace a ministry of “presence” with the ironic adage, “don’t just do something, stand there?” These questions often pitted professionals with international development training against the desires of restive North American constituents who wished desperately to make a difference by doing things quickly, efficiently, and, as they saw it, apolitically.

Many North American Mennonites who had been abroad worked hard to counter what they saw as an outworn, paternalistic, well-intentioned, but misguided global identity.<sup>44</sup> Gerald W. Schlabach’s 1990 book *And Who is My Neighbor?* pondered the meaning of a “theology of service,” even wondering whether “well-intentioned North American Christians relate to the poor from positions of strength – while hiding their own neediness, their own poverty.”<sup>45</sup>

Other reconsiderations were more radical. A special 1984 issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* reported on a conference in which North American Mennonite theologians and economists lent their voices to a growing radicalization among Latin American Mennonites, many of whom believed that faith was irrelevant if it did not address issues of poverty and injustice. To a person, the writers insisted that North American Mennonites must stand with their impoverished brothers and sisters in war-torn and repressive Latin America, but always to do so as a nonviolent struggle for justice.

**The question emerged: what was the truly Anabaptist approach to aid?**

Blake Ortman, MCC representative in El Salvador, noted prophetically that the “role of the Church should be to announce the Kingdom of God and denounce all that opposes the Kingdom.” And if that kind of political action became impossible, he said, then “one can only live with the suffering people and say to them: ‘Our cry goes with you to God and God has not forgotten you.’”<sup>46</sup> Other northerners reminded the Latin Americans that although “true Anabaptists rejected [the] violence” inherent in Liberation Theology, there was “ample material in the Anabaptist tradition to reconstruct a very radical theology.”<sup>47</sup>

Not far in the background of such debates was a new political sensibility among progressive U.S. Mennonites that their tax dollars and their nation’s foreign policy were fomenting the violence that wracked Central America, in particular during the 1980s. Even theologically conservative Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), which generally avoided political controversy, offered an implicit critique of its Pennsylvania constituents who supported President Ronald Reagan’s aid to Nicaraguan *Contra* rebels, by pointedly wording a story about a *Contra* attack on Moriah Mennonite Church in Honduras, a congregation supported by EMM, and the *Contras* taking the pastor and church members hostage.<sup>48</sup>

North American-based evangelical missions were also put to the test during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Certainly many North American Mennonites remained engaged and energized by global mission. In 1975 J. A. Toews’s *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* celebrated the manner in which “a small German-speaking, fellowship group ... in ... South Russia ... has expanded into a multi-national and multi-lingual worldwide brotherhood of approximately 80,000 members” and rejoiced that the “sun never sets on the MB Church!”<sup>49</sup>

In 1978 the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC), headquartered in Steinbach, Manitoba marked its mission board's twenty-fifth anniversary with a book titled *Ever Widening Circles*. It spoke of the EMC's short, but dynamic history that led from "the awakening of a few individuals" to the culmination of a missions program of 136 missionaries and "an entire Conference of churches welcoming others to the circle of believers."<sup>50</sup>

Such approaches, however, came under criticism from some North American leaders. In a 1970 piece titled, "A New Vocabulary for Missions," Vernon Wiebe, the general secretary of MB Mission/Services, suggested that a "new mood" of international respect and inclusion had led his church conference to begin using new language. The word "foreign," denoting strangeness, was out; the word "overseas," suggesting "sameness, separated only by water," was in. Similarly, the colonial words "fields" and "native," suggesting paternalism and superiority, were to be replaced by terms of mutual respect, such as "countries" or "continents."<sup>51</sup>



In the early twenty-first century two of the largest North American Mennonite mission organizations were led by Mennonites from Africa. In 2002 Stanley Green (left), of South Africa, began serving as executive secretary of Mennonite Mission Network, having previously led one of its predecessor agencies. Nelson Okanya (right), of Kenya, became president of Eastern Mennonite Missions in 2011.

Missions histories, such as Theron Schlabach's 1980 *Gospel versus Gospel*, which traced mission in the Mennonite Church (MC), and James Juhnke's 1979 *A People of Mission*, which offered a General Con-

ference mission history, added their own voices to the new perspective on missions. Schlabach's book criticized North American missionaries who had left an "Anabaptist gospel" at home and preached a mainline Protestant gospel overseas. Juhnke's work applauded a reassessment of mission strategy among North American mission boards as "movements of anticolonialism and national independence revealed that missionaries and mission programs ... had absorbed the attitudes and patterns of paternalism and condescension."<sup>52</sup>

This thinking informed many of those concerned with outreach overseas. An April 1980 issue of *Mennonite Weekly Review* carried reports on two ordinary, but telling events. In one, Michigan and Indiana pastors attending a prayer breakfast heard that Mennonites needed to understand the "Islamic point of view," reflecting an historic "complexity of the Middle East tradition of hostility" with the West, one stirred by western "intolerance, fear and enmity." The old approach of seeing a "heathen" people from a western perspective was unhelpful, if not dangerous, the pastors learned.

In the other report, seminary students in Elkhart, Indiana heard former missionary, Alfred C. Krass, provide an African perspective of "neo-pagan" North America. Canada and the United States might be economic powerhouses and offer their people an enviable standard of living, but their societies were also increasingly places whose "popular religions and cults, and ... culture of narcissism ... [were] manifestations of self-hatred and alienation, and ... [represented] idolatry."<sup>53</sup> In this perspective, then, North America had seemingly lost its moral right to comment on whole societies in other continents.

## Travelers Abroad

A growing affinity among North American Mennonites for a global village, however, came not only from the experts – the missiologists, economists, theologians. Increasingly, everyday encounters of world travelers shaped this emerging story. Among the Mennonite travelers were college students and elderly volunteers, tourists and entrepreneurs. Many returned with stories of their lives, accounts that reinforced the idea that exchanges with the global Mennonite community could be instructive.

One of these global interactions was economic in nature. Mennonite farmers, of course, had grown commodities for the international market throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There had also been Mennonites or entrepreneurs of Mennonite background,

signalled by the names of Hershey and Kaufmann, who manufactured their chocolates and rubber products, respectively, for the domestic market but invested in foreign plantations to secure their industries. In time, though, many other Mennonite-owned businesses in North America developed close links with foreign markets, and many stationed local Mennonites in overseas offices.

In Manitoba, for example, the last decades of the twentieth century were heady days for Mennonite manufacturers who capitalized on an historically low Canadian dollar. Among those with significant overseas interests in Europe and Asia, and each employing 1000 or more workers, were Palliser Furniture of Winnipeg, Friesen Printers of Altona, and Loewen Windows of Steinbach. In addition, there were somewhat smaller Mennonite manufacturers – Triple E Homes of Winkler, Wilmar Windows of Winnipeg, Westfield Industries of Rosenort, and dozens of others.<sup>54</sup>

Informed and confident announcements of overseas ventures were made with regularity. In March 1990, for example, Charles Loewen, president of Loewen Windows, announced curtly to *Mennonite Weekly Review* readers that his firm was “edging into the market of exporting wood windows to Japan” where 99 percent of the windows were of aluminum construction and where “one of the government’s priorities is to improve housing.”<sup>55</sup> By coincidence many of these same Mennonites were also intricately involved in MCC and MEDA initiatives abroad. Factory owner Art DeFehr of Palliser Furniture, for example, had even served as the country representative for MCC in Bangladesh and had launched several overseas development projects himself.

Many other Mennonites, trained in one of a dozen professions, found short term work for foreign governments or multinational corporations. And here, too, questions of development often arose. A striking, if unusual example, was J. Franklin Ebersole, who had been raised in the Mennonite community around Clarence Center, New York and taught at Goshen College before becoming a prominent banker. In the 1930s he was appointed director of the National Bank of Nicaragua when the United States took control of that country’s economy.<sup>56</sup>

The international economic interaction of most North American Mennonite professionals abroad was more mundane. Doug Pritchard of northern Ontario, for example, worked as a chemical engineer for an Australian-based chemical firm when he was offered a better position with the company in Germany. The offer, however, was an impetus for him and his wife Jean to consider – and accept – an overseas



assignment with MCC in Bangladesh. As he saw it, the move caused him to become “born-again [as] a citizen of [Christ’s] kingdom,” providing a strong “peace in God,” and a personal commitment to fight poverty and end his “own complicity in such pain.”<sup>57</sup>

The family history of John and Margarete (Penner) Martens of Winnipeg, Manitoba describes their work as professionals in foreign countries, including Kenya, the United States, New Zealand, and Turkey, opening doors to adventures and a global knowledge for their four children. As one daughter recalled, “my life seems to have developed a pattern of living in Winnipeg for three years, and then living somewhere else or going on a trip.”<sup>58</sup>

**By the end of the century it was not uncommon for Mennonites to have a family member working overseas**

By the end of the century it was

not uncommon for North American Mennonites to have a family member working overseas within an evolving global economy.

Foreign lands interested Mennonites at both ends of the generational scale, the youth and the elderly. With regard to the elderly, it seemed most communities had their favorite “grandparents abroad.” Among innumerable examples were J. K. and Tina Klassen who, having retired in 1972 from their positions as pastor and senior citizens home attendant, respectively, traveled from their home in Vineland, Ontario to serve in Mexico’s Steinreich Bible School. The reason was simple: they both had “a love of travel and a desire to serve.”<sup>59</sup> With regard to the youth, most communities had someone young overseas.

Oftentimes the program of choice was MCC’s SALT (Serving and Learning Together) program, which offered a “yearlong cross-cultural immersion experience for Christian young adults from the United States and Canada.”<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, the youth spent a year in Europe with the InterMenno program, run by European Mennonites to host North American “trainees.” When *Menmonite Weekly Review* reporter David Smiley took three weeks to travel Europe in 1980 he followed the tourist trails, visiting the great sites of Europe, but he also dropped in on several youthful North American volunteers, including Lowell Tieszen “an inter-Menno trainee of urban background, working on the Nussbaumer farm,” a dairy operation near Strasbourg, and Marty Wiens of California who was working “as caretaker and host at the historic Singel Mennonite Church.”<sup>61</sup>

During these years too, many of the North American Mennonite colleges developed overseas educational programs. In 1967 Goshen College initiated a required “semester abroad” program called Study-Service Term, that placed students neither in European capitals, nor even in leading universities of non-Western nations, but instead granted credit for simply living with ordinary families in the developing world, from Haiti and Honduras to Côte d’Ivoire and Cambodia. The semester included formal course work taught by nationals, but also service in rural clinics, producer co-ops, or church orphanages.

After its founding in 2000 Canadian Mennonite University created a similar program, first named “The School of Discipleship” and later renamed the more youthful “Outatown.” It combined adventure with inner city service, wilderness awareness and poverty studies in such places as Canada, Guatemala, South Africa and Thailand. At the same time, the University offered a very popular major in International Development Studies, mostly focused in its satellite institution, Menno Simons College, located in downtown Winnipeg.<sup>62</sup>

Mennonite tourists also joined the movement to embrace a wider world. In her family history, Katherine Martens of Winnipeg wrote of her parents’ “urge to travel, to leave home and experience life in different countries.” In the early 1970s the couple traveled to visit their adult children in Mexico and Israel, and in the latter country, Martens’ father was especially “thrilled to visit the places he knew so well from a lifetime of Bible study.” It was an interest that later turned him into a tour guide for a group visiting Middle East countries for Menno Travel in Winnipeg.<sup>63</sup> In 2010 when 93-year-old Pennsylvanian Grace Kautz Peifer published her memoirs, she devoted much of the space to accounts of international travel on several continents. “I spent quite some money on traveling,” she confessed, but “I enjoyed seeing people and places first hand.”<sup>64</sup>

Although trips to the “Holy Land” were especially popular among the elderly, tours that fell under the term “ethnotourism” were even more popular. Middle class Mennonites often booked their travel independently, but many thousands came to know Mennonite history by paying for the services of Mennonite tour companies. The destination for Dutch-North German Mennonites with roots in Russia was Ukraine. One of the first to visit old sites in a restrictive Soviet Union was historian Gerhard Lohrenz. In a trip in 1970 he described “a cruise along the beautiful Dnieper River around the island of Chor-

titza ... a very fine experience” and expressed great nostalgia: “just think that all of this at one time belonged to our people.”<sup>65</sup> Return visits to Ukrainian lands took off after 1989 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and also came to include more distant Siberia, Kazakhstan and other central Asian republics.

The well-known Mennonite Heritage Cruise, organized by Walter and Marina Unger of Toronto, promised a mythic “trip back in time ... to the emotionally charged Russian Mennonite time,” down the Dnieper River through the one-time Khortitsa (Chortitza) Colony, stopping to see the 1000-year-old Khortitsa Oak, and numerous extant village buildings and cemeteries bearing familiar names.<sup>66</sup> For many it was a trip of great spiritual significance. Martha Zacharias of Saskatoon who took the trip in 1996 wrote about being thrilled to meet an elderly, Low German-speaking “bright, intuitive” woman, named Eva, who in a “dramatic voice ... in our shared language,” declared that Mennonites whether in Canada or Ukraine had “the same sun ... the same God” and were “one family.”<sup>67</sup>



Between 1990 and 2010 the Mennonite Heritage Cruise drew thousands of mostly Canadian Mennonite tourists to visit the birthplace of their parents in Ukraine. Here their cruise ship enters the historic harbor of Sevastopol in Crimea.

Other tour companies took Swiss-American Mennonites back to Western Europe. TourMagination, begun in 1970 and based in Waterloo, Ontario, aimed to make “ministry the foundation” of a mission that shared “the Mennonite story in Europe,” in particular helping “Mennonites rediscover their heritage and become acquainted with key persons in Anabaptist-Mennonite life and thought.” Often led by noted Pennsylvania historian John L. Ruth, tours initially focused on Anabaptist sites, such as “the castle where George Blaurock was

imprisoned” and “the Neckar River where Michael Sattler was executed.” Over time, however, the company organized tours to dozens of countries around the world, all the while seeking to “integrate faith into all aspects of the visits.”<sup>68</sup>

### **Mennonite World Conference and a Global Identity**

Of special importance to the late twentieth century North American Mennonite identity was the growing sense that Mennonites belonged to a global church. This identity was expressed with particular passion, and propelled vigorously at the Mennonite World Conference assemblies, multi-day, international events held every six years. Twice during the last third of the twentieth century the conference was held in the southern half of the globe: in Brazil (1972) and in India (1997), and twice in North America, in Wichita (1978) and in Winnipeg (1990). The events marked crucial moments of cultural exchange between North Americans and their brothers and sisters around the world. More importantly, they were occasions for honing a Mennonite transnational identity, a heightened awareness of global poverty, a forceful reminder that the “Kingdom of God,” for all the Mennonite idealism, had not yet been built.

When the ninth Mennonite World Conference met in Curitiba, Brazil in 1972, North American leaders sounded a common refrain: Mennonites needed to shift their focus to the Global South. Erland Waltner of Elkhart, Indiana, president of the World Conference called the Curitiba conference a “Schleitheim” moment, as historic as the first recorded gathering of Anabaptist leaders in 1527. According to Waltner, Curitiba marked “a gathering bringing brotherly unity in the presence of disintegrative and destructive pressures,” a time to embrace the conference slogan, “Jesus Christ Reconciles.” Perhaps Brazil in 1972 was dangerous and its government repressive, but Waltner insisted, it was much better for “us to meet in Curitiba, the first time in the ‘Third World,’ than to turn back, as some had urged, to the more comfortable and secure settings of some European or North American country.”

North American historian and the Conference’s executive secretary, Cornelius J. Dyck, called for nothing less than a radical reconceptualization of Mennonite history; since the first world conference had been held in 1925 in Switzerland “times have changed.” Dyck noted that “one third of the Mennonites in the world today are non-white ... The cathedrals of Europe, the colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna,

or Colonial Pennsylvania, or the East Reserve, or CPS are not part of their history.” But Florence Driedger, a conference delegate from Regina, Saskatchewan put it especially powerfully. The world community was not only a social reality, it had a spiritual basis, arising from common membership in a religious faith: “once having accepted Jesus Christ as a Way of Life ... *I am* a brother or sister to others in the faith ... whether brothers and sisters accept and acknowledge each other or not... [A common Mennonite] brotherhood is part of the very essence of each of us.”<sup>69</sup>

**There was a growing sense that Mennonites belonged to a global church**

A global Mennonite community was not only an intellectual fact, it was also a matter of the heart.

The 1978 and 1990 conferences at Wichita, Kansas and Winnipeg, Manitoba, respectively, introduced a new idea: that of the world coming to North America. A frequently-voiced idea was that the continued growth of a global Mennonite identity was putting to shame old parochial and ethnicized loyalties. A 20-year-old university student from Canada, Travis Kroeker, reported that the Wichita conference “reinforced my Mennonite identity.” But it did so by disassociating Mennonitism “with a particular culture or ethnic heritage,” and linking it instead to the “thousands of Mennonites from all parts of the world assembled” in “a colorful mosaic.”<sup>70</sup>

Similar ideas were expressed in Winnipeg in 1990. Speaking at the Winnipeg conference, historian Wilbert R. Shenk of Elkhart, Indiana announced that “we are witnessing a momentous change, with the center of gravity having now moved from the historical heartland of the Christian faith in the west to various parts of the world.” Shenk envisaged a time when Africa would become the most Christian of all the continents, when North Americans or Europeans would no longer lead the world’s Christians.

Giving this notion a spiritual and even poetic dimension was theologian A. James Reimer of Kitchener, Ontario. Reimer called delegates to “understand the unifying work of God behind, underneath or in the midst of all this ... diversity without destroying that diversity ... of ethnicities, cultures and religious expressions while at the same time moving as the Holy Spirit to unite all in Christ.”<sup>71</sup> From a North American perspective, while global Mennonites might be socially diverse, they nevertheless shared a profound, common spirituality.

The real test of this emerging global identity, of course, was whether or not North Americans would listen to Mennonites in the Global South. The Winnipeg conference featured many such voices. Elizabeth Soto, a native of Puerto Rico and a one-time Roman Catholic, thanked North Americans for helping her, a “victim of fundamentalist” dichotomies, to “reconcile or celebrate ... differences” between the North and the South. But she also challenged North Americans to learn from the socially-engaged church of the Global South, and adopt an evangelicalism that included a search for social justice, abandoning that traditional “comfortable, inactive pacifism.”



Members of a Youth Discovery Team, made up of African and North American young adults, lead singing at the 12th Assembly of Mennonite World Conference, held in 1990 in Winnipeg, Canada.

This willingness to confront powerful forces – both capitalist and nationalist – was also apparent in the address by Gan Sakakibara, an economist and member of a Tokyo Mennonite church. Sakakibara recalled learning about Christian communalism from visits to large Hutterite farm colonies and to the tiny Reba Place commune in urban Evanston, Illinois. He also reminded listeners that memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki must compel Mennonites around the world to challenge the idea that nations possessed the right to wage war.

But the call from southerners at the 1990 conference was also one infused with overtly mystical language. Marta Quiroga de Alvarez, a schoolteacher from Argentina, for example, spoke of her *Iglesia Evangélica*

Mennonite Argentina where members “drank the fresh water of ... spiritual renewal,” and where much “was said about the baptism of the Holy Spirit” and “clarity was gained about the active presence of Satan and the supernatural power of God.”<sup>72</sup> The southerners’ message in Winnipeg was much more than a polite invitation to northerners for friendship.

By the time of the 1997 conference in Calcutta, India, the transition to a global partnership had become convention. In preparation for the Peace Council Meetings linked to the Calcutta conference, writers from each of the continents described Mennonite peace efforts at home. North America was now only one of five continental voices, and one described in an essay entitled “North American Mennonites and Peace,” the fifth chapter in a conference-related book of *Reflections on Our Contexts*. Significantly, the chapter’s author, Patricia Shelly of Bethel College in Kansas, who was headed for Palestine on MCC assignment, described a North American Mennonite community without its historic global tentacles, its mission organizations and economic development agencies. Indeed, Shelly mentioned but one North American-based international program, the Christian Peacemaker Teams. The word “peace,” wrote Shelly, is seen by some North Americans as primarily personal and by others as primarily political. Moreover, it meant different things for Americans and Canadians. But in either case, “peace” was in jeopardy in North American culture.

From the podium in Calcutta it was easy to see North America’s central pitfall, the temptation “to believe that having more things makes us happier and more secure.” In fact, wrote Shelly, the more elaborate a lifestyle and the larger the church buildings, the more “we struggle with the need to protect what we have.” It all made for a “culture of violence,” exacerbated by a North American popular culture “permeated by an ethos that glorifies violence.”<sup>73</sup> Shelly seemed to suggest that North America was ready to take instruction from the South.

## Conclusion

The continental history of Mennonites in North America is not only a story within particular geographical borders, and certainly not only one of Mennonites within particular nation states. It is one of multiple border crossings, into a wide and diverse global community. The North American Mennonites’ strong belief in nonviolence and a heart for the powerless affected their behavior within their respective nations and the importance they placed on national borders. The Mennonites seemed

keenly aware of national borders, but, ironically, as their identity with their respective nations of Canada or the United States increased, so too did their sense of being global citizens. In fact, one feature of the North American nation-centrism was a willingness to advise their respective governments regarding an Anabaptist-informed foreign policy. The most radical suggested that excessive military spending by either Canadian or American governments was wrong; but many more supported the idea that governments could be lobbied with respect to refugee policies, material aid and other issues related to foreign affairs.

Certainly North American Mennonites criticized the nature of their own particular form of transnationalism, observing that it contained hidden paternalism, that its attention to global links shortchanged local action, or that it ignored the ecumenical and ecclesiological implications of its global stance. But one phenomenon North American Mennonites seemed not to question was the rise of an international Mennonite identity, or the notion of a world Anabaptist frame of reference.

Indeed, the transnational history of Mennonites tells the story of a growing sense of living within a global, nonviolent, discipleship-oriented Christian community. More and more world-focused Mennonite institutions were established, many drawing previously unengaged segments of the Mennonite population into the foreign arena.

By the end of the twentieth century, traditionalist groups, women's organizations, farm-based food aid programs, student programs and other initiatives had joined such previously well-rooted, globally-oriented institutions as MCC and MEDA. One of the most profound changes was one that involved many Mennonites only once every six years, at the regularly scheduled Mennonite World Conference assemblies, yet seemed to leave an indelible spiritual and mental imprint in the intervening years. North American Mennonites began to speak more confidently of a global Mennonite community, culturally diverse, but committed to common Anabaptist principles. Indeed, increasingly it seemed as if a strong awareness of a global community with a global perspective and mission was the very underpinning of a North American Mennonite identity.



## Epilogue

This book has travelled the length and breadth of North America, paying visits to Mennonites in hundreds of places. We hope readers will feel that they have come to know these Mennonites as real people and as their brothers and sisters – people of faith from every age and race, background and way of life. The Mennonites and Brethren in Christ of North America charted a distinct place for themselves in a dynamic, vast, and beautiful continent. The two northern countries, the United States and Canada, also marked a particular cultural place, mostly English-speaking, but also home to large groups of French and Spanish speakers, and to diverse immigrant populations that represented every corner of the globe. Most significantly, these two countries, when contrasted to other parts of the world, were marked by disproportionate wealth and power.

Within the panorama of North American faith communities, Mennonites charted a distinct flavor. Their congregations were committed to seeking God's face, following the simplicity of Christ, extending the witness of the church, and working to secure peace in all its forms – sometimes an internal quiescence before God and at other points an active life of nonviolence. These ways were tested over the three and a quarter centuries that Mennonites called the continent their home, first as members of frontier farming communities, then as members of established and highly developed rural communities, and especially, in the most recent generations, as residents of urban places. At every turn they sought to secure what they understood to be Anabaptist values, including the importance of each generation affirming, and not simply accepting or assuming, the faith it inherited. Mennonites and Brethren in Christ developed family traditions of passing on the faith to their youth, through bedtime prayers and hymns and

childrens' stories, through instruction to the youth by parents and grandparents.

In cultural contexts that made space for religious minorities and encouraged entrepreneurial volunteerism, North American Mennonites also charted a distinct style in public life, establishing a vast array of institutions, from schools and hospitals to fire insurance

**North American  
Mennonites charted  
a distinct style in  
public life**

companies and publishing houses, both to bolster the faith and identity of their children and, increasingly, to share that faith with those outside Mennonite communities and even invite them to join the community.

The most elaborate institutions – service and mission agencies, universities and advocacy groups – reached out beyond the Mennonite communities themselves, into the wider North American society. Mennonites also learned dynamic ways of expressing themselves, especially through singing, but also in books of poetry and literature, and even in fine arts and music, and most innovatively in film and internet sites.

There have been constant challenges. Government and social pressure to render military service was intense, especially during the World Wars of the twentieth century. These pressures led some Mennonites to decide that citizenship required military defense, but most responded by recommitting themselves to being a people called by God to walk in ways of peace. There were also tests to the faith within the dynamic marketplace of North America: how could the simplicity of Christ correspond with earning a livelihood in an advanced capitalistic part of the globe? Some Mennonites became quite wealthy; others rejected any semblance of modern economics; most joined the middle class, working as professionals or as skilled laborers who hoped to join the middle class, balancing the lure of consumer society and the call to protect the poor and vulnerable.

Because Mennonites were, for much of their North American history, disproportionately a rural people who held to farming as an especially sacred vocation, land stewardship marked another major challenge, first as a challenge of living alongside Indigenous people and their historic claim to the land, and then as a challenge of maintaining the fertility of the soil in the face of commercialized, technologized and chemicalized farming. There were challenges

within the unique demographics of North America where all except the Indigenous population possessed a collective memory of being from somewhere – Europe for most, but also Africa and increasingly, Latin America and Asia. The first North American Mennonites had come to the continent as a people already firmly “Mennonite.” Thus the first challenge in a pluralistic North America had been to protect and anchor particular identities – even ethnic languages and cultural customs. But eventually a new challenge arose: how to reach out to a wider North American society with a message of hope inherited from Anabaptist ancestors, and incorporate new names, voices, and sensibilities into the Mennonite family.

The common challenge was to seek ways of being faithful to a loosely-defined sense of being “Anabaptist,” defined divergently, but often based on what one North American leader had dubbed “the Anabaptist Vision” – a call to Christianity as discipleship, church as community, and ethics as peace and nonviolent love. The common challenge drew a thousand different responses and those responses accounted for another distinctive feature of the Mennonite community in North America: remarkable divergence.

There were dozens of different Old Order or traditionalist groups that were noticeably counter-cultural, as well as an array of more modern or progressive groups. On the one hand, the progressives were less visible than their “plain” cousins, yet even as residents in towns and cities, neighbors often recognized their lives as embodying distinctive and prophetic values. Within all of these groups, and especially the latter ones, there were sharply expressed differences of thought and theology affecting approaches to evangelism, gender, sexuality, worship, youth, and even to modes of baptism. Within colleges and seminaries, church councils or congregational member meetings, theological niceties never received the same attention as did matters of practice and the everyday application of faith. Still, insofar as theological concerns affected daily life they became points of debate. Issues related to the exact nature of the “end times” or church discipline or the meaning of the cross – even the right forms of worship – brought some groups together, but also split others in sometimes painful divi-

**It has become apparent that North American Mennonites are members of a trans-national people**

sion. Conflict certainly was a sign of disunity, but it was also a mark of common commitment, a measure of just how profoundly these folks cared about their faith.

As North American Mennonites entered the twenty-first century it became apparent that as never before they were members of a transnational people, celebrating the scope of Mennonite World Conference, but linked too in myriad ways to a global community through service organizations, missions programs, international travel, global business, and bi-national citizenship.

But it was also apparent that global phenomena would shape them in other ways. How would they address the unprecedented rise in social media and technology that was fundamentally questioning old ways of seeing the universe, of worshipping and thinking about ethics and of God? How would they meet the challenge of increasing scales of economy, larger-sized institutions, and consumerism in every walk of life?

One way of meeting these challenges was certain: following Christ in North America would require joint effort with Mennonites in every part of the world. By working together, by imagining a global congregation, by sharing gifts of all sorts, this community would thrive. It would strive to confront injustices, cultivate life-giving spirituality, and seek the common cause of bringing the peace of Christ to this world.

# Appendix A

## Major North American Conferences/Branches (Combines Canada and U.S. memberships for groups with members in both countries.)

<b>Conference or group</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>
(Old) Mennonites/Mennonite Church (MC)	64,591	90,879	93,447	94,265	n/a	n/a
General Conf. (GC) Menn. & Conf. of Menn. in Canada	50,790	56,631	60,267	62,806	n/a	n/a
Mennonite Church Canada	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	36,877	33,000
Mennonite Church USA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	123,404	106,000
Mennonite Brethren (MB)	19,169	31,931	38,156	43,452	53,863	72,875
Old Order Amish	14,874	23,025	34,000	56,200	73,080	104,050
Mennonite Brethren in Christ/ United Missionary Church	13,488	*	*	*	*	*
Brethren in Christ	6,807	10,750	15,096	19,853	22,964	26,600
Conservative Mennonite Conference	5,618	6,659	7,503	8,031	10,334	11,100
Old Order Mennonites (various groups)	5,617	7,950	12,524	15,000	21,589	26,650
Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman)	5,000	8,161	9,527	12,694	15,887	19,500
Sommerfelder Mennonites	3,785	4,000	3,650	5,500	4,590	2,425

\* no longer active in inter-Mennonite work

<b>Conference or group</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>
Hutterites	3,300	7,500	10,258	14,000	12,840	19,125
Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (EMB)/Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches	2,000	3,413	3,965	*	*	*
Kleine Gemeinde/Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC)	2,040	3,580	4,974	5,813	6,500	7,000
Old Colony Mennonites (various groups)	1,859	3,331	3,265	6,150	7,086	10,450
Defenseless Mennonites/ Evangelical Mennonites/ Fellowship of Evang. Churches	1,780	2,988	3,782	3,888	*	*
Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC)	1,709	1,712	2,370	3,470	4,004	4,700
Chortitzer Mennonite Conference	1,525	1,800	2,000	2,400	2,500	1,700
Amish Mennonites (Beachy Amish and others)	1,000	4,030	5,170	7,238	7,807	12,300
Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church	n/a	1,431	2,430	3,255	3,913	4,700
Reinland Mennonite Church	n/a	800	1,000	1,590	1,460	5,200

\* no longer active in inter-Mennonite work

Sources:

For 1950-2000, various conference yearbooks, Mennonite World Conference directories, and other publications; for 2010, adapted from *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites*, ed. by Donald B. Kraybill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

There are many other, smaller groups in North America; information about them can be found in *Concise Encyclopedia*, 215-49.

## Appendix B

### Mennonite/BIC/Amish/Hutterite baptized membership in the United States, by state

	1890	1936	2000
Alabama			887
Alaska			18
Arizona			1,461
Arkansas	100		812
California		4,018	13,892
Colorado	75	644	2,338
Connecticut			219
Delaware		463	1,391
District of Columbia			317
Florida		7	5,677
Georgia			1,303
Hawaii			78
Idaho			1,276
Illinois	3,014	6,034	11,557
Indiana	3,732	11,918	33,135
Iowa	1,454	4,110	6,456
Kansas	4,620	15,267	21,768
Kentucky		32	4,552
Louisiana		27	631
Maine			63
Maryland	525	1,167	4,024
Massachusetts			311
Michigan	356	3,502	8,038
Minnesota	967	2,011	3,334
Mississippi		56	1,638
Missouri	748	785	6,657
Montana		766	2,972
Nebraska	1,664	3,620	3,636
Nevada			none
New Hampshire			none

	1890	1936	2000
New Jersey			595
New Mexico		12	409
New York	470	817	7,056
North Carolina		44	1,193
North Dakota	41	1,166	883
Ohio	5,988	13,785	45,189
Oklahoma		4,709	5,090
Oregon	248	1,950	5,391
Pennsylvania	15,330	36,655	92,179
Rhode Island		none	
South Carolina			697
South Dakota	1,383	2,753	6,484
Tennessee	58	39	1,836
Texas		166	3,378
Utah			30
Vermont			190
Virginia	666	2,934	11,263
Washington		714	2,908
West Virginia	102	303	504
Wisconsin		158	6,170
Wyoming			34
Grand total	41,541	121,274	329,920
	20 states	33 states	47 states

## Sources:

For 1890, U.S. Census 1890; for 1936, U.S. Census of Religious Bodies, 1906-1936; for 2000, compiled and modified from Donald B. Kraybill and C. Nelson Hostetter, *Anabaptist World USA* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).



## Appendix C

### Mennonite population (baptized members and children) in Canada, by province and territory

	1901	1941	2001
British Columbia	11	2,542	35,495
Alberta	522	6,171	22,790
Saskatchewan	3,683	16,660	19,565
Manitoba	15,246	19,943	51,535
Ontario	12,208	11,029	60,595
Quebec	50	39	425
Newfoundland	n/a	n/a	10
New Brunswick	0	4	150
Nova Scotia	9	10	795
Prince Edward Island	0	0	10
Assiniboia	68	n/a	n/a
NWT	0	4	50
Yukon	0	0	40
Nunavut	n/a	n/a	10
Grand Total	31,865	56,402	191,470
Source:	8 Provinces/ Territories	9 Provinces/ Territories	13 Provinces/ Territories
Census Canada			

## Appendix D

### North American Mennonite, BIC, Amish, and Hutterite baptized membership, 2010

	Canada	United States
Mennonites	123,625	258,375
Brethren in Christ	3,600	23,000
Amish	2,450	101,600
Hutterites	14,050	5,075
Total	143,725	388,050

Source: Adapted from *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites*, ed. by Donald B. Kraybill (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

# Appendix E

## North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Universities, Colleges, and Seminaries

Name	Location	Open	Sponsor
Bethel College	North Newton, KS	1893-	GC
Goshen College <sup>1</sup>	Goshen, IN	1894-	MC
Bluffton University <sup>2</sup>	Bluffton, OH	1899-	GC
Freeman Junior College	Freeman, SD	1903-1986	GC
Tabor College	Hillsboro, KS	1908	MB
Hesston College	Hesston, KS	1909	MC
Messiah College	Grantham, PA	1909	BIC
Eastern Mennonite University	Harrisonburg, VA	1917	MC
Witmarsum Theol. Seminary	Bluffton, OH	1921-1931	GC
Steinbach Bible College	Steinbach, MB	1936	Chortitzer/EMC/EMMC
Fresno Pacific University <sup>3</sup>	Fresno, CA	1944	MB
Rosedale Bible College	Irwin, OH	1952	Cons.Menn.Conf.
Fresno Pacific Bib. Seminary <sup>4</sup>	Fresno, CA	1955	MB
Anab. Menn. Bib. Seminary <sup>5</sup>	Elkhart, IN	1958	GC/MC
<i>bringing together –</i>			
<i>Mennonite Bib. Seminary</i>	<i>Chicago, IL</i>	<i>1945</i>	<i>GC</i>
<i>Goshen Bib. Seminary</i>	<i>Goshen, IN</i>	<i>1946</i>	<i>MC</i>
Conrad Grebel Univ. College	Waterloo, ON	1963	GC/MC
Eastern Mennonite Seminary	Harrisonburg, VA	1965	MC
Columbia Bible College	Abbotsford, BC	1970	GC/MB
<i>bringing together –</i>			
<i>Menn. Brethren Bib. Inst.</i>	<i>Abbotsford, BC</i>	<i>1943</i>	<i>MB</i>
<i>Bethel Bible Institute</i>	<i>Abbotsford, BC</i>	<i>1946</i>	<i>GC</i>
Canadian Mennonite Univ.	Winnipeg, MB	2000	GC/MB
<i>bringing together –</i>			
<i>Men. Brethren Bib. College</i>	<i>Winnipeg, MB</i>	<i>1944</i>	<i>MB</i>
<i>Can. Men. Bib. College</i>	<i>Winnipeg, MB</i>	<i>1947</i>	<i>GC</i>
<i>Menno Simons College</i>	<i>Winnipeg, MB</i>	<i>1982</i>	<i>--</i>

<sup>1</sup> Known as Elkhart Institute and located in Elkhart, Indiana, 1894-1903.

<sup>2</sup> Known as Central Mennonite College, 1899-1913.

<sup>3</sup> Known as Pacific Bible Institute, 1944-1964.

<sup>4</sup> Known as Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1955-2010.

<sup>5</sup> Known as Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries/Seminary, 1958-2012.

## Appendix F

### Major North American Mission and Service Organizations

Name	Office address	Origin
Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission <i>Supported by EMC, Fellowship of Evangelical Churches, MB, MC Canada, and MC USA congregations. Known as Congo Inland Mission until 1972.</i>	Goshen, Indiana	1912
Amish Mennonite Aid <i>Sponsors international mission and relief work of Amish Mennonite Churches.</i>	Free Union, Virginia	1955
Brethren in Christ World Missions <i>North American and international mission agency of BIC.</i>	Grantham, Pennsylvania	1898
Christian Aid Ministries <i>International relief and Christian literature distribution, supported by a wide range of Amish and conservative Mennonite groups.</i>	Berlin, Ohio	1981
Christian Peacemaker Teams <i>Sponsors nonviolent direct action and support for peacemakers in conflict settings around the world, with funding from Mennonite, Brethren and Quaker churches.</i>	Chicago, Ill. & Toronto, Ont.	1987
Chortitzer Men. Board of Missions <i>National and international mission agency of Chortitzer Mennonite Conference.</i>	Steinbach, Manitoba	1968
Eastern Mennonite Missions <i>National and international mission agency of Lancaster Conference of Mennonite Church USA, and several other Anabaptist groups.</i>	Salunga, Pennsylvania	1914
Evangelical Mennonite Conference Board of Missions <i>International mission agency of EMC.</i>	Steinbach, Manitoba	1953
General Mission Board of the Church of God in Christ <i>International mission agency of Holdeman Mennonites.</i>	Moundridge, Kansas	1933
MB Mission <i>National and international agency of Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.</i>	Abbotsford, British Columbia	1900

<b>Name</b>	<b>Office address</b>	<b>Origin</b>
Mennonite Central Committee	Akron, Pennsylvania	1920
<i>Global relief, development, and peace agency of a wide range of North American Mennonite, BIC and Amish groups. Beginning in 2012 MCC's international programs will be assumed by Mennonite Central Committee Canada (Winnipeg, Manitoba; 1963) and Mennonite Central Committee U.S. (Akron, Pennsylvania, 1979), which had previously administered only North American programs.</i>		
Mennonite Church Canada Witness	Winnipeg, Manitoba	2002
<i>National and international agency of Mennonite Church Canada, and continuing the work of predecessors Commission on Home Ministries (1884) and Commission on Overseas Mission (1872) of the former GC Mennonite Church; and Mennonite Board of Missions (1906) of the former MC Mennonite Church.</i>		
Mennonite Disaster Service	Lititz, Pennsylvania	1950
<i>Disaster-relief agency supported by a wide variety of North American Mennonite, Amish, and BIC churches, active in Canada and the United States and occasionally elsewhere. Until 1993 MDS was a part of MCC.</i>		
Mennonite Mission Network	Elkhart, Indiana	2002
<i>National and international agency of Mennonite Church USA, and continuing the work of predecessors Commission on Home Ministries (1884) and Commission on Overseas Mission (1872) of the former GC Mennonite Church; and Mennonite Board of Missions (1906) of the former MC Mennonite Church.</i>		
Mennonite Economic Development Associates	Waterloo, Ontario	1953
<i>Association of Mennonite business people developing and implementing local, sustainable, market-driven economic development nationally and internationally.</i>		
Mennonite Messianic Mission	Ephrata, Pennsylvania	1970
<i>North American and international mission agency of Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church.</i>		
Northern Youth Programs	Dryden, Ontario	1967
<i>Ministry among First Nations in Ontario, supported by a variety of predominately conservative Mennonite groups.</i>		
Rosedale Mennonite Missions	Rosedale, Ohio	1919
<i>National and international mission agency of Conservative Mennonite Conference.</i>		
Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions	Harrisonburg, Virginia	1919
<i>International mission agency of Virginia Conference of Mennonite Church USA.</i>		

## Abbreviations

AIC	African-Initiated Church
AIMM	Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission
AMA	Amish Mennonite Aid
AMBS	Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries/ Seminary
ASW	Alternative Service Work (alternative to military service, Canada)
BIC	Brethren in Christ
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMC	Brethren and Mennonite Council for Gay and Lesbian Concerns
CAM	Christian Aid Ministries
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CIM	Congo Inland Mission
CMBC	Canadian Mennonite Bible College (1947-2000)
CMC	Conference of Mennonites in Canada
CMU	Canadian Mennonite University (after 2000)
CO	Conscientious Objector (to military service)
COGS	Conscientious Objector girls
CPS	Civilian Public Service (alternative to military service, U.S.)
CPT	Christian Peacemaker Teams
DOOR	Denver Opportunity for Outreach and Reflection
EMB	Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches)
EMC	Kleine Gemeinde/Evangelical Mennonite Conference
EMM	Eastern Mennonite Missions
EMMC	Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference
FQ	<i>Festival Quarterly</i>
GC	General Conference
I-W	U.S. Selective Service classification for conscientious objectors

IVEP	International Visitor Visitor Exchange Program
KMB	Krimmer Mennonite Brethren
LMS	Lancaster Mennonite School
MB	Mennonite Brethren
MBBC	Mennonite Brethren Bible College
MBIC	Mennonite Brethren in Christ (after 1947 United Missionary Church)
MC	Mennonite Church; before 1971, (Old) Mennonite
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MCS	Mennonite Conciliation Service
MDS	Mennonite Disaster Service
MEDA	Mennonite Economic Development Associates
MF	Mennonite Foundation
MFC	Mennonite Foundation Canada
MMA	Mennonite Mutual Aid (now Everence)
MMN	Mennonite Mission Network
MPM	Mennonite Pioneer Mission
MWC	Mennonite World Conference
NAE	National Association of Evangelicals
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NCA	North Central Association of Universities and Colleges
NDP	New Democratic Party (Canada)
NFB	National Film Board of Canada
NPR	National Public Radio
PAX	Mennonite Central Committee volunteer service program
SWAP	Sharing with Appalachian People
TAP	Teachers Abroad Program
VORP	Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program
VS	Voluntary Service
YES	Youth Evangelism Service
YADA	Young Adult Discipleship Adventure

# End Notes

## Preface

- <sup>1</sup> Marie Becker, "Our Trip from Russia to America, 1877," trans., Augusta Schmidt, *Alexanderwohl-Tabor: From Holland to America*, ed., Martha Friesen Gaber (self published, North Newton, KS, 1961), 19-37.
- <sup>2</sup> Story recounted by Saulo Padilla as a guest speaker to Goshen College students in various sections of Immigration and Ethnic History and History of Mennonites in America, most recently on January 26, 2011. See Saulo Padilla, "Open Your Arms: A Reflection and Invitation," *A Common Place*, Spring 2012, 14-17.
- <sup>3</sup> Alemu Checole, Bekithemba Dube, Doris Dube, Michael Badasu, Erik Kumedisa, Barbara Nkala, I.U. Nsagak, Siaka Traore and Pakisa Tshimika, *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts; Global Mennonite History Series: Africa* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books and Kitchener ON: Pandora Press, 2006); Claude Baecher, Neal Blough, James Jakob Fehr, Alle G. Hoekema, Hanspeter Jecker, John N. Klassen, Diether Götz Lichdi, Ed van Straten and Annelies Verbeek, *Testing Faith and Tradition; Global Mennonite History Series: Europe* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books and Kitchener ON: Pandora Press, 2006); Jaime Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration; Global Mennonite History Series: Latin America*, ed. and trans by C. Arnold Snyder, (Intercourse, PA: Good Books and Kitchener ON: Pandora Press, 2010); I. P. Ash-eervadam, Adhi Dhrama, Alle Hoekema, Kyong-Jung Kim, Luke Martin, Regina Lynn Mondez, Chiou-Lang Pan, Nguyen Thanh Tam, Nguyen Thi Tam, Takanobu Tojo, Nguyen Quang Trung, Masakazu Yamade, and Earl Zimmerman, *Churches Engage Asian Traditions*; (Intercourse, PA: Good Books and Kitchener ON: Pandora Press, 2011).

## Chapter 1: Finding Faith and Leaving Europe

- <sup>1</sup> Original wording: "roten indenn über das mer." See Leland Harder, ed., *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), 451, Document 71-O.
- <sup>2</sup> Reproduced in Clarence Hiebert, ed., *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need: A Scrapbook About Mennonite Immigrants From Russia, 1870-1885* (North Newton, KS, 1974), 147.
- <sup>3</sup> John D. Daniels, "The Indian Population of North America in 1492," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 49 (April 1992), 296-320; Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).
- <sup>4</sup> Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and John H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
- <sup>5</sup> For a well-documented survey of Anabaptism in its first two generations, see C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1995).
- <sup>6</sup> From "A Christian Catechism" (1526) of Balthasar Hubmaier; H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, trans. and eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 348.

- <sup>7</sup> C. Arnold Snyder and Linda Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).
- <sup>8</sup> John S. Oyer, "From Anabaptists to Mennonites: Some Selected Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Developments" in *"They Harry the Good People Out of the Land": Essays on the Persecution, Survival and Flourishing of Anabaptists and Mennonites*, (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 2000), 49-62.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Pietism see W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and A. G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 62-94.
- <sup>11</sup> For a story of Mennonite-Quaker interaction and conversion see John L. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship: A Narrative History of Life in the Oldest Mennonite Community in North America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 36-39, 46-50.
- <sup>12</sup> Hans de Ries, *Historie der Martelaren ofte waerachtighe Getuygen Jesu Christi . . .* (Haarlem, 1615), 156-57.
- <sup>13</sup> See James W. Lowry, trans. and ed., *Documents of Brotherly Love: Dutch Mennonite Aid to Swiss Anabaptists* (Millersburg, OH: Ohio Amish Library, 2007).
- <sup>14</sup> John D. Roth, trans. and ed., *Letters of the Amish Division: A Source Book* (Goshen, IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1993).
- <sup>15</sup> C. Henry Smith, *The Mennonite Immigration to Pennsylvania in the Eighteenth Century* (Norristown, PA: Pennsylvania German Society, 1929), 71-72.
- <sup>16</sup> For overviews, see Hans Fenske, "International Migration: Germany in the Eighteenth Century," *Central European History* 13 (1980), 332-47; Marianne S. Wocek, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999), xix-35.
- <sup>17</sup> Aaron S. Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717-1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 16-28, 58-59.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 29, 33-34, 60; Mark Häberlein, "Communication and Group Interaction Among German Migrants to Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Baden-Durlach," 156-71, in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity: New German Settlements in Eighteenth-Century Europe and America*, ed. by Hartmut Lehmann, Hermann Wellenreuther, and Renate Wilson (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) describes the role of personal correspondence in motivating emigration and describing an appealing destination.
- <sup>19</sup> Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys*, 28-31.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31. On the relative appeal of eastern Europe versus North America, see the comparative essays in Lehmann, Wellenreuther, and Wilson, eds., *In Search of Peace and Prosperity*.
- <sup>21</sup> Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys*, 32-35 and 36-65 for a case study of the Kraichgau. On the comparative role of the state, see Hermann Wellenreuther, "Contexts for Migration in the Early Modern World: Public Policy, European Migrating Experiences, Transatlantic Migration, and the Genesis of American Culture," 3-35, in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity*.



- <sup>22</sup> For an overview and bibliography, see Carola Wessel, "‘We Do Not Want to Introduce Anything New’: Transplanting the Communal Life from Herrnhut to the Upper Ohio Valley," 246-62, in *In Search of Peace and Prosperity*.
- <sup>23</sup> For context, see Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans: Migration in Western Europe since 1650* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 11, 105-107.
- <sup>24</sup> Harvey Plett, "Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church: A Study in Continuity," Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 1991.
- <sup>25</sup> James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, MB: Hyperion Press, 1989).
- <sup>26</sup> See for example: E. K. Francis, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sociological Interpretation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 25 (July 1951), 173-182. Hereafter cited as MQR.
- <sup>27</sup> John N. Klassen, "Mennonites in Russia and Their Migrations," in Claude Baecher, et al., *Testing Faith and Tradition*, 181-232, quotation from 193.
- <sup>28</sup> Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, 1789-1910* (Fresno, CA: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, 1978), 212.
- <sup>29</sup> John Funk to Peter Toews, August 21, 1874 in Delbert F. Plett, *Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde* (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1986), 286.
- <sup>30</sup> Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 592.
- <sup>31</sup> George K. Epp, "Russian Patriotism Among Nineteenth Century Russian Mennonites," *JMS* 4 (1986), 127. Cited hereafter as *JMS*. See also Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 958; John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets & Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1982); Abraham Friesen, *In Defence of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 2006).
- <sup>32</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite in Canada: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1982), 144.
- <sup>33</sup> See James C. Juhnke, "Turning Points, Broken Ice, and *Glaubensgenossen*: What Happened at Prairie Street on July 27-28, 1920?" in Alain Epp Weaver, ed., *A Table of Sharing: Mennonite Central Committee and the Expanding Networks of Mennonite Identity* (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011), 66-83.
- <sup>34</sup> Katie Funk Wiebe and Richard D. Thiessen, "Janz, Benjamin B. (1877-1964)," *GAMEO*, retrieved 8 Feb., 2008. See also John B. Toews, *With Courage to Spare: The Life of B. B. Janz, 1877-1964* (Winnipeg, MB: General Conference Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978). Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: DW Friesen and Sons, 1962); John B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland: The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Union, 1921-1927* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967).
- <sup>35</sup> See Helmut Harder, *David Toews was Here, 1870-1947* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Press, 2002).
- <sup>36</sup> See for example: Peter Letkemann, "The Fate of Mennonites in the Volga-Ural Region, 1929-1941," *JMS* 26 (2008), 181-200.
- <sup>37</sup> Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Immigration to Canada and Paraguay after the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). See also Pamela E. Klassen, *Going by the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994); Waldemar Janzen, *Growing up in Turbulent Times: Memoirs of Soviet Oppression*,

*Refugee Life in Germany and Immigrant Adjustment to Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2007).

- <sup>38</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981).
- <sup>39</sup> See for example: Bill Redekop, "Bridges Built, Lessons Learned," *Winnipeg Free Press* (13 March 2005), Section B.

## Chapter 2: Faith and Family in a New Land

- <sup>1</sup> Corinne P. and Russell Earnest, *To the Latest Posterity: Pennsylvania-German Family Registers in the Fraktur Tradition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 55, 57, 72-74, 107.
- <sup>2</sup> Mahala Yoder Diary, 17 April, 1871; 7 May 1871; 29 July, 1871; 18 August 1871; 2, 8, & 24 December 1871; 12 January 1873; 22 July 1873; 2 April 1875; Mahala Yoder (1850-1879) Collection, Hist. Mss. 1-12, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, IN.
- <sup>3</sup> Earnest, *To the Latest Posterity*, 6-8, 26-27, 38-46, 52, 58, 78. Corinne and Russell Earnest document these striking patterns in Pennsylvania German family records, including – and perhaps even pioneered by – Mennonites.
- <sup>4</sup> Mahala Yoder Diary, 27 December 1872; 10 March 1873; 2 November 1876.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard K. MacMaster, with Samuel L. Horst and Robert F. Ulle, *Conscience in Crisis: Mennonites and Other Peace Churches in America, 1739-1789* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), 165, 168, 176-85.
- <sup>6</sup> Quoted in Richard B. Yoder, "Nonresistance among the Peace Churches of Somerset County, Pennsylvania during the Civil War," Goshen Biblical Seminary term paper, 1959, Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, IN.
- <sup>7</sup> The traditional version of the story is found in Harvey Hostetler, *Descendants of Jacob Hochstetler, the Immigrant of 1736* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1912), 29-45.
- <sup>8</sup> MacMaster, et al., *Conscience in Crisis*, 209-10.
- <sup>9</sup> E. Reginald Good, "Lost Inheritance: Alienation of Six Nations' Lands in Upper Canada, 1784-1805," *JMS* 19 (2001), 92-102, quote from 99; Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 67-131.
- <sup>10</sup> Entry for 1 June 1846 in James L. Morris, "Diary, or Daily Notes of the Weather together with the Events of the Neighborhood, etc., etc.," original vol. 3, Historical Society of Berks County, Reading, PA. See also Alfred L. Shoemaker, "Whit-Monday . . . Dutch Fourth of July," *Pennsylvania Dutchman* 5 (May 1853), 5, 12.
- <sup>11</sup> "Missionary Journal of Pastor John H. Bernheim," [6 July-24 October 1835], appended to *Minutes of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Pennsylvania . . . 1836* (Allentown, PA: A. W. Blumer, 1836), 55, 57, 72-74, 107.
- <sup>12</sup> Christian Burkholder, *Nützliche und Erbauliche Anrede an die Jugend . . .* (Elkhart, IN, 1868), 190, 201, 207.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ausbund: das ist, Etliche schöne Christliche Lieder* (Lancaster, PA: Verlag von den Amischen Gemeinden in Lancaster County, 2003), 317; translation by Ohio Amish Library, in *Songs of the Ausbund. History and Translations of Ausbund Hymns*,

- v. 1 (Millersburg, OH: Ohio Amish Library, 1998), 125. The hymn is believed to be an Anabaptist adaptation of an earlier Catholic hymn.
- <sup>14</sup> In Canada, the River Brethren/Brethren in Christ were nicknamed *Tunkers* because of their practice of immersion baptism. That nickname was rarely if ever used in the United States for this group. In the U.S., the nickname *Dunkers* or *Dunkards* was used for the German Baptist Brethren/Church of the Brethren.
- <sup>15</sup> Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 96; Peter Burkholder, *The Confession of Faith of the Christians Known by the Name of Mennonites, in Thirty-Three Articles*. . . . (Winchester, VA: Robinson and Hollis, 1837), 397-98.
- <sup>16</sup> Steven D. Reschly, *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie, 1840-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 72.
- <sup>17</sup> E. Morris Sider, *The Brethren in Christ in Canada: Two Hundred Years of Tradition and Change* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1988), 17-18, quoting earlier accounts.
- <sup>18</sup> Neil Ann Stuckey Levine, Ursula Roy, and David J. Rempel Smucker, "The View of Louis C. Jüngerich (1803-1882) in 1826: It is Best to Come to This Country Well Prepared," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 20 (July 1997), 10.
- <sup>19</sup> Harold S. Bender, "Some Early American Amish Mennonite Disciplines," *MQR* 8 (April 1934), 90-98.
- <sup>20</sup> Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).
- <sup>21</sup> John S. Umble, trans. and ed., "Memoirs of an Amish Bishop," *MQR* 22 (April 1948), 101-104.
- <sup>22</sup> Amos B. Hoover, ed. and comp., *The Jonas Martin Era: Presented in a Collection of Essays, Letters, and Documents*. . . . (Denver, PA: Muddy Creek Farm Library, 1982), 593.
- <sup>23</sup> Mahala Yoder Diary, 30 May 1871; 27 February 1873; 5 October 1874.
- <sup>24</sup> Christina Herr to "Cousin Sarah" and, in the same letter, J. & B. Herr to J. & C. Nold, undated apparently written in 1864, Jacob Nold Collection, Hist Mss. 1-873, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, IN.
- <sup>25</sup> Levi Eash, Middlebury, Lagrange Co., Indiana to Samuel S. Yoder, 2 March 1862, Samuel S. Yoder Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- <sup>26</sup> Peter Nissley, Marietta, Lancaster Co., PA to John F. Funk, 6 Aug. 1863, John F. Funk Papers, Hist Mss. 1-1, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, IN.
- <sup>27</sup> T. D. Regehr, *Peace, Order, and Good Government: Mennonites and Politics in Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 2000); Robin W. Winks, *Canada and the United States: The Civil War Years* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1960).
- <sup>28</sup> "Letter from Virginia" and "Another Letter from the Same," *Herald of Truth* 2 (July 1865), 53. Letters dated May and June 1865.
- <sup>29</sup> "Our Duty Toward the Russian Brethren," *Herald of Truth*, Oct. 1873, 165-66.

### Chapter 3: Creating Communities in the Interior

- <sup>1</sup> Margaretha Jansen, diary, translated by Anna Linscheid, Mennonite Library and Archives [hereafter MLA], North Newton, KS, Cornelius Jansen Collection.

- <sup>2</sup> Heinrich Friesen, diary, 1893-1918, 23 volumes, trans. by Irene Enns Kroeker, in John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve, 1874-1910* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 1894), 597-608.
- <sup>3</sup> Heinrich Friesen, diary.
- <sup>4</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893 in *The Frontier in American History* (New York, H. Holt, 1920), 109-227; Donald G. Creighton, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1944).
- <sup>5</sup> Among many works on the 1870s migration see: Harley J. Stucky, *A Century of Russian Mennonite History in America: A Study of Cultural Interaction* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, 1973).
- <sup>6</sup> For an account of Oregon Mennonites see Hope Kauffman Lind, *Apart and Together: Mennonites in Oregon and Neighboring States, 1876-1976* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990).
- <sup>7</sup> Clarence Hiebert, *The Henderson Mennonite Brethren, 1878-1978* (Henderson, NE: Centennial Committee, the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1979), 23; Lois R. Habegger, *Cheyenne Trails: A History of Mennonites and Cheyennes in Montana* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication House, 1959).
- <sup>8</sup> Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 40.
- <sup>9</sup> John C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World: 1650-1900* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003).
- <sup>10</sup> Manifest destiny in the United States was almost always linked to claims of divine providence, while the so-called "Fathers of Confederation" in Canada invoked Psalm 72:8 to explain the expansion of "His Dominion."
- <sup>11</sup> For a popular history of the "Indian Wars" in the United States see Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, Winston, 1970).
- <sup>12</sup> For a well researched, albeit fictional account, of the battle between the forces of Big Bear and the Canadian military see Mennonite author Rudy Wiebe's novel, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973).
- <sup>13</sup> Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?: The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994).
- <sup>14</sup> James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada, 1525-1980* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2006); James Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1975).
- <sup>15</sup> Peter Toews, "Anhang Number 1 to Sammlung von Briefe und Schrifliche Nachrichten zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten, 1874," in *History and Events*, ed. and trans., Delbert F. Plett (Steinbach, MB: self, 1982), 37.
- <sup>16</sup> Toews, "Anhang," 71.
- <sup>17</sup> John J. Friesen, *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites* (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2007), 29. See also Peter D. Zacharias, "Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905)," in *Church, Family, Village: Essays on Life on the West Reserve*, eds., Adolf Ens, Jacob E. Peters, Otto Hamm (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1999), 53-66, quote from 57.

- <sup>18</sup> Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America, 1900*, trans. by Helen Janzen (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981), 36.
- <sup>19</sup> E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen, 1955).
- <sup>20</sup> Conrad D. Stoesz, "The Post Road," in *Church, Family, Village*, 81-92, 89.
- <sup>21</sup> William Neufeld, *From Faith to Faith: The History of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1989), 25.
- <sup>22</sup> Ralph Friesen, *Between Earth and Sky: Steinbach, the First 50 Years* (Steinbach, MB: Derksen Printers, 2009).
- <sup>23</sup> John W. Schmidt, "Turkey Wheat: A Mennonite Contribution to Great Plains Agriculture," *Mennonite Life* (December 1974), 67-69, quote from 67.
- <sup>24</sup> Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 47; Dennis Engbrecht, *The Americanization of a Rural Immigrant Church: The General Conference Mennonites in Central Kansas, 1874-1939* (New York: Garland, 1990), 69.
- <sup>25</sup> Rodney Sawatsky, *History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition through History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005); see also Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, 22.
- <sup>26</sup> Engbrecht, *The Americanization of a Rural Immigrant Church*, 2.
- <sup>27</sup> John Thiesen, *Prussian Roots, Kansas Branches: A History of First Mennonite Church of Newton* (Newton, KS: First Mennonite Church, 1986), 2.
- <sup>28</sup> Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, 22.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 and 33.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>32</sup> Engbrecht, *The Americanization of a Rural Immigrant Church*, 78.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 80 and 143.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 105 and 52.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 193 and 201.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 208 and 211. See also Marvin E. Kroecker, *Comanches and Mennonites on the Oklahoma Plains: A. J. and Magdalena Becker and the Post Oak Mission* (Fresno, CA: Centre for MB Studies, 1997).
- <sup>38</sup> J. A. Wiebe, "The Founding of Gnadenu," 1912, in *From the Steppes to the Prairies (1874-1949)*, ed. by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication House, 1949), 98-101. See also David V. Wiebe, *Grace Meadow: The Story of Gnadenu and its First Elder, Marion County, Kansas* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1967).
- <sup>39</sup> Clarence Hiebert, *The Holdeman People: The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, 1859-1969* (South Pasadena, CA: Wm Carey, 1973).
- <sup>40</sup> G. S. Rempel, *A Historical Sketch of the Church of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren* (Rosthern, SK: D. H. Epp, 1939), 88. See also Kevin Enns-Rempel, "The Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches and the Quest for Religious Identity," *MQR* 63 (July 1989), 247-264.
- <sup>41</sup> Rod A. Janzen, *The Prairie People: Forgotten Anabaptists* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 40.

- <sup>42</sup> J. John Friesen, et al., eds. *Seventy Five Years in Minnesota, 1874-1949* (Mountain Lake, MN: 1949), 22.
- <sup>43</sup> With reference to the venerated status of Mrs. Neufeld, see also *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 15 December, 1881.
- <sup>44</sup> Elsie Penner Pankratz, *Through the Years: Memoirs of Elsie Penner Pankratz* (Newton, KS: Wordsworth, 1993), 7.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 and 5.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>47</sup> Hiebert, *The Henderson Mennonite Brethren*, 10. For another account of a Nebraska community see Centennial Book Committee, *God's Love in Action: The Mennonite Community of Beatrice, Nebraska, 1876-1976* (Beatrice, NE: Centennial Committee, 1978).
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.
- <sup>50</sup> Janzen, *Prairie People*, 58. See also John D. Unruh, *A Century of Mennonites in Dakota: A Segment of the German Russians* (n.p., 1972).
- <sup>51</sup> Janzen, *Prairie People*, 70 and 10.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 107, 111, 198.
- <sup>54</sup> Marvin E. Kroeker, "Die Stillen Im Lande: Mennonites in the Oklahoma Land Rushes," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 67 (1989), 76-97, quotation from 78.
- <sup>55</sup> Sharon Harton Iorio, *Faith's Harvests: Mennonite Identity in Northwest Oklahoma* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 42.
- <sup>56</sup> Kroeker, "Die Stillen Im Lande," 82. See also Wilma McKee, ed., *Growing Faith: General Conference Mennonites in Oklahoma* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1988) and Esther Loewen Vogt, *A Race for Land* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992).
- <sup>57</sup> Iorio, *Faith's Harvests*, 48.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 50 and 83.
- <sup>59</sup> Adolf Ens, *Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2004), 10; Helmut Harder, *David Toews was Here* (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2002), 52.
- <sup>60</sup> Leonard Doell, *The Berghaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan, 1892-1975* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1987), 12.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>62</sup> Leo Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 76.
- <sup>63</sup> See Romans 12: 2.
- <sup>64</sup> Peter F. Bargaen, "The Mennonites of Alberta," MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1953, 36. See also Arthur Kroeger, *Hard Passage: A Mennonite Family's Long Journey from Russia to Canada* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2007).
- <sup>65</sup> Bargaen, "The Mennonites of Alberta," 22; T. D. Regehr, *Faith, Life and Witness in the Northwest, 1903-2003: Centennial History of the Northwest Mennonite Conference* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 15.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>69</sup> Gary B. Nachtigall, "Mennonite Migrations and Settlements of California," MA Thesis, California State University, 1972, 26; Brian Michael Driedger Froese, "'In This Far Off Country': An Examination of Mennonite Identity in California, 1905-1960," Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 2003, 48.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 50.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., 52.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 68.
- <sup>75</sup> M. J. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Witness through Three Generations* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003), 35.
- <sup>76</sup> James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 217.
- <sup>77</sup> Gerlof D. Homan, *American Mennonites and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 182.
- <sup>78</sup> Melanie Springer Mock, *Writing Peace: The Unheard Voices of Great War Mennonite Objectors* (Telford PA: Pandora, 2003), 186.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid., 215 and 216.
- <sup>80</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 240.
- <sup>81</sup> Homan, *American Mennonites and the Great War*, 153.
- <sup>82</sup> Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 190.
- <sup>83</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto, ON: Macmillan, 1982), 187.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>85</sup> John Jacob Krahn, "A History of the Mennonites in British Columbia," Graduate Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1955.
- <sup>86</sup> Leonard N. Neufeldt, ed., *Before We Were the Land's: Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise* (Victoria, BC: Horsdal and Schubart, 2002), 119; 151.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid., 177.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 170.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid., 213.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 184, 173, 203.
- <sup>91</sup> Ibid., 208, 225.
- <sup>92</sup> See H. Leonard Sawatsky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).
- <sup>93</sup> Walter Schmiedehaus, *Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexiko* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1982), 57-8.
- <sup>94</sup> See: Martina E. Will, "The Mennonite Colonization of Chihuahua: Reflections of Competing Visions," *The Americas* 53 (1997), 353-378.
- <sup>95</sup> Isaac Dyck, "The Emigration of the Reinlaender Mennonite Church from Canada to Mexico," trans. by, Robyn Dyck Sneath, unpublished manuscript in possession of author, 3. Originally published as Isaak M. Dyck, *Die Auswanderung der Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde von Kanada nach Mexiko 1970* (Cuauhtémoc: Imprenta Colonial, 1993).
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>97</sup> *Steinbach Post*, 4 November, 1936.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 October 1945.

## Chapter 4: Struggling Stewards of the Earth

<sup>1</sup> David Bergey, diary, Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

<sup>2</sup> Helena Doerksen Reimer, "Tagebuch, 1949," George D. Reimer, Meade City, Kansas. See also Royden Loewen, "Household, Coffee Klatsch and Office: The Evolving Worlds of Mid-Twentieth Century Mennonite Women," in *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History*, eds. Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble and Steven D. Reschly (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 259-283.

<sup>3</sup> Parts of this chapter appear in Royden Loewen, "The Quiet on the Land: The Environment in Mennonite Historiography," *JMS* 22 (2005), 151-164.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Worster, "History as Natural History: An Essay on Theory and Method," *Pacific Historical Review* 53 (1984), 5.

<sup>5</sup> William Cronan, "The Uses of Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* 17 (1993), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 14.

<sup>7</sup> E. K. Francis, "The Adjustment of a Peasant Group to a Capitalist Economy: The Manitoba Mennonites," *Rural Sociology* 17 (1952), 218-228.

<sup>8</sup> Winfield Fretz, "Farming Among the Mennonites in North America," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II, 307-309. Cited hereafter as ME.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Hart, "The Earth is a Song Made Visible," in *Creation and the Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World*, ed. Calvin Redekop (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin Redekop, "Mennonites, Creation and Work," *Christian Scholar's Review* 22 (1992), 358, 359.

<sup>11</sup> Steven D. Reschly, *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie, 1840-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Peter G. Genzinger, "Mennonite Representations of Nature in the Nineteenth Century," MA Thesis, University of Guelph, 1995, 191; 193.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 251; 203.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>15</sup> Waldemar Janzen, "Geography of Faith," in *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Press, 1982), 148.

<sup>16</sup> Royden Loewen, *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Immigrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), 66.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba, 1960* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 2000); Richard Friesen, "Saskatchewan Mennonite Settlements: The Modification of an Old World Settlement Pattern," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 9 (1977), 78-90.

<sup>19</sup> Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements*, 362.

<sup>20</sup> D. Aidan McQuillan, *Prevailing Over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875-1925* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), xvii.



- <sup>21</sup> D. Aidan McQuillan, "Farm Size and Work Ethic: Measuring the Success of Immigrant Farmers on the American Grasslands, 1875-1925," *Journal of Historical Geography* 4 (1978), 57-76; see esp. 61, 63, 64.
- <sup>22</sup> Quoted in Peter Pauls, "God's Gift, the Land: A Major Theme in Peter G. Epp's Novel *Eine Mutter*," *Mennonite Life* 39 (March 1984), 27.
- <sup>23</sup> Neufeldt, *Before We Were the Land's*, 151, 156 and 171.
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## Chapter 5: Mennonites in Town and City

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- <sup>71</sup> Bender, *All the Days of My Life*, 224.
- <sup>72</sup> Susan Fisher Miller, *Culture for Service: A History of Goshen College, 1894-1994* (Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 1994), 164-65, 180-81.
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## Chapter 6: Midcentury Faith Journeys

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<sup>3</sup> Ens, *Becoming a National Church*, 75-79.

<sup>4</sup> Orland Gingerich, *The Amish of Canada* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2002), 41.

<sup>5</sup> James C. Juhnke, *Dialogue with a Heritage: Cornelius H. Wedel and the Beginnings of Bethel College* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 208, 239-40. Briercrest Bible College had been founded by Mennonite-reared Henry Hildebrand (1911-2006).

<sup>7</sup> George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 7-61, esp. 32-36, 44, 50-53.

<sup>8</sup> C. Henry Smith, *Mennonites in History* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1907), 17, 23-24; Perry Bush, *Dancing with the Kobzar, Bluffton College and Mennonite Higher Education, 1899-1999* (Telford, PA.: Pandora Press, U.S., 2000), 66-68. Two other North American Mennonites earned doctoral degrees in 1907, but did so in Europe.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth M. Miller, "Moody, Fundamentalism and Mennonites: The Struggle for Particularity and Engagement in Illinois Mennonite Churches, 1900-1955," *Illinois Mennonite Heritage Quarterly* 24 (Winter 2007), 96-101, and 25 (Spring 2008), 1-8; Kuhlmann, *The Story of Grace*.

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<sup>13</sup> Anna Beiler, Goshen, IN, to "Dear Friend Gingerich Family," October 30, 1950, and additional hand-written note on back, dated November 20, 1950; and Beiler's five-page "translation from the German" of mission conference minutes, all in Hist. Mss. 1-361, Harvey Graber Collection, Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen, IN.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin W. Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism: From Evangelical Mennonite Brethren to Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Delbert L. Wiens, "Mennonite: Neither Liberal nor Evangelical," *Direction* 20 (Spring 1991), 38.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce L. Guenther, "Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites in Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. by George A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 237-39.

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- <sup>22</sup> Guethner, "Living with the Virus," 239.
- <sup>23</sup> Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 116-22.
- <sup>24</sup> *Revival Fires in Manitoba: A Report on the Work of the Brunk Revivals, Inc., in Four Manitoba Communities, Summer of 1957* (Denbigh, VA.: Brunk Revivals, Inc., [1957]), 4, 12, 15-18. Chortitzer, Sommerfelder, and Old Colony Mennonites did not participate in sponsoring the tent revivals.
- <sup>25</sup> "Statement of Christian Doctrine and Rules and Discipline of the Mennonite Church, Lancaster Conference, Approved September 16, 1954," 22.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with John Eby, Aug. 12, 2010.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Eby; *WDAC 2010 Program Guide* [fiftieth anniversary issue], 47.
- <sup>28</sup> Hinojosa, "Race, Gender, and Mennonite Brethren Religious Identity."
- <sup>29</sup> Earl B. Groff, ed., *250 Years. Light from a Hill* (Lancaster, PA: Mellinger District, 1967), F-8.
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## Chapter 7: Transformed through Mission and Peace

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## Chapter 9: Mennonites and Money

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- <sup>12</sup> Billy M. Jones, *Factory on the Plains: Lyle Yost and the Hesston Corporation* (Wichita, KS: Center of Entrepreneurship, Wichita State University, 1987), 7; Redekop and Redekop, *Entrepreneurs in the Faith Community*, 81; Roy S. Burkholder, *Be Not Conformed to this World: A Narrative History of the Weaverland Mennonites, 1900-1975* (Lititz, PA.: R.S. Burkholder, 1997), 180.
- <sup>13</sup> Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside*, 155-60; Chad M. Horning, *Shifting Gears: A Narrative History of Horning Dodge, 1945-2003* (Goshen, IN: C. M. Horning, 2004), 19. In 1950 Steinbach was home to five car dealerships, and the village of New Holland had six.
- <sup>14</sup> Jason Kauffman, "Faith Amidst Prosperity: Business, Wealth and the Mennonite Church in Fulton County, Ohio, 1930-2005," *MQR* 81 (October 2007), 606-607, 612-14.
- <sup>15</sup> Olive J. Rich, "Discipleship as Expressed in the Archbold Community," *Mennonite Community*, May 1950, 6-11.
- <sup>16</sup> Wally Kroeker, "Ministers of Commerce: How Mennonites in Business Create Economic Hope for the Poor," *JMS* 27 (2009), 195-97.
- <sup>17</sup> J. Winfield Fretz, *The MEDA Experiment: Twenty-Five Years of Economic Development* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1978), 96-97; *The Marketplace*, November-December 2003, 4-23.
- <sup>18</sup> Kroeker, "Ministers of Commerce," 193, 199.
- <sup>19</sup> "Shirtsleeve Millionaires: An Extraordinary Crop of Newly Rich Farmers Grows in San Joaquin Valley's Once Dry Soil," *Life*, September 3, 1951, 105-13 ["Praying Potato Packer," 108, 110-11]; Kroeker, "Ministers of Commerce," 192.
- <sup>20</sup> J. Winfield Fretz, "Business," *ME*, I, 480-81.
- <sup>21</sup> Ben Noll, "'Pine Manor was Probably the Catalyst': The Challenges of Speaking for Migrant Workers in Goshen, Indiana, 1969-1971," unpublished paper, 2009, Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen College, Goshen, IN.
- <sup>22</sup> Thiessen, "Mennonite Business and Labour Relations," 181-82; Thiessen, "Mennonite Business in Town and City," 588-90.
- <sup>23</sup> Thiessen, "Mennonite Business and Labour Relations," 190-91, 196; Thiessen, "Mennonite Business in Town and City," 593, 599.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> Schlabach, *War, Peace, and Social Conscience*, 250-60; Jones, *Factory on the Plains*, 143-44, 192-207, 214.
- <sup>26</sup> Schlabach, *War, Peace, and Social Conscience*, 225-30, 234-38.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-32.
- <sup>28</sup> *Yearbook of the 51st Session, General Conference of M.B. Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1969), 17-18.
- <sup>29</sup> *Redefining Duty: Stories of Alternative Service in the Name of Christ, 1942-1970* (South Bend, IN: Kern Road Mennonite Church Peace and Justice Committee, 2010), 54, 56.



- <sup>30</sup> "Crosstown Credit Union," ME, I, 742; "Credit Unions," ME, I, 733; ME, V, 211-12.
- <sup>31</sup> Epp, *Mennonite Women*, 247; *Mennonite Community*, November 1951, 32; October 1952, 2.
- <sup>32</sup> Conrad L. Kanagy, *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007), 115-18.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-17.
- <sup>34</sup> Hugh Grant and Michael Rosenstock, "Do Mennonites Earn Less than Other Canadians? The Role of Religion in the Determination of Income," *JMS* 24 (2006), 73.
- <sup>35</sup> Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt, *Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 29.
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- <sup>37</sup> "The Lunch Pail Problem," three-part series, *Family Life*, April 1982, 12-16; May 1982, 10-14; June 1982, 11-16.
- <sup>38</sup> Kraybill and Nolt, *Amish Enterprise*, 222.
- <sup>39</sup> J. Winfield Fretz, "Mutual Aid among Mennonites," *MQR* 13 (January 1939), 28-58; (July 1939), 187-209.
- <sup>40</sup> Lauren Harder, *We Bear the Loss Together: A History of the Mennonite Aid Union, 1866-2007* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2007), 32, 84.
- <sup>41</sup> Schlabach, *War, Peace, and Social Conscience*, 308-16; Steven M. Nolt, "Fifty-Year Partners: Mennonite Mutual Aid and the Church" in *Building Communities of Compassion: Mennonite Mutual Aid in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Willard M. Swartley and Donald B. Kraybill (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 217.
- <sup>42</sup> Nolt, "Fifty-Year Partners," 219, 221-22.
- <sup>43</sup> Carl Kreider, "The Christian Attitude toward Investments," *Gospel Herald*, February 9, 1945, 900-901.
- <sup>44</sup> Nolt, "Fifty-Year Partners," 224-25; Steven M. Nolt interview with John H. Rudy, August 11, 1995.
- <sup>45</sup> Nolt, "Fifty-Year Partners," 223-27; John Dyck, *A Foundation Like No Other: Mennonite Foundation of Canada, 1973-1998* (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Foundation of Canada, 1999).
- <sup>46</sup> Emails to Steven M. Nolt from Mennonite Foundation, Feb. 9, 2012 and Mennonite Foundation Canada, Nov. 19, 2011; <http://www.mennofoundation.ca/home>
- <sup>47</sup> Willis Sommer, "Mennonite Institutions and Mennonite Capital" in *Anabaptist/ Mennonite Faith and Economics*, ed. by Calvin W. Redekop, Victor A. Krahn, and Samuel J. Steiner (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 225-78; Praxis 2010 *Annual Report to Shareholders*.
- <sup>48</sup> <http://www.afweb.org/>
- <sup>49</sup> James M. Harder, "Church-Related Institutions: Driven by Member Commitment or by Economic Forces?" *MQR* 71 (July 1997), 380.
- <sup>50</sup> Kauffman began his work with the 1952 Conrad Grebel Lectureship, and in 1955 published *The Challenge of Christian Stewardship* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press).

- <sup>51</sup> "Declaration of Commitment in Respect to Christian Separation and Nonconformity to the World," Statement adopted by Mennonite General Conference, August 27, 1955, reprinted in J. C. Wenger, *The Mennonite Church in America, Sometimes Called Old Mennonites* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1966), 357.
- <sup>52</sup> "Our Mission is One: An Interpretation of the Mennonite Church's Work in the World Today" (Scottsdale, PA: [Mennonite Church General Council, 1965]), 30.
- <sup>53</sup> *Mennonite Yearbook 1966*, 62; *Mennonite Yearbook 1997*, 213. Separating out the 1995 figures for Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada and Northwest Mennonite Conference shows that their category percentages were essentially the same as those of their U.S. area conference cousins.
- <sup>54</sup> General Conference *Handbook of Information 1965-66*, and *Handbook of Information 1997*. The percentages of monies kept for local use are quite similar for Canadian and U.S. General Conference churches, although the percentages going to districts and denominational levels is different due to the fact that Canadian churches also gave to Conference of Mennonites in Canada. E.g., in 1964, U.S. congregations kept 55.8% of offering receipts, and Canadian congregations, 56.8%. Meanwhile, U.S. churches gave 35.5% of their funds to denominational GC boards, while Canadian churches directed only 24.8% there since they were also giving to the Canadian Conference. Similar patterns appear in 1995, where 72.2% of U.S. congregational receipts and 70.4% of Canadian, remained local. Canadian churches directed 6.3% of their funds to Conference of Mennonites in Canada and 10.2% to denominational GC boards; U.S. churches gave 16.9% of their funds to denominational GC boards and none to CMC. Other categories of giving were district/provincial conference, other Mennonite entities, and non-Mennonite entities. In 1995 U.S. GC churches gave slightly more to non-Mennonite entities, and Canadian congregations slightly more to provincial district conferences. Giving to MCC via congregations was included everywhere under "GC boards," not "other Mennonite entities."
- <sup>55</sup> *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 2004* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 384.
- <sup>56</sup> Susan Biesecker-Mast, *Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Findings of the Faith Communities Today Survey (FACT)* (Scottsdale, PA: Faith & Life Resources, 2003), 38-40.
- <sup>57</sup> E-mails to Steven M. Nolt from Mennonite Foundation, Goshen, Indiana, 23 Sept. 2004, and Mennonite Foundation Canada, Winnipeg, Man., 22 Sept. 2004. As public foundations, MF and MFC are donor-directed entities, so disbursements are set by those making the donation; however, see "Guidelines for Responsible Giving" [form 2040069], which lists nine criteria that MF uses in working with clients.
- <sup>58</sup> *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 17 April 2006, 1, 10.
- <sup>59</sup> Lucille Marr, *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and its Evolution in Ontario* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 272.
- <sup>60</sup> Kreider and Goossen, *Hungry, Thirsty, a Stranger*, 361-69.
- <sup>61</sup> *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 8 Oct., 1970; 13 March 13, 1975; Mennonite Central Committee Annual Report 2010.
- <sup>62</sup> *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 13 March 1975.
- <sup>63</sup> Ervin Beck, "The Relief Sale Festival," 200-201, in *MennoFolk: Mennonite and Amish Folk Traditions* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004).

- <sup>64</sup> The first auction was in northern Indiana, and initiated by Alvin E. Miller, pastor of Milford Chapel, to support work of the Mennonite Gospel Mission in Haiti.
- <sup>65</sup> Steven M. Nolt, "Mennonite Identity and the Writing on the 'New Giving' since 1945," *JMS* 23 (2005), 70-71.

## Chapter 10: Worshipping Communities

- <sup>1</sup> *Living Water, Living Faith: Mennonite Women of Color*, produced by Linda Christophel and Patricia Lehman (Goshen, IN: Goshen College, 2005), video disk, 59 minutes.
- <sup>2</sup> Jonathan M. Dueck, "An Ethnographic Study of the Musical Practices of Three Edmonton Mennonite Churches," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 2003, 87-88, 90-96.
- <sup>3</sup> Numeric data for 2010, here and in subsequent paragraphs is taken or calculated from Donald B. Kraybill, ed., *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 251-58.
- <sup>4</sup> *Mennonite Weekly Review*, January 9, 1975, 8; January 23, 1975, 8; April 4, 1985, 8; April 18, 1985, 13; October 19, 1995, 8; *Mennonite Reporter*, September 4, 1995, 11.
- <sup>5</sup> Spreadsheet listing of Mennonite preschools and daycare programs, compiled by professor of education emerita Kathryn Aschliman, Goshen, Indiana, 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> Gladys Terichow, "MCC Thift Shops Began at a Tea Party," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, June 18, 2007, 19.
- <sup>7</sup> Felipe Hinojosa, "Mennonites in the Barrio: The Rancho Alegre Youth Center in Alice, Texas," *Mennonite Life* 65 (Summer 2011), accessed at [http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2011/mennonites\\_barrio.php?view=print](http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2011/mennonites_barrio.php?view=print)
- <sup>8</sup> "Refugees," ME, V; *Mennonite Weekly Review*, February 7, 1985, 1-2; Gary S. Elbow, "The Overground Railroad: Refugee Flows to Canada," 57-61, in *Geographical Snapshots of North America*, ed. by Donald G. Janelle (New York: Guilford Press, 1992).
- <sup>9</sup> Stephen Scott, *An Introduction to Old Order and Conservative Mennonite Groups* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1996), 160-63. Most members of the congregations described here had withdrawn from the MC Mennonite branch, but some had withdrawn from the Conservative Mennonite Conference, and in Western Canada there were some of Dutch-North German heritage. Lester Bauman, *God and Uncle Dale* (Crockett, KY: Rod and Staff Publishers, 2005), narrates these events as they unfolded in Alberta.
- <sup>10</sup> David Harrington Watt, *Bible Carrying Christians: Conservative Protestants and Social Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 57, 58, 64-65.
- <sup>11</sup> Jeff Gundy, *A Community of Memory: My Days with George and Clara* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 117.
- <sup>12</sup> *Church Organization and Administration: Proceedings of the Study Conference . . . held at Chicago, Illinois, March 28-29, 1955* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), 19-34. Peachey's essay was cited with approval by GC Mennonites in *Proceedings of the Study Conference on the Believers' Church, held at . . . Chicago, Illinois, August 23-25, 1955* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, 1955), 135-40; John Howard Yoder, "The Fullness of Christ: Perspectives on Ministries in Renewal," *Concern* No. 17 (February 1969), 33-93.

- <sup>13</sup> *Report of the South Central Mennonite Conference*, August 18-21, 1953 (Hutchinson, KS), 17-19; *Report of the South Central Mennonite Conference*, August 17-20, 1954 (Eldon, MO), 3-4, 25.
- <sup>14</sup> Ens, *Becoming a National Church*, 107-12.
- <sup>15</sup> Ross T. Bender, ed., *The People of God: A Mennonite Interpretation of the Free Church Tradition* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971), 153-56; *Proceedings of Mennonite General Conference*, 1967 (Lansdale, PA), 82-83; *Reports of Mennonite General Conference*, 1967 (Lansdale, PA), 108-109.
- <sup>16</sup> Mary Swartley and Rhoda Keener, *She Has Done a Good Thing: Mennonite Women Leaders Tell Their Stories* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 59-64; Mary A. Schiedel, *Pioneers in Ministry: Woman Pastors in Ontario Mennonite Churches, 1973-2003* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2003), 24-36.
- <sup>17</sup> Joanna Shenk, "Survey: More Women in Leadership, but Still Not Enough," *The Mennonite*, March 2010, 46-48.
- <sup>18</sup> April 19, 2008. See Laura Kalmar, "Ordination of Two Women Revives Discussion," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, May 2008, 18-19. These Canadian ordinations followed the Mennonite Brethren Church in Congo, which had ordained Madame Lukala Londa Charly to serve in pastoral ministry in France in August 2000. See Mary Anne Isaak and Jeanine Yoder, "Ordination Decision: A Sign of Changing Relationships," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, January 16, 2004, 10-11.
- <sup>19</sup> Paul Schrag, "Women in the Pulpit," *The Mennonite*, January 18, 2005, 8-11; email from Kevin Enns-Rempel, February 1, 2012.
- <sup>20</sup> Kilian McDonnell, ed., *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*. 3 vols. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980).
- <sup>21</sup> Stevenson, then a widow, moved to New York City and in 1927 opened a storefront church known as Pentecostal Gospel Hall and served as its first pastor. <http://yonkerschristianassembly.com/246893.html>
- <sup>22</sup> Gerald Derstine, *Visitation of God to the Mennonites* (Sarasota, FL: The Gospel Crusade, 1961).
- <sup>23</sup> Roy S. Koch, "Introduction: The Baptism with the Holy Spirit," 17, 20, in Roy S. Koch and Martha Koch, eds., *My Personal Pentecost* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977).
- <sup>24</sup> Nelson Litwiller, "Revitalized Retirement," 113-15, in Koch and Koch, eds., *My Personal Pentecost*.
- <sup>25</sup> Dave Kroeker, "Festival of the Holy Spirit: A Pentecost Experience at Goshen College," *Mennonite Reporter*, May 29, 1972, 1, 13-14.
- <sup>26</sup> Ron Eigsti, "God Filled a Farm Couple in Illinois," 213-14, 218, in Koch and Koch, eds., *My Personal Pentecost*.
- <sup>27</sup> Quote predates founding of MRS; Message to Allegheny Conference Annual Session, 1973, Nelson and Ada (Ramseyer) Litwiller Papers, Hist. Mss., 1-105, Box 8/25, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Indiana.
- <sup>28</sup> "The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church: A Summary Statement," Adopted by Mennonite General Assembly, June 18-24, 1977.
- <sup>29</sup> Harold E. Bauman, "Charismatic Movement," ME, V, 134-36; J. Howard Kauffman, "Mennonite Charismatics: Are They Any Different?" MQR 70 (October 1996), 449-72.

- <sup>30</sup> Hinojosa, "Making Noise among the 'Quiet in the Land,'" 199.
- <sup>31</sup> Kanagy, *Road Signs for the Journey*, 149-50.
- <sup>32</sup> John L. Ruth, "Affectionate Memories of Traditional and Transitional Mennonite Worship in Pennsylvania," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 6 (Fall 2005), 49-50.
- <sup>33</sup> Kauffman and Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic*, 74.
- <sup>34</sup> Theron Schlabach, "History," in *College Mennonite Church, 1903-2003*, ed. by Ervin Beck (Goshen, IN: CMC, 2003), 56-57.
- <sup>35</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 40-45.
- <sup>36</sup> *Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches 2008 Yearbook, for July 9-12 Gathering '08*, 82.
- <sup>37</sup> *Mennonite Weekly Review*, January 10, 1985, 9.
- <sup>38</sup> "Q & A with Marlene Kropf," *The Mennonite*, September 2010, 15.
- <sup>39</sup> Susan Biesecker-Mast, *Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Findings of the Faith Communities Today Survey* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Resources, 2003), 24.
- <sup>40</sup> Marlene Kropf and Kenneth Nafziger, *Singing: A Mennonite Voice* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 52.
- <sup>41</sup> For a richly-textured memory of this hymn, see Samuel S. Stoltzfus, "Going in with the Boys," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 31 (January 2008), 31-32.
- <sup>42</sup> Ruth, "Affectionate Memories," 46.
- <sup>43</sup> Laura H. Weaver, "'Pleasure Enough': Four-part A Cappella Singing as a Survival Strategy for a Mennonite-in-Exile," 210-16, in *Sound in the Land: Essays on Mennonites and Music*, ed. by Maureen Epp and Carol Ann Weaver (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2005).
- <sup>44</sup> Orlando Schmidt, "Hymnology," ME, V, 409.
- <sup>45</sup> Mary K. Oyer, "Global Music for the Churches," 68-69, in Bernie Neufeld, ed., *Music in Worship* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998).
- <sup>46</sup> Schmidt, "Hymnology," ME, V, 410.
- <sup>47</sup> Hinojosa, "Making Noise Among the 'Quiet in the Land,'" 204-207.
- <sup>48</sup> Dueck, "Ethnographic Study," 150.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 131, 136, 145.
- <sup>50</sup> Biesecker-Mast, *Mennonite Church USA Congregations*, 25.
- <sup>51</sup> Louise Stoltzfus, "One Mennonite Musician's Journey," *Festival Quarterly*, Fall 1991, 14-15; <http://briandoerksen.com>. In the mid-1990s Croegaert joined the Roman Catholic Church.
- <sup>52</sup> "The Theology of Christian Experience," Statement adopted by Mennonite General Conference, August 27, 1957.
- <sup>53</sup> David Janzen, "Dedication of Infants," ME, V, 221.
- <sup>54</sup> Marlin Jeschke, *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 142-43.
- <sup>55</sup> Sampling of published histories, including those of Altona Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (Manitoba); Central Heights Church (British Columbia); Neffsville Mennonite Church (Pennsylvania); Niagara United Mennonite Church (Ontario); Mennonite Church of Normal (Illinois); Pigeon River [Conservative] Mennonite Church (Michigan); Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church (California);

- Salem Mennonite Church (Saskatchewan); Zion Mennonite Church (Virginia); Zoar Mennonite Brethren (Kansas)
- <sup>56</sup> Brian Petkau, et al., *Which Lord?* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publish House, 1974), 1.
- <sup>57</sup> Bob Yoder, "Growing Faith in Mennonite Youth through Socialization and Experience: A Historical Review of Mennonite Youth Ministry," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 10 (Fall 2011), 21-25.
- <sup>58</sup> Matthew Harms, "Short-Term Work for Long-Term Change: An Early History of SWAP, DOOR and Group Venture," *MQR* 83 (October 2009), 578-79, 582, 586, 592.
- <sup>59</sup> "Joint Youth Convention Will be the Largest in Mennonite History," *Gospel Herald*, July 4, 1995, 25; "Youth Pray, Play, Worship, Work, Together," *The Mennonite*, August 10, 1999, 12.
- <sup>60</sup> "The Other Band Leads Record Numbers in Enthusiastic Worship," *Gospel Herald*, July 28, 1987, 536.
- <sup>61</sup> "The Top 10 MYF Fundraisers" and "Wichita '95 Fundraisers on the Unusual Side," *Gospel Herald*, July 4, 1995, 24-25.
- <sup>62</sup> David W. Boshart, *Becoming Missional: Denominations and New Church Development in Complex Social Contexts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 82-83, 86.

## Chapter 11: Media, Arts, and Mennonite Images

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- <sup>2</sup> Diane Zimmerman Umble, "'Wicked Truth': The Amish, the Media, and Telling the Truth," in Diane Zimmerman Umble and David Weaver-Zercher, eds., *The Amish and the Media* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 221-41; Michael A. Goldstein, "Party On, Amos," *Philadelphia Magazine*, August 1997, 137-44.
- <sup>3</sup> Martens, *All in a Row*, 137.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Gelehr, *Faith, Life and Witness in the Northwest*, 296.
- <sup>6</sup> Bender, *All the Days of My Life*, 159.
- <sup>7</sup> Ronald Friesen, *Kleefeld Pilgrims of a Mennonite Tradition* (Beausejour, MB: author, 1999), 58.
- <sup>8</sup> Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village*, 103.
- <sup>9</sup> Doreen Klassen, "'From Getting the Words Out' to 'Enjoying the Music': Musical Traditions among Canadian Mennonite Brethren," *Bridging Troubled Waters: The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century*, Paul Toews, ed. (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1995), 237 and 238.
- <sup>10</sup> Harold S. Bender and Diane Zimmerman Umble, "Broadcasting, Radio and Television," *GAMEO*, 1989, accessed 7 March 2008.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.mbconf.ca/mbstudies/holdings/other/flc.en.html> , retrieved 6 March 2008.
- <sup>12</sup> Larry Kehler, "Inter-Church Relations," in *Call to Faithfulness: Essays in Canadian Mennonite Studies* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Press, 1972), 122.
- <sup>13</sup> Neufeldt, ed., *Before We Were the Land's*, 182, 197, 225. See also Leonard N. Neufeldt, ed., *Village of Unsettled Yearnings: Yarrow, British Columbia: Mennonite Promise* (Victoria, BC: Horsdal and Schubart, 2002).

- <sup>14</sup> Peter Letkemann, *The Ben Horch Story* (Winnipeg, MB: Old Oak Publishing, 2007).
- <sup>15</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, May, 1980.
- <sup>16</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, Dec., 1977; May, 1981.
- <sup>17</sup> Harry Loewen, "The Mennonites," at [www.multiculturalcanada.ca/ecp/content/mennonites.html](http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/ecp/content/mennonites.html), retrieved 13 March 2008.
- <sup>18</sup> <http://www.paxchristichorale.org>, retrieved 13 March 2008.
- <sup>19</sup> Neufeldt, ed., *Before We Were the Land's*, 198, 208, 215. .
- <sup>20</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, Jan., 1979.
- <sup>21</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, March 1974.
- <sup>22</sup> [http://archives.radio-canada.ca/days\\_to\\_remember/classic\\_8812\\_en.asp?prov=1-111-1288](http://archives.radio-canada.ca/days_to_remember/classic_8812_en.asp?prov=1-111-1288) retrieved 7 March 2008.
- <sup>23</sup> <http://www.victordavies.com/mennonite.htm>, retrieved 7 March 2008. See also *Mennonite Mirror*, Dec. 1977; May 1981.
- <sup>24</sup> Leo Driedger, "Artists: Driven to Explore," *At the Forks: Mennonites in Winnipeg* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2010), 373-398.
- <sup>25</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, April 1975.
- <sup>26</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, Jan. 1979.
- <sup>27</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, March 1975.
- <sup>28</sup> [www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/region.nsf](http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/region.nsf) , retrieved 5 March 2008.
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- <sup>30</sup> Harry Loewen, "Mennonite Literature in Canada: Beginnings, Reception and Study," *JMS* 1 (1983), 119-132.
- <sup>31</sup> Al Reimer, "The Role of Arnold Dyck in Canadian Mennonite Writing," *JMS* 10 (1992), 83-90.
- <sup>32</sup> *Mennonite Mirror*, Sept. 1971.
- <sup>33</sup> Harry Loewen, "The Mennonite Writer as Witness and Critic," *JMS* 2 (1984), 113-123.
- <sup>34</sup> Rudy Wiebe, "The Skull in the Swamp," *JMS* 4 (1987), 8-20.
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# Index

- A**  
Abbotsford, B. C. 76, 110, 127, 149, 202, 251, 260, 305  
Aberdeen, Sask. 69  
“Abundant Life” radio program 281  
Adonis, Bishop Thompson Mpongwana 175  
Afghanistan 185  
Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission 175  
African-American people and culture viii, 120-1, 152, 158, 167, 169, 171-3, 191, 251, 263, 268, 305, 309  
Ailsa Craig Boys Farm (later Craigwood Youth Services) 238-9  
Akron, Ohio 127  
Akron, Penn. 111, 228, 314, 316  
Alcatraz, Cal. 75  
Alderfer, Harold 224  
Alexander I, Czar 16  
Alice, Texas 254  
Allebach, Ann J. 112  
Allemands, Louisiana 213  
Alsace 7, 9, 19  
Alternative Service to War, see Military Service  
Altona, Man. 90, 111, 148, 216, 225, 232, 254, 281, 326  
American Friends Service Committee 166  
Amish viii, 9-13, 19, 25-30, 32-3, 35, 37-8, 40-5, 47-8, 52, 84, 89, 91, 98-9, 101-2, 105, 130, 140, 144, 155, 158-63, 179, 184, 200, 203, 205, 230, 234, 236-7, 243, 247, 250-2, 256, 267, 271, 277-9, 292-5, 302-4, 320  
— Beachy Amish 159, 303, 320  
Ammann, Jakob 9  
Amsterdam 6, 9, 327  
Anabaptism/Anabaptists viii, xi-xii, 4-7, 14-17, 27-9, 34-7, 42, 47-8, 52, 54, 64, 66, 75, 79-80, 83-4, 91, 98-106, 109, 112, 123, 134-6, 139, 144-5, 152-8, 194, 198, 207, 216-7, 220, 224, 243, 262, 271, 286, 299-302, 304, 309-11, 316, 322-3, 325, 329-30, 334-5, 337  
Neo-Anabaptism 154-8, 160, 162-4, 258, 273  
Anabaptist Foundation; Anabaptist Financial; Financial Solutions 243  
Anabaptist Vision (the) xiii, 153-56, 337  
Andreas, John 73  
Andrew’s Bridge mission 171  
Archbold, Ohio 111, 226-28, 234  
Archbold Ladder Co. 227  
Argentina 162, 174, 176, 313, 332-4  
Arnaud, Man. 219  
Art Institute of Chicago 299  
Arthur, Ill. 235  
Arvada, Col. 127  
Asociación de Servicios de Cooperación Indígena Mennonita, Paraguay 228  
Atlanta, Georgia 223, 297  
Augsburger, Esther Kniss 299  
Aylmer, Ont. xv, 161, 237
- B**  
“Back to the Bible” radio program 151  
Baehr, Ruth Ediger 301-2  
Baerg, Irmgard 282  
Bainton, Roland 153  
Bakersfield, Cal. 227  
Balzer, Suzanna Ediger 65  
— and husband Jacob 65  
— and daughter Anna 65  
Bangladesh 229, 326-7  
Banks, Michael 120, 255  
— and Addie 120, 255  
Baptism ix, 5, 27, 36, 38-9, 41, 63, 69, 121, 139, 209, 271-2, 306, 337  
— of the Holy Spirit 261, 333  
— by Immersion 36, 59, 63, 67  
Baptist Church 23, 117  
Barge, Anna, Witmer and Elnora Mae 85  
Bargen, John 76  
Bargen, Peter 118  
Bartsch, Paul 73  
Bartel, Marvin 298  
Bauman, Bishop Amos 71  
Bauman, David and Maria (Bechtel) 26  
Bauman, Elizabeth Hershberger 198  
Bauman, Harold 262  
Bauman, Harvey 203-04  
Bavaria, Ger. 12, 43, 64  
Beachy, Ezra 213  
Beachy, Moses 159  
Beachy, Tim 157  
Beatrice, Neb. 49, 90-1, 116  
Bechtel, Elsie C. 165  
Bechtel, Emma Thuma 139  
Bechtels, (the Phila.) 123  
Beck, Ervin 247  
Becker, Maria Lange vii-viii  
Beiler, Anna 144  
Beiler, Bishop David 41-2  
Belize (British Honduras) 138, 162, 249, 313  
Bender, Harold S. 95, 152-6  
Bender, Elizabeth Horsch 153  
Bentsen, Senator Lloyd 98  
Berdysk 19  
Bergen, David 286  
Bergen, Jacob 65  
Bergen, Jacob and Gertrude 208  
Bergen, Peter 208  
Bergey, David E. 81-2  
— and wife Louisa (Bowman) and fam. 71  
Bergthal, Russia 20  
Bergthal, Sask. 56  
Bergthaler Mennonites 52, 58-9, 69, 71, 95, 110, 115, 126, 158, 171, 173, 313  
Berky, Esther 108  
Berlin, Germany 182  
Berlin, Ohio 320  
Berlin (now Kitchener), Ont. 112, 115  
Bern, Switzerland 8  
Berne, Indiana 111, 133  
Bernheim, John H. 34

- Berry, Wendell 102  
 Bethany Bible School,  
 Mthatha, So. Africa 175  
 Bethany Bible School,  
 Sask. 205  
 Bethany Christian School 131  
 Bethel College, Kan. ix,  
 62, 108, 118, 132, 140,  
 154, 298, 333  
 Bethesda Hospital 182  
 Betzner, Maria, Samuel  
 and family 218  
 Bible 4, 7, 26, 61, 64, 66,  
 120, 132, 134-7, 139-43,  
 147, 151, 155, 161,  
 169-70, 173-5, 194, 198,  
 207, 217, 254-6, 264-5,  
 273-4, 276, 320, 328  
 Bible Schools, Institutes,  
 Colleges 114, 120-1,  
 125, 130, 133-6, 139-  
 43, 147, 155, 169-70,  
 173, 175, 205, 274,  
 282, 314, 327; see also  
 Appendix E  
 Bible Institute of Los  
 Angeles 142, 169  
 Biblical Seminary in New  
 York 147-8  
 Bienville, Ontario (Upper  
 Canada) 34  
 Big Bear 55  
 Bil-Jax Scaffolding Co. 227  
 Bill & Melinda Gates  
 Foundation 230  
 Birtle, Manitoba 187  
 Blaurock, George 329  
 Block, Isaac 208  
 Block, Jacob 193-4  
 Blosser, Don 158  
 Bluffton, Ohio 111, 116,  
 246, 298  
 Bluffton College (later  
 University), Ohio 87,  
 108, 141, 145, 203, 301  
 Blumenort, Man. 114, 206  
 Bogotá, Colombia 229  
 Bolivia 162, 216, 228, 313  
 Bollinger, Rudolph 26  
 Boley, Oklahoma 312  
 Bolt, Jake 305-6  
 — and wife Erna 306  
 Bomberger, Peter 34  
 Bontrager, Bishop Levi 98  
 Boone, North Carolina 169  
 Born, Anna 216  
 Botswana 252  
 Bowen, Joanna 108  
 Braeside Home, Preston 215-6  
 Brandon Mental Hospital  
 165  
 Brandt, Di 287  
 Brandt, Herbert J. 165  
 Brandt, Les 283  
 Braun, Jan 202  
 Brenneman, Daniel 38  
 Breslau, Ont. 174  
 Brethren and Mennonite  
 Council for Gay and  
 Lesbian Concerns 202  
 Brethren in Christ  
 (formerly River Brethren)  
 v-vi, viii, 37-8, 46, 52,  
 71-2, 130, 139-40, 143,  
 166-7, 169, 174, 176-  
 72, 179-80, 184, 208,  
 223, 233, 238, 241,  
 250-3, 259, 264, 273,  
 276, 302, 307, 321, 335  
 Briercreech Bible Institute,  
 Sask. 140  
 Britten, Benjamin 281-2  
 Brook Lane Psychiatric  
 Center 182  
 Brown, Pastor 193  
 Brubaker, Jacob 221  
 Bruderthaler Church (See  
 Evangelical Mennonite  
 Brethren)  
 Brunk II, George R. 148-9, 214  
 Brunk, J. M. 72  
 Brunk, Juanita 302  
 Bucknell University 302  
 Buckwalter, Anna 152  
 Buhler, Kan. ix, 63  
 Buhler, Maria 63, 216  
 Buller, Bishop Jacob 61  
 Burkholder, Clayton 211  
 Burkholder, Christian 35  
 Burkholder, Helen (Erb) 211  
 Burkholder, L. J. 170  
 Burkholder, Noah 222-3  
 Burkholder, Bishop Peter 37  
 Bustos, Pastor Mac 262-3  
 Burns Lake, B. C. 97  
 Burrell, Curtis 121  
 Byers, Bishop Charlie 253  
 Byler, Edna Ruth Miller 318-9
- C**  
 Calgary, Alberta vii, xi, 111  
 Cali, Colombia 229  
 Calvin, John 4  
 Calvinist (Reformed) 7, 9, 26,  
 33, 36, 91, 112, 146, 252  
 Camp Cody, New Mex. 74  
 Camp Ebenezer 172  
 Camp Funston, Kan. 73-4  
 Camp Peniel, Que. 274  
 Campolo, Tony 265  
 Canadian Broadcasting  
 Corporation (CBC) 282  
 Canadian Foodgrains Bank  
 319-20  
*Canadian Mennonite* (the) 155  
 Canadian Mennonite Bible  
 College 125, 134, 282  
 Canadian Mennonite  
 University 134-5, 328  
 Canaviri, Hannah xv  
 Canton, Ohio 165  
 Caronport, Sask. 140  
 Carter, President Jimmy 185  
 Cassel, Anna Moist 139  
 Catherine the Great 15-16  
*The Carillon News*, Steinbach,  
 Man. 124, 214  
 Caves Trail, B. C. 181  
 CFAM radio, Altona, Man.  
 149, 281  
 Chaco, Paraguay 54, 77,  
 183, 306  
 Chapa, Ted 214  
 Charles, Howard 148  
 Cheapside, Ont. 180  
 Chenoa, Ill. 257  
 Chicago, Ill. 46, 83, 110,  
 113, 120-1, 127, 133,  
 136, 148, 154, 172,  
 268, 286, 299, 316  
 Chihuahua, Mexico 54, 77-  
 8, 80, 95, 97, 138, 291  
 Chilliwalk, B. C. 76, 111,  
 149, 194, 282  
 Chortitzer Mennonite Church  
 50, 59, 69, 95, 158, 222  
 China 82, 174, 268, 316  
 Christian Aid Ministries 320-1  
 Christian Peacemakers  
 Teams 321-2, 333  
*Christian Week* 144  
 Church Discipline 159-  
 160, 257-8, 337  
 Church Life 4, 34-40, 77,  
 115, 148, 223, 243-4,  
 248, 252, 254-9, 265, 276  
 Church of the Brethren  
 (formerly German

- Baptist Brethren 32-3, 35-6, 45, 268, 273, 310  
 Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman Mennonites) 39, 63, 70, 97, 159, 176, 181, 232, 252  
 Church World Service 174  
 CHWK radio, Yarrow 280  
 Cincinnati, Ohio 303  
*Cincinnati Poetry Review* 303  
 Civil War,  
 — Central America 254, 311  
 — Russia 21  
 — United States 44-6, 55  
 — Congo 173  
 Civilian Public Service 178-9, 182, 185, 331  
 Clarence Center, N. Y. 326  
 Classen, J. J. R. 90  
 Cleveland, Ohio 119, 123, 172  
 Climenhaga, Arthur M. 143  
 Clinton, Oklahoma 168  
 Clothing; Dress; Fashion 33, 40-1, 43, 63-4, 69, 112, 125-7, 132, 139, 159, 176, 200, 207, 208, 210, 214, 254, 262, 293, 313, 321  
 Coaldale, Alberta 76, 111, 118, 272, 286  
 Coatesville, Penn. 193  
 Coffman, Alma 128  
 Coffman, S. F. 71, 141  
 Cold War (the) x, 166, 182-7, 276, 292, 320  
 Colombia, S. A. 205, 229  
 Colombian Mennonite Foundation for Dev. (MENCOLDES) 229  
 Columbia Univ. 112, 152, 154  
 Columbiana, Ohio 126  
 Communion 36, 38-9, 50, 66, 139, 161, 238, 244, 257-9, 263, 267  
 Communication 277-304  
 Communism 21-3, 127, 198, 232, 306, 316, 320  
 Concern Movement 129  
 Concilio Nacional de Iglesias Menonitas (Nat'l. Coun. of Hispanic Menn. Churches) 263  
 Conference of Mennonites in Canada 69, 139, 148, 257-8, 268, 313  
 Conflict Mediation 191, 241, 321  
 Congo (today, Democratic Republic of Congo) 173-4, 183, 307  
 Congo Inland Mission 174  
 Congregations; Congreg. life, see 249-276 and *passim*  
 Conrad, Annabelle 204  
 Conrad Grebel 158  
 Conrad Grebel College 134-5, 314  
 Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario 255  
 Conversion 3, 8, 18, 37-8, 66, 71, 120, 140, 143, 149, 154, 164, 187, 193, 272-3, 288; see also New Birth  
 Conscientious Objection, see Military Service  
 Cooper, Mattie 305  
 Co-op Vegetable Oils Ltd., Altona 225  
 Corn, Oklahoma 69  
 Correa, Luis 229  
 Cotton, Essie 11  
 Crawford, Percy 143, 151  
 Credit unions 228, 234-5, 243  
 — Crosstown C. U. 235  
 — Scottsdale, Hesston, Waterloo C. U. 235  
 — Steinbach C. U. 234-5  
 Creighton, Donald 51  
 Cressman, Arnold W. 157  
 Cressman, Ephraim 115  
 Cressman, Margaret 319  
 Cressman, Menno C. 112  
 Cressman, Susannah Betzner 115  
 Crimean War 18  
 Croegaert, Jim 271  
 Cross Lake Indian Reserve 181  
 Cuahtémoc, Mexico 78
- D**  
 Danzig (Gdansk) 15  
 Davidson, Hannah Frances 174  
 de Alvarez, Marta Quiroga 332  
 de Brecht, Georg 286  
 De León, Lupe 214  
 De Ries, Hans 8  
 DeFehr, A. A. and Mia 231  
 DeFehr, Art 186, 326  
 DeFehr, C. A. 231  
 — and sons William, Abe, Cornelius, and son-in-law Bernard Fast 231  
 Defenseless Mennonite Church 227, 234, 261  
 DeLeón, Seferina Garcia 268  
 Denbigh, Virginia 214  
 Denver, Colorado 116-7, 127, 185, 274  
 Denver Opportunity for Outreach and Reflection (DOOR) 274  
 Derstine, Rev. C. F. 200-1  
 Derstine, Gerald 261  
 Dick, Elfrieda 133  
 Dick, Peter 115, 279  
 — and Anna 115  
 Didsbury, Alberta 70  
*Die Mennonitische Rundschau* 85  
 Dimmitt County, Tex. 213  
 Dinuba, California 117  
 Discipleship 35, 64, 138, 154, 156, 158, 164, 17, 328, 334, 337  
 Dispensationalism 142, 147, 151, 155  
 Divorce 113, 129, 134, 203, 207-8, 255  
 Djiho, Burkina Faso 305  
 Dnieper River 53, 328-9  
 Dobson, James 265  
 Doering, Alma 174  
 Doerksen, Brian 271  
 Doerksen, Gerhard and Sara 89  
 Doukhobors 17  
 Dohner, Mary 139  
 Douglas, Janet 146  
 Dreams and Visions 37-8, 64, 218  
 Driedger, Florence 331  
 Driedger, Johann 70  
 Driedger, Leo 188  
 Dueck, David 186  
 Dueck, Dora xv  
 Dueck, Jonathan 249-50  
 Dueckmann, Sara 217  
 Dufferin, Lord 57  
 Dunham, Mabel 285  
 Durango, Mexico 54, 78, 80, 291  
 Dutch Mennonites (*Doopsgezinden*) 6-9, 14-15  
 "Dutchmen" football team 199

- Dyck, Aganetha 283  
 Dyck, Annie 151  
 Dyck, Arnold 286, 288  
 Dyck, Cornelius J. 330  
 Dyck, David (settler) 96  
 Dyck, David 277  
 Dyck, Ernest and Lydia 173  
 Dyck, Howard 282  
 Dyck, Isaac 78  
 Dyck, Jacob J. 56  
 Dyck, Johannes 71  
 Dyck, John A. and Mary (Letkemann) 205  
 Dyck, Mary Knackstadt and husband Henry 88  
 Dyck, Peter 198
- E**
- Eash, Levi 44  
 Eash, Mary (Yoder) 44  
 East Freeman, S. Dak. 116  
 East Harlem, N. Y. 108  
 East Lampeter Township, Penn. 218  
 East Reserve, Man. 50, 57, 59, 100, 331  
 Eastern Mennonite College (later Eastern Mennonite Univ.) 107, 209  
 Eastern Mennonite Missions 186, 246, 323, 325  
 Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church (conservative) 255  
 Ebenezer Home, Altona 216  
 Ebersole, J. Franklin 326  
 Eby, Bishop Benjamin 33-4  
 Eby, Christian and Nancy 285  
 Eby, John 151  
 Eby, Nancy 251  
 Ebytown (later Berlin, then Kitchener), Ont. 32-3  
*Ecos Menonitas* (Menn. Echoes) 263  
 Ediger, Elmer 306  
 Ediger, John 69  
 Edinburg, Texas 169  
 Edmonton, Alberta 111, 118, 249-50, 269  
 Education 18, 43, 47, 52, 61-2, 65, 77-80, 91-2, 116, 130-5, 138, 150, 168, 181, 186, 206, 227, 236-7, 241, 252, 255, 291, 312, 314-5, 328  
 — Sex 200-01  
 — Stewardship 244  
 Eigsti, Ron and Elsie 262  
*Eglise des Frères Mennonites*, Que. 123  
 Ekron, Manitoba 197  
 El Salvador 311, 323  
 Elbing, Kansas 188  
 Elk Park, N. Carolina 169  
 Elmira, Ont. 111, 187, 274  
 Elizabethtown College xiv  
 Elizabethtown, Penn. 34  
 Elkhart, Ind. 47, 111, 148, 190, 266, 325, 330-1  
 End Times 62, 77, 260, 337  
 — Premillennialism 62, 134, 142  
 Engbrecht, Dennis 62  
 Engbrecht, Henry 281  
 Engel, Jacob 36-7, 241  
 Ens, Adolf 57  
 Ens, Gerhard 281  
 Enns, Harry 128  
 Enns, *Ältester* Johann H. 139  
 Ensz, Bernard F. 91  
 Ephrata, Penn. 197, 222  
 Epp, Frank H. 21, 129, 148, 281  
 Epp, Jacob 219  
 Epp, Jake 129, 316  
 Epp, Bishop Cornelius 69  
 Epp, Marlene 127, 212  
 Epp, Peter G. 87  
 Epp, Theodore H. 151  
 Erdel, Timothy Paul xv  
 Eschatology, see  
 Dispensationalism  
 and/or End Times  
 Espinoza, Marta 169  
 Esquibel, Dr. Augusto 306  
 Ethiopia 228  
 Ethnicity viii-xiii, 17, 24, 26, 33-4, 43, 45-6, 122, 131, 136, 148-9, 156-7, 160, 162, 164, 190, 214, 236, 247, 260, 262, 268, 283, 289, 303, 331, 337  
 Evangelical Mennonite Brethren 59, 64, 89, 144, 149  
 Evangelical Mennonite Conference xiii, 97, 128, 145, 170, 210, 233, 275, 309, 324  
 Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference 145, 170, 251, 312  
 Evangelicalism and Mennonites 143-52, 164  
 Evanston, Ill. 271, 332  
 Evansville, Indiana 267  
 Ewert, H. H. 59  
 Ewert, Wilhelm 61  
 Excommunication 38, 44, 70, 208, 249, 287 (see also Church Discipline)
- F**
- Fairview Mennonite Home 238  
 Faith and Life Press 118  
 Faith Builders Educational Programs, Penn. 255  
 Falcón, Rafael 312  
*Family Life* 161, 237  
 Farmers and Merchants Bank, Archbold 234  
 Fast, Bernard 231  
 Fast, H. T. 59  
 Fast, Henry A. 173  
*Festival Quarterly* 297-9, 301  
 Film 277, 288-94, 297, 300-301  
 First Nations, see  
 Indigenous People  
 First World War 21-2, 72-5, 77, 80, 97, 140, 166  
 Flanders 14  
 Flores, Gilberto 311  
 Fogleman, Aaron 12  
 Food 33, 180, 188-91, 200, 211-2, 247, 283, 288, 316, 319-20, 322, 334  
 Footwashing 36, 139  
 Ford, Harrison 293  
 Fort Garry, Man. 53, 125  
 Fox Street Mission, N. Y. 152  
 France 9, 35, 168, 182, 268, 301, 321  
 Francis, E. K. 82  
 Franz, Delton 184, 316  
 Fraser River Valley 53, 76, 149  
 Fredrick the Great 15  
 Freed, John 172  
 Freeman, S. Dakota 111, 234  
 Freeman Junior College, S. Dakota 116  
 "Fresh Air" prog. 172-3, 192  
 Fresno, Cal. 53, 111, 113-4, 155-6, 298  
 Fresno Pacific College (later University) 155, 158

- Fretz, J. Winfield 83, 93-4,  
230, 235, 238
- Frey, Ardiith 128
- Frey, Bishop Edward B. 227
- Frey, Philemon 227
- Friedmann, Robert 153
- Friesen, A. W. 120
- Friesen, Aganetha 44
- Friesen, Carl Victor 199-200
- Friesen, David 135
- Friesen, D. K. 232-3
- Friesen, Heinrich 50
- Friesen, J. R. 124
- Friesen, John and Ted 290
- Friesen, Linie 252
- Friesen, Nancy 116
- Friesen, Patrick 287
- Friesen, Paul 297-8
- Friesen, P. M. 18, 20
- Friesen, Roger and Marsha 229
- Friesen, Ronald 279
- Friesen, Walter 88
- Friesens Corp. 226, 223, 326
- Friesland 14
- Froese, Brian 71, 140
- Frohe Botschaft* radio  
program 281
- Fuller Theol. Seminary 143, 155
- Funcken, Fr. Eugene 140
- Fundamentalism  
(See Modernism/  
Fundamentalism)
- Funk, Christian 31
- Funk, Henry 180
- Funk, John F. 19, 46-7
- G**
- Gaeddert, Bishop Dietrich  
ix, 61  
— and wife Helena ix  
Galicia 20, 52, 61
- Garber, Ella 203
- Garber, Henry 132
- Gautsche, Charles 227
- Geauga County, Ohio  
237, 278
- Gehman, William 38
- Geiger, Kenneth E. 146
- Gender Issues 125-8 (See  
also Women)
- General Conference (GC)  
Mennonite Church 43,  
47, 52, 61, 67, 70, 107,  
115, 127, 149, 167, 172,  
174, 176, 188, 201, 229,  
239, 245, 262, 266-8,  
273-6, 280, 312, 314
- George Leaman  
Appliances 235
- German Baptist Brethren,  
see Church of the  
Brethren
- Germany 5, 8-9, 12, 14,  
19, 22, 30, 34, 36, 60,  
72, 182-3, 289, 301,  
306, 326
- Germantown, Penn. 27, 295
- Germantown Mennonite  
Historic Trust, Phila. 295
- Giesbrecht, Donovan xv
- Giesbrecht, Levi 221-2
- Giesbrecht, Susan 252
- Gingerich, Melvin 244
- Glass, Esther Eby 198
- Gnadenfeld, Russia vii, 65
- Gnadenthal, Man. 195
- Goertzen, Ernest 108
- Goertz, David 71
- Good Books vi
- Good, Martha Smith 259
- Good, Merle 296-7
- Good, Phyllis Pellman 296-7
- Goossen, Henry 219
- Gordonville, Penn. 161
- Goshen, Ind. 111, 131,  
133, 148, 230, 245,  
247, 265, 298
- Goshen College, Ind. v-vi,  
xiv-xv, 121, 131, 152,  
178, 208, 262, 300,  
303, 314, 326, 328
- Gospel Herald* 275
- "Gospel Tidings" radio  
program 280
- Gothard, Bill 207
- Graber, Chris L. 241
- Graber, D. Wyse 227
- Graber, Ken 228
- Grace Bible Institute, Neb.  
134, 142
- Graham, Billy 143, 149
- Grand Rapids, Mich. 146
- Grand River, Ont. 32, 218
- Grassy Lake, Alberta 94
- Graybill, Eve 217
- Graybill, J. Paul 232
- Greece 183, 306
- Green, Stanley 324
- Grigorjewka, S. Russia 216
- Gross, Leonard 131
- Grove, Gladys 315
- Guatemala vii, xi, 311, 328
- Guatemala City vii
- Guedeke, Lisa 254
- Guest House Restaurant 235
- Gulfport, Mississippi 172
- Gundy, George 257
- Gundy, Jeff 218, 301-2
- Güngrich, Joseph 38
- H**
- Hagerstown, Maryland  
182, 190
- (the) Hague, Netherlands 281
- Hague, Sask. 69, 79
- Haiti 176, 183, 247, 305-  
6, 320, 322, 328
- Halstead Seminary, Kan. 62
- Hamilton, Ont. 34
- Hamilton, Albert 168
- Hamilton, Robert 168
- Hammon, Oklahoma 168
- Hans Herr House, Penn. 295
- Hansen, George 15
- Harder, Aganetha 86
- Harder, Bernard 21
- Harder, James 104
- Harder, Karen Klassen 104
- Harder, Laureen xv
- Harding, Vincent 158
- Harms, David 111
- Harnish, David xv
- Harrisonburg, Virginia  
107, 209, 252, 299
- Harshberger, Cora 139
- Hart, John Peak 168  
— and wife Corn Stalk 168
- Hart, Homer 168
- Hart, Lawrence 83, 168
- Harvard Univ. 117, 123, 295
- Haskell County, Kansas 89
- Hattieville, Belize 247
- Haury, Samuel S. 61-2,  
68, 167-8  
— and Susanna (Hirshler)  
167-8
- "Heart to Heart" radio  
program 150
- Heatwole, Gabriel D. and  
Lydia Frank 45
- Hedrick, Ralph 224
- Heisey, Mary Jane 195
- Henderson, Neb. 63-6,  
111, 251
- Herald of Truth (Herold der  
Wahrheit)* 46-8
- Hernandez, Raúl and  
Samuel 214



- Herr, Barbara 44  
 Herr, Christina 44  
 Herr, Hans 295  
 Herr, John 44  
 Hershberger, Abner 300  
 Hershberger, Ezra 299-300  
 Hershberger, Guy F. 92-3, 178, 233, 240, 309  
 Hershey Chocolates 326  
 Hershey, Christian 29  
 Hershey, Eusebius 173  
 Hershey, Lewis B. 177  
 Hershey, Lloyd 242  
 Hesston, Kan. 111, 116, 182, 235  
 Hesston College, Kan. 121, 172, 212, 244  
 Hesston Corporation 226  
 Hesston Manufacturing Co. 232-3  
 Hesston Manufacturing Workers' Assoc. 233  
 Heyndricks, Anneken 6  
 High Steel Structures 226  
 Hildebrand, Bishop Jacob 46  
 Hillsboro, Kan. x, 63, 111, 133  
 Hinojosa, Felipe 152  
 Hiroshima and Nagasaki 332  
 Hispanic people and culture, see Latino people and culture  
 Hmong People and Culture 121, 250, 275  
 Hobsbawm, Eric 108  
 Hochfeld, Man. 50  
 Hostetler, Jacob and family 29  
 Hofer, Joseph and Michael 75  
 Hofer, Sam 290  
 Holdeman, John 59, 63  
 Holdeman Mennonites: see Church of God in Christ Mennonite  
 Holiness spirituality 141, 145-6, 176  
 Holmes County, Ohio 39, 44, 293  
 Holy Spirit 58, 103, 176, 260-4, 272, 313, 333  
 Honduras 221, 323, 328  
 Hoover, Mary Hershey 139  
 Horning, Abraham 34  
 Horst, Isaac 103-4, 163  
 Horton, Rondo 169  
 Horch, Benjamin 281  
 Horch, Esther 284  
 Hostetter, C. N. 143  
 Hostetler, Ann 295, 302  
 Hostetler, D. Michael 301  
 Hostetler, John A. 101  
 Hostetler, Sheri 303  
 Hostetler, Ura 74  
 Howard, Rhode Island 179  
 Hubley Toy Company 221  
 Hudson, Margaret 298  
 Hughes, Gerald 171, 204  
 Humanitarian Service 167, 177-82, 185-88  
 Humility viii, 7, 15, 23, 33, 37, 42, 57, 67, 70, 79-80, 85, 93, 103-6, 158, 163, 210  
 Huron, South Dakota 90  
 Hurst, Brenda Martin 200  
 Hutchinson, Kan. 117, 124, 208, 247  
 Hutter, Jakob 5  
 Hutterites viii, 5, 16-17, 19, 48, 52, 64, 66-7, 75-7, 98, 130, 179, 290, 292, 304, 332  
 Huxman, Richard 233  
 Huynh, Vinh 187  
 Hymns/Hymnology 7, 31, 35-6, 150, 161, 168-9, 175, 203, 250, 264, 266-9, 282  
 — *Ausbund* 31, 35-6, 267
- I**  
 India 174, 228, 268, 299, 306, 316, 319, 330, 333  
 Indianapolis, Ind. 116, 185, 234  
 Indigenous (Native American; First Nations) People viii, x, 2-3, 11-13, 19, 28, 30, 43, 54-6, 192, 286-7, 336-7  
 — Arapahoe 62, 68, 168  
 — Cheyenne 11, 62, 68, 168-9, 265  
 — Choctaw 11, 169  
 — Conestogas 28  
 — Cree 169, 188  
 — Creek 169  
 — Delaware 29  
 — Iroquois, Six Nation 32  
 — Métis 55  
 — Navajo 169  
 — Ojibway 169  
 — Shawnee 29  
 — Sioux 169  
 Indonesia 183, 189, 307  
 Inheritance, 40, 54, 78, 85, 202, 238  
 — Partible 10, 16, 54, 202  
 Inman, Kan. 63, 252  
*Institut Biblique Laval* 173  
 Insurance, see Mutual Aid  
 Interlake Region, Man. 97, 210  
 International Visitor Exch. Prog.(IVEP) 307  
 Iowa Mennonite School 130  
 Isaac, Gary and Jean (Kliwer) 175
- J**  
 Jackson, Jesse 121  
 Jacob Engel Foundation 241  
 Jamesville Colony, N. Dakota 98  
 Jansen, Cornelius 19, 49, 51  
 — and family 51  
 Jansen, Helena (von Riesen) 51  
 Jansen, Margaretha 49-51  
 Jansen, Nebraska 112  
 Jantz, Harold 143-4  
 Janz, B. B. 22  
 Janz Construction Ltd., Alberta 226  
 Janzen, Ben and Nancy (Friesen) 116-17  
 Janzen Henry 77  
 Janzen, Jacob H. 286, 288  
 Janzen, Jean 302  
 Janzen, Lena 193-4  
 Janzen, Megan xv  
 Janzen, Rhoda 301  
 Janzen, Rod 66  
 Janzen, Sam 157  
 Janzen, William 312  
 Japan 182, 268, 306, 326  
 Jefferson County, Neb. 49, 64  
 Jeschke, Marlin 272  
 Joliette, Man. 111  
 Jordan 183, 307, 319  
 Joseph Schneider Haus 285  
 Juhnke, James 61, 75, 123, 300, 324-5
- K**  
 Kaes 168  
 Kalona, Iowa 111, 230  
 Kansas City, Missouri 116  
 Kasdorf, Julia 302  
 Kauffman, Daniel 112, 210  
 Kauffman, Janet 301  
 Kauffman, Jason xv

- Kauffman, Mary Ellen 221, 223  
 Kauffman, Milo 244  
 Kauffmann, Joel 301  
 Kautz, Bernard 171  
 Keener, George 41  
 Keeney, Bill 185  
 Kenya 183, 305, 324, 327  
 Kidron Swiss Cheese Co. 226  
 Kim, Grace 259-60  
 King, Aaron 108-9  
 King, Jim 310  
 King, Martin Luther 121  
 King, P. M. William L.  
   Mackenzie 22, 177, 285  
 Kingston, Jamaica 255  
 Kirk, Colorado 63, 112  
 Kitchener, Ont. 32-3, 110, 115, 118, 123, 126, 212, 238, 250, 253, 259, 279-82, 285, 331  
 K-W Philharmonic Choir 282  
 Khortitsa (Chortitza)  
   Colony 16, 20, 52, 329  
 Klaassen, Rev. Heinrich 107  
 Klaassen, Walter 104, 156, 301  
 Klassen, A. H. 90  
 Klassen, David 53  
 Klassen, David and  
   Elizabeth 197  
   — and daughters Neta,  
   Tina, Mary, Betty, Annie  
   and Gertie 197  
 Klassen, Dean A. J. 156  
 Klassen, Doreen 288  
 Klassen, Gertie 114  
 Klassen, J. K. and Tina 327  
 Klassen, J. M. 317  
 Klassen, John P. 16  
 Klassen, Johann and Maria  
   (Martens) 235  
 Klassen, Otto 289, 291  
 Kleefeld, Manitoba 279  
 Kleine Gemeinde church  
   xiii, 18, 20, 52, 58-9,  
   64, 95, 137, 148, 160,  
   199, 292, 312  
 Kline, Bishop David 102  
 Kniss, Fred 128  
 Koch, Roy S. and wife  
   Martha 261  
 Koontz, Gayle Gerber 190  
 Koontz, Ted 191  
 Koop, Helena and Jakob 89  
 Koop, Wanda 283  
 Korean War (the) 182  
 Kornelsen, Jacob 160  
 Kraemer, Charles 315  
 Krahn, Cornelius 95, 154  
 Krahn, Konrad xv  
 Krass, Alfred C. 325  
 Kraybill, Donald 188, 251, 310  
 Kreider, Alan 203  
 Kreider, Roy 108-9  
 Krefeld 8, 27  
 Krimmer Mennonite Breth. 52,  
   63, 66-7, 88, 169, 234, 272  
 Kroeker, Ellis 124  
 Kroeker, Travis 157, 331  
 Kroeker, Wally 229  
 Kropf, Marlene 266  
 Khrushchev, Nikita 131  
 Kutztown, Penn. 102
- L**  
 La Crete, Alberta 96, 105, 111  
 La Grulla, Texas 137  
 La Merced credit union,  
   Santa Cruz, Bolivia 228  
 Labor 10, 28, 83, 88, 100-  
   1, 104, 113, 115, 135,  
   183, 191, 222-4, 226,  
   230-34, 237-8, 248,  
   273, 291, 336  
 Labor unions 230-34, 248  
 Lacercantière, France 166  
 Lake Manitoba 97  
 Lake Ontario 99  
 Lake Winnipeg 97  
 Lakewood, Colorado 252  
 Lame Deer, Montana 11  
 Lancaster, Penn. x, 25, 28, 30,  
   39, 91, 103, 112, 171, 173,  
   196, 212, 217, 221, 237,  
   277, 292, 294, 296-7, 306  
 Lancaster Mennonite  
   Historical Society vi  
 Lancaster Mennonite  
   School 131-2  
 Lancaster Mennonite Conf.  
   xiii, 112, 150-1, 176  
 Land viii-x, 12-13, 15-19,  
   23-24, 28, 30, 32, 40,  
   42, 51-57, 58-9, 67-72,  
   76, 78-106, 114-5, 168,  
   188, 222-3, 237, 336  
 Lansdale, Penn. 307  
 Landis, Hans 8  
 Landmark, Manitoba 199  
 Landorf, Joyce 265  
 Langham, Sask. 67, 252  
 Language vii, 3, 15, 17,  
   26, 42, 62, 77, 79, 122-  
   3, 131, 138, 140, 148,  
   155, 158-9, 164, 173,  
   183, 192, 267-8, 275-  
   6, 281, 311-2, 329, 337  
   (See also Pennsylvania  
   Dutch and *Plautdietsch*)  
 Lanning, James W. 216  
 Lantz, Thomas 26  
 Lapp, John E. 224  
 Latino people and culture  
   viii, 120, 152, 170, 191,  
   214, 231, 262-3, 269,  
   309, 311-2  
 Lauver, Mary Hottenstein 318  
 Lawndale Choir 268-9  
 Leadership (congregational),  
   see Pastoral Leadership  
 Leamington, Ont. 111, 197-8  
 Leavenworth, Kansas 74  
 Lebold, Ralph 212  
 Lederach, Ruth 318  
 Leedy, Oklahoma 37  
 Lefever, Mary (Groff) 196  
 Lefever, Sue (Mowrey) 196  
 Lehman, John K. 71  
 Lehman, Joyce Bontrager 230  
 Lenard, Mark 301  
 Lensen, Jan and Merken  
   (Schmitz) 27  
 Lenzmann, Herman 280  
 Letkemann, Peter 281  
 Lewis, Ella Hershey 139  
 Liberal, Kansas 312  
 Liberia 173, 320  
 Liechty, Joe 227  
 Lilje, Andreas 50  
 Lincoln, Nebraska 151  
 Lind, Jon 157  
 Linden, Alberta 70, 252  
 Lititz, Penn. 219  
 Little Arkansas River 182  
 Little Coyote, Bertha 11  
 Litwiller, Bishop Peter 140  
 Litwiller, Nelson 176, 261  
   — and Ada 176  
 Litz, Helen 281  
 Loepky, Bishop Johann 95  
 Loewen, C. Wilbert 319  
 Loewen, Charles 326  
 Loewen, Elisabeth 114  
 Loewen, Gerald 283  
 Loewen, Gerhard 286  
 Loewen, Gertie (Klassen)  
   114, 206  
 Loewen, Harry 286

- Loewen, Isaac P. 137-8  
 Loewen, John P. 186  
 Loewen, Mary Ann xv  
 Loewen, Selma 252  
 Loewen Windows 226, 326  
 Lohrenz, Gerhard 328  
 Lombard, Illinois 126, 259  
 Lombardi, Leigh 300  
 London Symphony Orch. 282  
 Longacre, Doris Janzen 188-90  
 — and daughter Cara 189  
 Lord's Supper, see Communion  
 Los Angeles, Cal. 110, 120, 125, 136, 142, 169, 249-50  
*Los Angeles Times* 297  
 Los Jagueyes colony, Mexico 95, 138, 292, 312  
 Luginbuhl, Darvin 298  
 Luther, Martin 4, 153, 155  
 Lutheran World Relief 174  
 Lutherans 17, 26, 33-4, 36, 91, 139, 162, 174, 281  
 Luthy, David xv
- M**  
 Machno, Nestor 21  
 MacDonald, Dr. R. H. 107  
 McFarland, Colleen xv  
 McMaster, Richard 314  
 McQuillan, Aidan 87  
 Madison County, Ohio 213  
 Mafeking, Manitoba 145  
 Magpie family (the) 68  
 Malaysia 187  
 Manitoba Colony, Mexico 78, 312  
 Mannheim, Ontario 81  
 Manson, Iowa 241  
 Maple Leaf Enterprises 227  
 Marietta, Penn. 45  
 Marion County, Kansas 70  
*The Marketplace* 230  
 Markham, Ontario 38  
 Markham, Illinois 121  
 Marr, Lucille 211  
 Marriage 36, 39, 65, 78, 129, 195-6, 201, 204-9, 255, 271, 314  
 Martens, John and  
 Margarete (Penner) 327  
 Martens, Katherine 278, 328  
 Martens, Maria ix  
 Martens, Olga Reimer 318  
 Martensville, Sask. 115  
 Martin, Abner 281  
 Martin, Ivan 227  
 Martin, Jason S. 184  
 Martin, J. B. 315  
 Martin, Naomi 315  
 Martin, Wayne S. 243  
 Martin, Wayne W. 243  
 Martin household 213  
 Martin Stone Quarry 227  
 Martyrdom viii, 6, 8, 35-6, 300, 302  
*Martyrs Mirror* 35  
 Mathies, Ronald R. J. 246  
 Mathis, Texas 214  
 Meade, Kan. 81-2, 105, 116-7  
 Media (print, radio, TV, film) see 277-304  
 Medina County, Ohio 44  
 Meeks, Willie 168  
 Mellinger, Anna 41  
 Menno Simons 6, 14, 61, 118, 288  
 Menno Simons College 134-5, 290, 328  
 Menno Singers of Ont. 281  
 Menno Travel 328  
 Menno-Hof, Indiana 295  
*The Mennonite* 72  
 Mennonite Aid Union of Ontario 238-9  
 Mennonite Brethren (MB) 18, 52, 59-60, 62-5, 86, 94, 97, 107, 113-4, 123, 129, 133, 137, 140, 149, 165, 169-70, 173-4, 176, 187, 209, 218, 227, 229, 232, 234, 239, 245, 251-2, 259, 260, 268, 270-2, 274, 280, 312  
 Mennonite Brethren Bible College 155, 282  
 Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary 156  
 Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute 304  
 Mennonite Brethren Foundation 241  
 Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission vi  
 Mennonite Brethren in Christ (later Missionary Church) 71, 140, 145-7, 173, 181  
 Mennonite Central Committee vi-vii, 22, 116, 118, 130, 146-7, 154, 161-2, 166, 177-80, 182-91, 211, 228, 238-9, 246-7, 254, 274, 291, 296, 305, 307, 310, 312, 314-23, 326-7, 333-4  
 Mennonite Children's Choir, Winnipeg 281  
 Mennonite Church (MC) See (Old) Mennonites/ Mennonite Church (MC)  
 Mennonite Church Canada 251, 259, 314  
 Mennonite Church USA 251, 259, 263, 270, 311, 314  
*The Mennonite Community* 235  
 Mennonite Community Orchestra 281  
 Mennonite Conciliation Service 321  
 "Mennonite Devotional" radio program, 281  
 Mennonite Disaster Service 116-7, 182, 321  
 Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) 226, 228-30, 306-7, 317, 327, 335  
 Mennonite Foundation vi, 341-3, 245  
 Mennonite Heritage and Agricultural Museum, Kansas 295  
 Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg 134  
 Mennonite Heritage Cruise 329  
 Mennonite Heritage Village, Man. 284  
 Mennonite Historical Society of Canada 314  
 "Mennonite Hour" radio program 280  
 Mennonite Indemnity Inc. 242  
*Mennonite Life* 90  
 Mennonite Male Choir, Winnipeg 281  
 Mennonite Mental Health Services 182  
 Mennonite Mission Network 246, 324  
*Mennonite Mirror* 282  
 Mennonite Mutual Aid (now Everence) vi, 117, 239-43

- Mennonite Oratorio Choir 282
- Mennonite Pioneer Mission outpost 171
- Mennonite Publishing House 118, 235
- Mennonite Publishing Company 47
- Mennonite Quarterly Review* 92, 323
- Mennonite Renewal Services 262
- Mennonite Reporter* 252
- Mennonite Weekly Review* 203, 205, 241, 252, 325-7
- Mennonite World Conf. iv, xiv, 305, 330-335
- MWC Assemblies: Curitiba, Brazil (1972), 296, 300; Wichita, Kansas (1978), 300, 305, 330; Strasbourg, France (1984), 320; Winnipeg, Manitoba (1990), 330-3; Calcutta, India (1997), 330, 333
- Mennonitische Post* 312-3
- MennoLink 303
- MennoNeighbors 303
- Mennonot: A Zine for Mennos on the Margins* 303
- Meno, Oklahoma 111, 133
- Merchants State Bank, Freeman 234
- Meritas investment fund, Canada 243
- Methodists 168
- Mexico x, 43, 76-80, 95, 97-8, 123-4, 137-8, 160, 162, 236-7, 291-2, 308-9, 311-3, 327-8
- Middlebury, Indiana 44
- Midland, Michigan 223
- Milford, Nebraska 299
- Migrations viii-ix, 9-24, 49-59, 77-9, 137-8, 291
- Military service and alternatives to war viii-xi, 13, 15-21, 24, 28-9, 44-6, 72-6, 78-9, 117-8, 167, 177-89, 192, 213-4, 281-2, 290-1, 333, 337 (See also Nonresistance and Nonviolence)
- Miller, Ella May 150
- Miller, Ernest E. 133
- Miller, Keith Graber 316
- Miller, Larry vi
- Miller, Orie O. 147, 178, 228, 296
- Miller-Hess Shoe Co. 228
- Millersburg, Ohio 172
- Millersville, Penn. 111
- Minneapolis, Minn. 110, 112-3
- Mission 2, 8, 11, 13, 20, 34, 43, 47, 60, 62, 68-9, 74, 83, 94, 108, 110, 112-4, 119-20, 123, 127, 132, 136-7, 140, 144-7, 149, 151-2, 155, 159, 163-77, 181, 188, 190-2, 204-5, 208, 221, 230, 241, 243, 246, 249, 260-1, 264, 273-4, 276, 281, 290, 302-3, 306-8, 317, 323-5, 333-4, 336, 338; see also Appendix F
- Mission, B. C. 270
- Mission Training School, Barmen, Germany 167
- Missionary Church, see Mennonite Brethren in Christ
- Missionary Church Association 146
- Modernism/Fundamentalism 62, 139-43, 155, 332
- Mogomela, Paul and Onkabetse 252
- Moist, Elizabeth Engle 139
- Moist, Lida 139
- Molochna (Molotschna) Colony vii, ix, 16-18, 20-1, 52, 61, 65
- Montreal, Que. 173, 275
- Moody Bible Institute 141-2, 169
- Moorhead, Minnesota 53
- Moravian Church 13, 33, 50
- Morden, Manitoba 218
- Morton, Illinois 262
- Mosemann Jr., John H. 265
- Mount Forest, Ont. 163
- Mountain Lake, Minn. 64-5, 90, 111, 116, 225, 266, 297
- Mullinger, Sask. 205
- Munich, North Dakota 60
- Münster 5
- Muppies 129-30
- Music, see Hymns and/or Singing
- Mutual Aid; Sharing; Charitable Giving v, 5, 93-4, 117, 121, 194, 222, 232, 238-40, 242-8, 338 — Deacons 81, 160, 240-3, 246, 248, 253, 286 — Relief Sales 246-7
- N**
- Nachtigal, Peter 66
- Nappanee, Indiana 293
- Nargang, Josiah 81
- National Association of Evangelicals 143
- National Film Board of Canada (NFB) 290
- National identity 308-17
- Nationwide Mennonite Fellowship Churches (conservative) 255
- Native Americans, see Indigenous People
- Neckar River 330
- Nepal 183
- Netherlands vi, 7, 14, 17, 23, 27, 281
- Neufeld, Bernie 281
- Neufeld, Dr. "Frau" 65
- Neufeld, George B. 90
- Neufeld, Gerhard 65
- Neufeld, John 74
- Neufeld, Katherina (Klassen) 218 — and husband Peter 218
- Neufeld, N. J. 235
- Neufeld, Pete 73
- Neufeld, Dr. Vernon 306
- Neufeld, Waldemar 298
- New birth 37, 63-4
- New Hamburg, Ont. 212
- New Holland, Penn. 226
- New Mexico 74, 169
- New Tribes Mission 174
- New York State 19, 43, 99, 210
- New York City 20, 27, 107-12, 120, 128, 136, 147-8, 152, 154, 171-2, 175, 185, 191, 255, 293, 296, 306
- New York Times* 152, 277, 294, 297
- The New Yorker* 302
- Newcomer, Christian 31-2
- Newsweek* 213

- Newton, Kan. x, 61, 111, 116, 118, 173, 235, 298  
 Niagara Christian College 238  
 Nicaragua 311, 317, 321, 327  
 Nickel, Henry 65  
 Nickel Mines, Penn. 294  
 Nigeria 174, 176, 183  
 Nikiema, Ed 305  
 Nissley, Homer 234  
 Nissley, Bishop Peter R. 2, 45  
 Niverville, Manitoba 277  
 Nogai nomads 15, 17  
 Nolt, Lizzie Zimmerman 42  
 Nonconformity (see Separateness)  
 Nonresistance 29-30, 36, 46, 62, 134, 142, 144-7, 154, 157, 167, 178, 188, 233, 309  
 Nonviolence viii, xi, xiii, 1, 6, 85, 104, 322, 333, 335  
 North Kildonan, Man. 114-5, 231  
 North Newton, Kansas xv, 103, 118  
 Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) 183  
 Northfield, Nova Scotia 312  
 Northwest Mennonite Conference, Alberta 279  
 Nyasaland (Malawi) 183
- O**  
 Oak Lake, Man. 76, 198  
 Oaths 5, 32, 64, 134  
 Oberholtzer, John H. 43  
 Obregón, Álvaro 78  
 Oesch, Magdalena 39  
 Okanya, Nelson 324  
 Oklahoma 53, 62, 64, 67-9, 74, 167-9, 302  
 Oklahoma Bible Academy 133  
 Old Colony (Reinländer) Mennonites xiv, 52, 58-9, 69-70, 76, 78-9, 95-7, 145, 158-9, 162, 203, 216, 257, 279, 292, 312-3  
 (Old) Mennonites/  
 Mennonite Church (MC) 43, 47, 52, 70, 94, 112, 127, 133, 141, 145, 150, 157-8, 171-2, 174-6, 178, 185, 188, 210, 227, 232-3, 239-40, 244-5, 257-9, 261-2, 266-8, 272-3, 274-6, 312, 314  
 Old Order (the) xiv, 42-3, 47, 52, 89, 91, 99, 101-3, 104-5, 126, 138, 142, 155, 158-64, 170, 181, 184, 191, 211, 215, 236-8, 243, 247-8, 251, 253, 256-7, 264, 267, 271, 276, 278-9, 292-5, 302, 317, 320, 337  
 Old Order Spirituality 159-64  
 Omaha, Nebraska 134, 142  
 Ontario Mennonite Bible School 314  
 Ortíz, José 263, 312  
 Ortmann, Blake 323  
 Osler, Sask. x, 70, 95, 145, 202  
 Osler Mission Chapel 145  
 Oswald, Peter 38  
 Ottawa, Ont. 110, 127, 312, 315-6  
 Oyer, Mary K. 268
- P**  
 Pacific Bible College 155-6  
 Pacific Bible Institute (later M. B. Biblical Seminary) 114  
 Pacifism (See Military Service)  
 Padilla, Saulo A. vii-viii, xi  
 Page, Geraldine 297  
 Palatinate (the) 7, 9  
 Palliser Furniture 231, 326  
 Palmer, Delma 74  
 Pandora, Ohio 146  
 Pankratz, Henry J. 225  
 — and wife Elsie 225  
 Pannell, Richard 120  
 Paraguay x, 19, 22, 54, 77, 79, 83, 95, 115, 162, 183, 222, 228, 267, 306-7, 313  
 — Paraguayan Chaco 54, 77, 183, 306  
 — Trans-Chaco Highway 183  
 Pastoral leadership; Ordination 65, 112, 127-8, 146-7, 150, 169, 227, 240-1, 252, 256-60, 264, 299  
 Pauls, Alvin 283-4  
 Pauls, Anna 219  
 Pauls, David F. 217  
 Pauls, Liese 107  
 Pax Christi Chorale, 282  
 PAX program 182-3, 185  
 Peace River Valley, Alberta 95-6, 162  
 Peachey, Paul 258  
 Peifer, Grace Kautz 328  
 Pellman, Charles and Lizzie 206  
 Peña, Maria 170  
 Peña, Ricardo 169  
 Penn, William 27  
 Penner, Abram 58  
 Penner, Archie 233, 309  
 Penner, Ed 180  
 Penner, Maria Buhler 65  
 — and daughter Aganetha 85  
 Penner, Wilmer 199  
 Penner Electric Store, 124  
 Pennsylvania Dutch x, 33, 212, 292, 306  
 Persecution viii-ix, 2, 5, 7, 14, 16, 79, 85, 320  
 Peru 183  
 Peters, Bev 260  
 Peters, Edward J. 227, 229  
 Peters, Frank C. 133, 155  
 Peters, Isaac 64  
 Peters, Ronald xv  
 Phan Thi Phuong-Hang 307  
 Philadelphia, Mississippi 11  
 Philadelphia, Penn. 27-8, 38, 110, 112, 123, 125, 255-6, 295, 305  
 Phoenix, Arizona 245  
 Pietersz, Pieter 15  
 Pietism 7-8, 15, 18, 36-7, 63-4, 122, 139, 281  
 Pinecraft, Florida 237-8  
 Pinkley, John 34  
 Plockhoy, Pieter 27  
*Plautdietsch* (Low German) x, 15, 17, 69, 98, 123, 198, 231, 236, 281, 283, 286, 288-9, 291-2, 306, 309, 312-3, 329  
 Plum Coulee, Man. 126, 180  
 Poland 7, 14-5  
 Politics 30-3, 44-6, 118, 128-30, 156, 186, 311  
 Prairie Bible Institute, 140  
 Prairieleut Hutterites 52, 64, 66-7  
 Prayer vii, 7, 38, 50, 62, 76-7, 89, 126, 132, 161-2, 172, 175, 193, 195, 198,

- 200, 210, 256, 261, 264-6, 270, 287, 325, 335  
 — Books 7, 162  
 — Veil 38, 71, 126, 132, 210  
 Preheim, Rich xv  
 Presbyterian Church 28, 46, 112, 193, 274  
 Primera Iglesia Evangélica Menonita, Calgary vii  
 Prince Phillip 283  
 — and Queen Elizabeth 307  
 Princeton University 203  
 Pritchard, Doug 326-7  
 Protestant Reformation (the) 5, 153  
 Prussia xiii, 10, 14-17, 19-20, 48, 52, 61, 69  
 Puerto Rico 172, 184, 263, 318, 332  
 Pauingassi, Manitoba 171
- Q**  
 Quakers 8, 27-30, 32, 177, 181  
 Quellen Kolonie 138  
 Quebec City 20, 56
- R**  
 Race and racial issues 4, 22, 24, 55, 109, 119-22, 125, 129, 136, 158, 167, 169-73, 190-1, 204-5, 235-6, 260, 262-3, 273, 316, 321  
 Radio broadcasting 139, 143, 149-51, 173, 180, 277-82, 296, 303, 306  
 Rahn, Margaretha (Giesbrecht) 86  
 Raid, Howard 242  
 Raid Quarries 226  
 Ralph's Market, Lansdale 224  
 Ranaghan, Kenneth 261  
 Rancho Alegre Youth Center 254  
 Ratzlaff, Keith 302  
 Rawling, R. C. 98  
 Reagan, President Ronald 323  
 Reba Place Fellowship 271, 332  
 Red River 53, 58  
 Redekop, Calvin 89, 104, 144, 194  
 Redekop, Gloria 127  
 Redekop, Jacob 226, 242  
 Redekop, Susanna 112  
 Reedley, Cal. 89, 111, 251  
 Refugees 9, 23, 115, 121, 159, 182-3, 186-7, 190-1, 199, 213, 254-5, 311, 316, 318-9, 334  
 — Overground Railroad 254  
 Regaldo, Carlos 292  
 Regehr, Ernie 186  
 Regehr, Olga 114  
 Regehr, T. D. 180, 316  
 Regier, Bob 298-9  
 Regier, J. J. 63  
 Regier, Marie J. 83  
 Regier, Bishop Peter 65, 69  
 Reimer, A. James 293, 331  
 Reimer, Al 286  
 Reimer, Ben D. 214  
 Reimer, George 281  
 Reimer, Helena (Doerksen) 81-2  
 — and daughter Helena 81  
 — husband Klaas and sons 82  
 Reimer, Irvin 233  
 Reimer, Nicholai 87  
 Reimer, Olga 318  
 Reimer, Richard 312  
 Reimer Express Lines 234  
 Rempel, Dietrich 77  
 Rempel, Peter 312  
 Renewal Movements 7-9, 18, 36-8, 59-66, 139-40, 142-52, 154-5, 159-61, 176, 260-4, 276, 333  
 Repentance 35, 37, 63  
 Restorative justice 187-8  
 Revivalism, see Renewal Movements  
 Revolutions  
 — American x, 30-2, 272, 308  
 — Agricultural 82-3, 193  
 — Communications xii, 294, 303  
 — French 13  
 — Münsterite 5  
 — Rural 93-4, 223  
 — Bolshevik ix, 21, 75, 277  
 — Sexual 201-2  
 Rhineland Consumers' Co-op 90  
 Rice, John R. 206  
 Richards, Emma Sommers 259  
 — and Joe 259  
 Richfield, Penn. 206  
 Riel, Louis 55  
 Ringenberg, Art and Ella 218  
 Rio Grande Bible Inst. 169  
 Risser, Wayne 131  
 River Brethren, see Brethren in Christ  
 Rockingham County, Virginia 45  
 Rockway Collegiate, 238  
 Rod and Staff Publishers, 255  
 Roman Catholicism 3, 17, 83, 135, 140, 156, 169, 173, 254, 260-1, 266, 269, 332  
 Rosedale Mennonite Missions 246  
 Rosehill, North Dakota 86  
 Rosenfeld, Manitoba 180  
 Ross, Kelly xv  
 Rosthern, Sask. x, 110-1, 114, 131, 199, 251  
 Rosthern Junior College 110, 131-2  
 Roten, Gertrude Wiebe 148  
 Roth, Arnold C. 183  
 Roth, John D. xv  
 Royer, Esther 126-7  
 Rudolph Boschmann's Gospel Messengers Quartet 282  
 Rudy, John H. 24  
 Rudy, Pastor John 298  
*Rural Evangel* 94  
*Russländer* Mennonites 53, 75-7, 87, 286  
 Russia, see also Soviet Union vii, x, xiii, 1, 10, 15-22, 47-9, 51-3, 56, 58, 61, 63, 65, 76-7, 80, 86-7, 127, 132, 139, 178, 198, 216, 277, 306, 310, 313, 323, 328-9  
 Ruth, John L. 264, 295-6, 301, 328  
 Rutschman, James 235
- S**  
 St. Catherine's, Ont. 110, 121  
 St. James, Manitoba 125  
 St. Michele, Haiti 306  
 Saint Paul, Minnesota 275  
 Sakakibara, Gan 332  
 Salem, Oregon 53, 209  
 Salunga, Penn. 306  
 San Joaquin Valley, Cal. 71, 229  
 San Jose, Cal. 113  
 Sanchez, Norma 249

- Santa Cruz, Bolivia 216, 229  
 Santa Fe Railroad 60-1  
 Sarasota, Florida 252  
 Sarona Dairy Cooperative, Paraguay 228  
 Saskatchewan *x*, 22, 53-6, 64, 67, 69-70, 75-7, 79, 84, 86, 95-7, 107, 110-1, 115, 120, 131-2, 140, 145, 158, 162, 170, 197, 202, 205, 227, 229, 251-2, 254, 272, 286, 331  
 Saskatchewan River 55, 111  
 Saskatoon, Sask. 107-8, 110, 115, 127, 280, 329  
 Sattler, Michael 156-7, 300, 330  
 — and Margareta 300  
 Sauder, Erie 227, 199  
 Sauder Manufacturing/Woodworking 227, 229  
 Sawatsky, Jake 198  
 Sawatsky, Margaret 195  
 Sawatsky, Rodney 60  
 Scarlatti, Domenico 250  
 Schaefer, Paul 219  
 Schaeffer, Francis 265  
 Schama, Simon 105  
 Scheffel, Keith 246  
 Schellenberg, Abraham 63  
 Schellenberg, Harry 128  
 Schenk, Oliver, W. 298  
 Schlabach, Gerald W. 322  
 Schlabach, Theron 54, 178, 324-5  
 Schleithem Confession 301, 330  
 Schlichting, Ray 232  
 Schmidt, Carl 73  
 Schmidt, Harold 239, 242  
 Schmidt, Rick 186  
 Schmidt, Sarah Jane 186  
 Schmiedehaus, Walter 77  
 Schmitt, Leona 315  
 Schneider, Bishop Henry 233  
 Schneider, Gordon 223  
 Schneider, Joseph, wife Barbara and family 285  
 "The School of Discipleship" (later "Outatown"), 328  
 Schools, see Bible Schools, Institutes, Colleges; Education; or individual institution names  
 Schowalter, J. A. 241  
 Schowalter Foundation 241  
 Schroeder, Mary 113  
 Schulz, Henry 202  
 Schwarzenau, Germany 36  
 Schwarzenhuber, Bishop Johannes 38  
 Schwenkfelders 33  
 Schwenksville, Penn. 112  
 Scottsdale, Penn. 235  
 Second World War 23, 93, 95, 115-6, 127, 128, 130, 146, 166-7, 177, 181-2, 185, 199, 207, 212-3, 231, 239, 244, 286, 290, 316  
 SELFHELP Crafts (later Ten Thousand Villages) 318-9  
 Seminole, Texas 98, 312  
 Senn, Fritz 286  
 Separateness (from "the world" or the state) 5-7, 9, 17-8, 29-33, 35-6, 42, 64, 78-9, 111-2, 132-3, 141, 160-1, 177-8, 210, 309-11  
 Service, see Humanitarian Service  
 Serving and Learning Together program (SALT) 327  
 Sevastopol, Crimea 329  
 Sexuality 194-5, 200-2, 208, 219, 287-8, 303, 337  
 Shafter, California 208  
 Shank, Crissie Yoder 174  
 Shantz, Elven 315  
 Shantz, Menno M. 81  
 Shantz, Milo 230  
 Shantz, William 174  
 Sharing with Appalachian People (SWAP) 274  
 Sharon High School 193  
 Shearer, Tobin Miller 204  
 Shelby, Brenda 223  
 Shelly, Patricia 333  
 Shenk, Stanley C. 147  
 Shenk, Wilbert R. v, 330  
 Sherk, Bert 37  
 Sholl, Betsy 302  
 Shover, John 93  
 Showalter, Shirley Hershey 219  
 Siberia 20, 23, 55, 306, 329  
 Sicily 165  
 Sider, E. Morris 180  
 Sider, Ronald J. 190, 208, 321  
 — and wife Artubus 208  
 Siemens, J. J. 90  
 Siemens, John 232  
 Siemens, Peter H. 169  
 Simcoe County, Ont. 38  
 Singing, see also Hymns vii, 25, 65, 107-9, 132, 160-1, 198, 249, 264-71, 281-2, 288, 305, 332, 336  
 Sitting Bull 55  
 Slavery 4, 28, 43-5, 91, 113, 305  
 Smiley, David 327  
 Smith, C. Henry 141  
 Smithville, Ohio 204  
 Smucker, Barbara Claassen 198  
 Smucker, John I. 172  
 Snider, Elias 81  
 Snyder, Alice 315  
 Snyder, Edward G. 229  
 Snyder, Isador 217  
 Snyder, Peter Etril 283  
 Snyder, William 242  
 Social Class 5, 40, 43, 109, 123-5, 128-9, 235, 239-41, 244, 311, 336  
 Sommerfelder (Mennonite) Church 59, 158, 162, 257, 312  
 Sommers, Dan 227  
 Soto, Elizabeth 332  
 Souder, Elvin 242  
 Souder, Eugene 108-9  
 South Bend, Ind. 234, 261  
 South Korea 183  
 Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) 174  
 Soviet Union *x*, 19-20, 22-3, 52, 87, 106, 127, 140, 142, 166, 182, 187, 198, 216, 266, 276, 289, 306, 320, 328-9  
 Springer, Joe xv  
 Spruceland Millworks 221  
 Sprunger, Sara 72  
 Staebler, Edna 212  
 Stalin, Joseph 22, 127, 198  
 Stamm, Alvin 234  
 Stauffer, Ana 31  
 Stauffer, Bill 92  
 Stauffer Mennonites 159  
 Steinbach, Manitoba xiii, 111, 124-5, 148, 212, 214, 226, 234, 284, 307, 316, 324, 326  
 Steiner, Menno 200  
 Steiner, Sam xv  
 Steinreich Bible School, Chihuahua, Mexico 327

- Sterling, Illinois 85  
 Stevenson, Mathilda (Kohn) 261  
 Stobbe, Pastor Victor 270  
 Stoesz, A. D. 90  
 Stoesz, Conrad xv  
 Stoesz, Bishop David 69, 74  
 Stoesz, Sara 252  
 Stoltzfus, Gene 321  
 Stoltzfus, Jacob, Grace (Hertzler), Joey, Vida Jean and Lena Mae 193-4  
 Stoltzfus, Ruth Brunk 150  
 Stoltzfus, Samuel 161  
 Stoner, John K. 310, 321  
 Strasbourg, France 321  
 Strawberry Lake, Minn. 261  
 "Study-Service Term," Goshen College 328  
 Submission 35-8, 127, 164, 208  
 Suckau, Dr. C. H. 133-4  
 Sullivan City, Texas 169  
 Summers, Joseph 71  
 Supreme Court, U. S. 162-3  
 Susquehanna River 36  
 Syddam, Ada 208  
 Syria 166  
 Swalm, Bishop E. J. 315  
 Swalm, Mary (Ruhl) 38  
 Swarr, Paul 108-9  
 Swartzendruber, Bishop Jacob 37  
 Swartzendruber, Harold L. 242  
 Swartzentruber, Dwight 174  
 Swartzentruber, Edwin E. 241  
 "Swartzentruber" Amish 159  
 Swift Current, Sask. 69, 111
- T**  
 Taber, Alberta 312  
 Tabor College 63, 133  
 Tanganyika 175  
 Tanzania 175-6, 229, 307  
 Taves, Harvey 315  
 Taylor-Wingender, Spencer 274  
 Teachers Abroad Program 183, 185  
 Teng, Kuaying 121  
 Temple University 255  
 Texas 53-5, 80, 84, 98, 120, 137, 151, 169-70, 254, 311  
 Texas A&M University 216  
 Théret, Jean Raymond 123  
 Thiesen, John D. xv, 61  
 Thiessen, Anna 113  
 Thiessen, Jacob G. 114  
 Thiessen, J. J. and Mrs. 107  
 Thiessen, Janis xv, 231  
 Thiessen, Karen Heidebrecht 128  
 Three Hills, Alberta 140  
 Tiegge, Molochna 17  
 Tieszen, Lowell 327  
 Tobacco 64, 77, 91, 102-3, 134, 242  
 Toews, David 22  
 Toews, John A. 155, 323  
 Toews, Harvey K. 252  
 Toews, J. B. 156, 219  
 Toews, Miriam 287-8, 292  
 Toews, Paul 316  
 Toews, Bishop Peter 58  
 Tompkins, Doug 293  
 Toronto, Ont. 81, 110-1, 136, 206, 282, 289, 329  
 Toronto Bible College (later Tyndale Seminary) 143  
 Torres, Gracie 172, 268  
 Torres, Neftali 171-2, 191  
 Tourism 163, 292-3, 328-30  
 TourMagination 329  
 Towell, Larry 291  
 Triple E Homes, Winkler 326  
 Troyer, David N. 320  
 Trudeau, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott 316-7  
 Tschetter, John 67, 90  
 Tung, Rev. Francis 186  
 Turner, Frederick Jackson 51  
 Turner, Oregon 157-8, 185  
 Tuscarawas County, Ohio 92
- U**  
 Ukraine 15, 19, 22, 53, 76, 328-9  
 Umble, Diane Zimmerman 150  
 Unger, Walter and Marina 329  
 United Farm Workers 191  
 University of Alberta 118, 250  
 University of Minnesota 90  
 University of Notre Dame 156  
 University of Saskatchewan 132  
 University of Waterloo 134-5  
 University of Winnipeg v-vi, xiv-xv, 134-5, 287  
 Unruh, Albert 73  
 Upland, California 89, 253  
 Urry, James 128
- V**  
 Vacation Bible School 120  
 Vang, Neng Chue 275  
 Vedder River 194  
 Victoria, Queen 57  
 Vilonia, Arkansas 98  
 Volhynia, Russia 16, 20, 52, 61, 63  
 Voluntary Service 116, 184, 188, 214, 254  
 Vancouver, B. C. 110, 114, 121, 136, 149, 192, 222, 225, 243, 252, 259-60  
 Vancouver Island, B. C. 179, 211  
 Vietnam 183, 186, 189, 192, 307, 316  
 Vietnam War 118, 120, 157, 183, 185-7, 214, 301  
 Villareal, Carmen 137  
 Villareal, Yolanda 137-8, 151-2  
 Vineland, Ontario 182  
 von Riesen, Anna 50  
 Voth, Heinrich 59, 65  
 Voth, Herman 280  
 Voth, J. H. 113  
 Voth, Larry 121
- W**  
*Waisenamit*, see Mutual Aid and Inheritance  
 Wakarusa, Indiana 39  
 Waldner, Fred 67  
 Waldner, Lizzie and Lydia 87  
 Waldrep, G. C. 302  
 Wall, Aron 59, 65  
 Walters, Samuel 255  
 Waltner, Erland 148, 330  
 Warkentin, John 86  
 Warwick River plantation 91  
 Washington, D. C. 108, 110, 184, 315-6  
 Waterloo, Ont. 26, 32, 34, 81, 85, 99, 110, 118, 123, 134-5, 140, 187, 200, 211-2, 217, 235, 282-3, 285, 329  
 Wayland, Iowa 183, 240  
 WDAC radio station 150-1  
 Weaver, Carol Ann 299  
 Weaver, David 322  
 Weaver, John 55



- Weaver, Joshua xv  
 Weaver, Laura 267  
 Weaver-Zercher, David 294-5  
 Weaverland Conference  
 Mennonites 99  
 Webb, Roberta and  
 daughters Nancy,  
 Peggy, and Ada 209  
 Weber, Christian and wife,  
 Magdalena Ruth 25-6  
 Weber, Doris 259  
 — and Rod 259  
 Weber, Rev. Urias 126  
 Weddings 197, 205-8  
 Wedel, Cornelius H. 140  
 Wedel, Jacob G. 242  
 Wedel, Rueben 137  
 Weisser, Norbert 300-1  
 Welk, Abraham 111  
 Welland County, Ontario 37  
 Wenger, Christian 217  
 Wenger, Ruth Yoder 267  
 Wenger, Samuel S. 112,  
 217, 242  
 Wenger Supplies,  
 Michigan 236  
 Werner, Hans xv, 111  
 West Liberty, Ohio 261  
 West Milton, Ohio 139  
 West Prussia xiii, 14-7, 20,  
 61, 69  
 West Reserve, Manitoba  
 58-9, 100, 126  
 Westfield Industries,  
 Rosenort 326  
 Western Conservative  
 Mennonite Fellowship 255  
 Western Gospel Mission  
 145, 170, 214  
 Wheaton, Illinois 206  
 Wheaton College 309  
 Whiteshield, Harvey 168-9  
 Whitewater, Kansas 83  
 Wichita, Kansas 111, 182,  
 300, 305, 330-1  
 Wiebe, Armin 287-8  
 Wiebe, Arthur J. 155  
 Wiebe, Dallas 303  
 Wiebe, Bishop Gerhard 58  
 Wiebe, George 282  
 Wiebe, Helen 197  
 Wiebe, Jacob A. 63  
 Wiebe, Bishop Johan 58  
 Wiebe, Menno 188  
 Wiebe, Philip 209  
 Wiebe, Rudy 197, 286-7  
 Wiebe, Vernon 324  
 Wieler, Martin 96  
 Wiens, Delbert 144  
 Wiens, Marty 327  
 Wiens, William P. 73  
 Williams, Norman V. 206  
 Wilmar Windows,  
 Winnipeg 326  
 Winkler, Manitoba 111-2,  
 165, 218, 312, 326  
 Winnerod, Germany 38  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba v-vi,  
 xiv-xv, 50, 53, 55, 100,  
 110, 113-5, 118, 122,  
 125, 128, 134-5, 139-  
 40, 148, 155, 180, 186,  
 208, 212, 216-7, 231-2,  
 235, 251, 281-3, 287,  
 304, 326-8, 330-3  
 Winnipeg Bible Institute 140  
*Winnipeg Free Press* 72  
 Winnipeg Philharmonic  
 Choir 281  
 Wipf, Mary 290  
 Wise, Aaron and Hannah  
 (Good) family 197  
 Wise, Susan 212  
 Witmer, Anna 297  
 Witmer, Earl 108-9  
 Wollman, J. J. 234  
 Women 1, 4-5, 23, 38,  
 43, 45, 47, 49, 54, 60,  
 64-5, 67, 71, 83, 85-6,  
 103, 107, 109, 112-3,  
 118, 121, 125-8, 133,  
 137, 139, 144, 148,  
 151-2, 165-6, 179, 182-  
 3, 186, 205-12, 236-7,  
 247, 252-4, 259-60,  
 262-3, 287, 293, 302-3,  
 318-9, 321, 334  
 — pastors and evangelists  
 112, 127-8, 146-8,  
 152, 174, 247, 259-60  
 Wong, Rev. Enoch 121-2  
 — and Grace 122  
 World Vision 143, 174  
 World War I, see First  
 World War  
 World War II, see Second  
 World War  
 Worship vii, 15, 57, 77, 122,  
 127, 137, 167, 176, 190,  
 243, 248-76, 337-8  
 Worster, Donald 82  
 Wycliffe Bible Translators 174  
 Wyse, Maynard 227  
 Wyse, W. M. and C. L. 227
- Y**  
 Yale University 153  
 Yankton, South Dakota 66  
 Yantzi, Mark 187  
 Yarrow, B. C. 76, 86-7,  
 111, 193, 280-1  
 Yarrow Freight and Fuels  
 Company 282  
 Yoder Dairies 226  
 Yoder, Elias 26  
 Yoder, John Howard 118,  
 129, 156, 258  
 Yoder, Katie xv  
 Yoder, Mag 26  
 Yoder, Mahala L. 25-6, 43  
 Yoder, Michael 104  
 Yoder, Tillie 172  
 Yost, Lyle 226, 232-3  
 Young Adult Discipleship  
 Adventure 177  
 Youth Evangelism Service 177  
 Youth for Christ 143  
 Youth with a Mission 174  
 Yunus, Muhammad 229
- Z**  
 Zacharias, Martha 329  
 Zehr, Howard 187  
 Zehr, Bishop Jacob and  
 Elizabeth Ehresman 12  
 Zielke, Cornelius and  
 Aganetha (Ediger) and  
 family 69  
 Ziegler, M. R. 310  
 Zimbabwe i, 174  
 Zimmerman, Anna 175  
 Zurich, Switzerland 1, 3-5,  
 109, 152  
 Zurich Mennonite Church,  
 Ont. 252  
 Zwingly, Ulrich 153, 301

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