

THE MENNONITES OF ALBERTA

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THE MENNONITES OF ALBERTA

by

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## Summary

### THE MENNONITES OF ALBERTA-----By Peter F. Bargaen

The only claim that this thesis can make is that it is an ~~introduction~~ introductory account of the Mennonites in Alberta. It has been attempted to give a brief but clear account of the origins of the various Mennonite denominations and their movement in Canada in general and into Alberta in particular. The common religious foundation (fundamentals of faith) enjoyed by most Mennonite bodies today can be traced to the common origins in the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century in Europe. From Switzerland and Holland the Mennonites have spread to all parts of the world.

There have been four well defined movements of Mennonites into Western Canada ranging in time from 1786 to 1953. These movements are important not only for their separation in time but also for their divergence in outlook which resulted from the different cultural background of the various immigrants. Today Mennonite differences, socially, culturally and religiously, make it clear that no one way of Mennonite life exists.

In Alberta the majority of Mennonites belong to two denominations: the Mennonite General Conference and the Mennonite Brethern, both of which can trace their Western Canadian origin back to the immigration from Russia 1923-1930. In addition to these two denominations Alberta contains smaller elements of Old Mennonites, Mennonite Brethern in Christ, Church of God in Christ and Old Colony Mennonites. In Alberta today prosperity and numerical strength have made Coaldale ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> headquarters of Mennonitism in the province. The more liberal outlook of the General Conference Church and the Mennonite Brethern Church have given ~~these~~ <sup>to</sup> groups economic and cultural dominance in Alberta Mennonite circles.



The land settlement policies of the Mennonites have always favoured group settlements; in Western Canada they found ideal conditions for such developments. Although communal beginnings were common the average Mennonite does not take to communism and preferred to seek land on his own. In his search there were only two determining factors: natural factors and the presence of people of his own faith. The settlement of the Mennonites on the land was largely controlled by the Canada Colonization Association under the control of the C.P.R., and the Mennonite Land Settlement Board later amalgamated with the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. A conflict soon developed between advocates of settlement controlled by Mennonite agencies and advocates of free settlement of farmers. This ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ conflict resulted in a confused policy of land settlement.

Mennonite economic development in Alberta has been rapid, especially in the areas dominated by the General Conference and Mennonite Brethern denominations; economic co-operation among the Mennonites has been largely confined to these two groups. In Alberta the Vertreterversammlung (Representative Assembly) is the controlling body of most Mennonite economic endeavours. Organizations have been set up on a local and provincial levels and provide services such as insurance in various fields, domestic and foreign relief and producer's co-operatives. A problem that was co-operatively solved by the Russian Mennonites was the Reiseschuld (travelling expenses) to the amount of \$1,767,398.68, which had been loaned ~~from~~ <sup>by</sup> the C.P.R. to aid the immigrants of 1923-1930. This debt was jointly liquidated in 1946.

The general problems of the Mennonites in relation to the community in which they live resolve themselves into the social, religious and educational fields. The specific problems along these

lines have been assimilation, the German language, and pacifism (non-resistance). Most Mennonites, outside of the more conservative elements, will assimilate in all things except religiously and socially; the German language is only a temporary problem and will disappear in the near future; non-resistance is a fundamental part of the Mennonite faith and compromise here is very unlikely. Outside of the latest immigrants the Mennonites in general are well on their way to "canadianization". This fact becomes doubly evident in the light of the differences between the older immigrants and the Mennonite "new Canadian". The Mennonites themselves now are faced with <sup>the</sup> a problem of assimilating the new-comers.

The thesis includes an appendix containing the following information:

1. Order-in-Council regarding the Mennonite rights in Canada 1873.
2. An excerpt regarding Mennonite settlement in Canada.
3. A petition of the Mennonite churches regarding military training and alternative services in case of another war, 1952.
4. An article, "Am I a National Socialist?"--by B.B. Janz.
5. A Map of Alberta showing all areas containing Mennonite elements.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts to present an introductory account of the Mennonites in Alberta, without attempting an interpretation or an evaluation of the Mennonite way of life. Major emphasis has been placed on Mennonite migrations, settlements, and common problems arising out of the clashes of alien cultures on new soil. Rather than deal with one particular Mennonite group, an attempt has been made to deal more with general problems which have been the concern of the Mennonite people as a whole, in the province of Alberta. Attention has been given to the Mennonite economic organizations which have been established and the educational efforts which have been made to preserve the Mennonite identity in a dominantly strange culture. Although the study is largely confined to the Mennonites in Alberta, where necessary the larger background has been given insofar as it helps to bring about an understanding of developments in that province.

As has been stated, the aim of this thesis is not an interpretation but rather a presentation of facts. The reasons for this approach are twofold: 1. The Mennonite settlements in Alberta are comparatively young, a few being founded in the early part of this century, the majority having been founded in the 1920's, and some as late as the thirties and forties. It is impossible at present to attain the proper historical perspective necessary for a just interpretation. 2. The great need in the field of Mennonite history in Alberta

is not so much one of interpretation as it is of the need to gather all the material into a more comprehensive whole. The material and the sources are there, but are scattered throughout Canada and the United States. One purpose, therefore, has been to gather this material and put it on record. Because of the late beginnings of the settlements many of the pioneers are still alive and have, at least in their minds, the earliest history of the Mennonites in Alberta. But this knowledge will die with them and now is the opportune time to make this history secure by transferring it from the perishable minds of men to the semi-permanence of written record.

# THE MENNONITES OF ALBERTA

## CHAPTER ONE

### ORIGINS AND DOCTRINES OF THE MENNONITES

The origin of the denominations classed under the head of Mennonite bodies can be traced to an early period in the history of the Christian Church. As various changes in doctrine and church organization came about, in both the East and the West, a number of communities, unwilling to accept them and preferring the simplicity of the Apostolic Church, remained more or less distinct through the middle ages. These communities received various names in different localities and in different centuries, but from the time of the first general council at Nicaea in the early part of the fourth century to the Conference of Dordrecht, Holland, in 1632, they represent a general protest against ecclesiastical rule and a rigid liturgy, and an appeal to the simpler organization, worship, and faith of the apostolic age.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the Reformation, the members of the scattered communities who laid particular stress upon the doctrine of believer's baptism, as opposed to infant baptism, found a leader in Menno Simons. He is regarded by Mennonites, however, not so much the founder of the church as a prominent factor in its organization.<sup>2</sup> The name Mennonite dates from

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1 Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Statistics, Religious Denominations: 1906, Washington, Government Printing Office, Part II, 1910, p. 404.

2 Smith, C. Henry, The Story of the Mennonites, Berne, Indiana, Mennonite Book Concern, 1945, p. 95f.

1550, but would scarcely be recognized in Holland where the usual name is "Doopsgezinde", or "Dooper", the Dutch equivalent for the English "Baptist". Similarly in parts of Germany, Switzerland and Austria, the German form "Taufgesinnte", or "Taeufer", was used to indicate Baptists. It was some of the Flemish Mennonites, who, upon invitation of King Henry VIII, settled in England and became the pioneers of the great weaving industry of that country. It was to this group that the Baptists of England were partly indebted for their organization as a religious body.<sup>3</sup> It must be understood, however, that the rise of the modern Baptists was largely independent of the Anabaptist movement on the continent.<sup>4</sup> The only connection seems to be the one already mentioned above, and also that the two founders of the Baptist Church in England, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, had to flee England and thus came into contact with the Anabaptists on the continent of Europe. Both of these men were baptized according to the Anabaptist fashion.<sup>5</sup>

As was stated, the origin of the Mennonites goes beyond Menno Simons. The cradle of the Anabaptist movement was in Zurich, Switzerland. It was here that Conrad Grebel turned from Roman Catholicism and became an evangelical believer through the ministry of Zwingli.<sup>6</sup> In 1525 a break occurred between Zwingli and Grebel over the relationship of

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3 Department of Commerce and Labor, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

4 "Baptists," in Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago, London, Toronto, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., Vol. III, 1950, p. 87.

5. Loc. cit.

6. Wenger, J.C., "The Cradle of the Mennonite Church," Mennonite Life, Jan. 1947, p. 6.

the Church and State. The former believed that the Church and State were one while Grebel taught they should be separated. Besides, for Grebel the Reformation was going far too slowly and the new church still retained too many ceremonies and forms from the Roman Catholic worship to suit him; especially the mass and infant baptism were attacked. Grebel went his own way and inaugurated what has come to be called "believer's baptism," thus founding what he called the "free" church. To Grebel this "free" church meant "a fellowship of voluntary Christians, entirely separated as a body from the state and state control."<sup>7</sup> Persecutions set in at once but in spite of imprisonment and death the new church grew. By 1535 this movement consisted of seventy-one congregations throughout Switzerland, and was spreading to the neighboring countries to the north. Most of these congregations were later ruthlessly exterminated.

At about this time a similar movement was taking place in northern Germany, where a man by the name of Melchior Hofmann had been licensed by Luther to preach the new reformation. Because of Hofmann's radical views, Luther later regretted this freedom of the ministry that had been granted to so unstable an enthusiast, who held some fanatical notions in the realm of prophecy. Hofmann first taught that Christ's second coming would take place in 1533, and when the event did not take place he allowed a "prophetess" to teach that he, Hofmann, was the Elijah of the Old Testament. The Melchior Movement, as it came to be called, spread throughout

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 7.



Germany and into Friesland and Holland.

Two brothers, Obbe and Dirck Philips, Frisian Catholics from Leeuwarden, had in the early 1530's affiliated themselves with the Melchiorites. When the coming of Christ did not materialize and the "saints" were persecuted unto the death, the brothers realized that they had heeded a false prophet. Obbe and Dirck then became the leaders of the Anabaptists opposing the Melchiorites, appealing to the less fanatical followers of the new church. They taught that the purpose of true Christians should be to continue the struggle against sin and put forth every effort to build the Kingdom of God on earth. This branch of the Anabaptist movement became known by the name of Obbenites, and it was this group with which Menno Simons later affiliated.

Menno Simons was born in 1496 in the little village of Witmarsum in Friesland. He was trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood and in 1524 became assistant priest at Pingjum, a small neighboring village. He was promoted to parish priest in Witmarsum in 1531, and remained there until the end of his Catholic career in 1536. As early as 1525 Menno had questioned some of the Roman Catholic doctrines. Through a study of the New Testament he came to the conclusion that in the matters of the mass and infant baptism the Catholic Church was wrong. The Bible did not state that the bread and wine used in the mass actually became the body and blood of Christ, nor did the New Testament mention anything but "believer's" baptism. It was not till April, 1535, that

Menno broke with the Church in a spiritual sense, and it was not until January, 1536, that he openly renounced Roman Catholicism.

Menno openly announced his new found faith and as a result soon had to flee persecution. He took refuge in the village of Groningen where a certain measure of religious freedom still existed. Here he met Obbe Philips and was immediately attracted to him as one who shared a similar religious belief. Menno was baptized by Obbe and thus became a member of the Dutch non-resistant Anabaptists. It was not long until Menno, by his energetic and fearless proclamation of his faith, drew upon him the wrath of the authorities, and in 1542 the Emperor Charles V, issued an edict against him.<sup>8</sup> Obbe later deserted the cause of the young church and Menno Simons became the established leader of the Dutch Anabaptists, thus giving his name to the entire movement. Menno died on his sick bed on January 30, 1561.

It should be understood that the Mennonites formed the largest denomination in the Anabaptist movement. Historians have even gone so far as to say that "After Menno's death Anabaptists became known as Mennonites."<sup>9</sup> This statement is an oversimplification but indicates that the predominant group surviving the Catholic reformation following the general break-away of the sixteenth century were Mennonites.

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<sup>8</sup> This edict is reproduced in Wenger, J.C., Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine, Harold Press, Scottdale, Pa., p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas, H.S., The Renaissance and the Reformation, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1934, p. 518.

Today there seem to be three definite branches of Anabaptists in existence, the Mennonites, the Swiss Brethern, and the Hutterites.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the first two mentioned denominations the differences in doctrine seem only to be the result of geographical separation and the fact that Menno Simons never taught in Switzerland; there is little difference in belief. The Hutterites, on the other hand, are spiritual descendants of Jacob Huter, whose field of activity was Moravia and who stressed the principle of a "community of goods" as a necessary part of a Christian life. Through the centuries this type of economy has cut the Hutterites off from the world around them, made them ultra-conservatives in religion to such an extent that today they are considered "backward" in all things except the art of making money. There is very little similarity between this group and the average Mennonite except, perhaps, in their pacifist attitude. For practical purposes, however, the Hutterites will not be considered as Mennonites in this work.

During the Reformation there were numerous Anabaptist parties. Newman<sup>11</sup> divides them into five main classes; The Chiliastic Anabaptists such as Thomas Muenzer, Hans Hut, Melchior Rinck, Melchior Hofmann, Jan Matthys and the Muenster sect, were the radicals whose philosophy was dictated by medieval modes of thought. This group disappeared entirely and represents the unstable and fanatical element in the Anabap-

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10 Newman, A.H., A Manual of Church History, Chicago, The American Baptist Publication Society, Vol. II, 1944, pp. 158-161.

11 Ibid., pp. 156-200.

tist revolt. The second group are the Biblical Anabaptists, including the Swiss Brethern, the Mennonites, and the Moravian Anabaptists in which the Hutterites have their origin. These three branches of the Biblical Anabaptists have remained and have absorbed many elements of the other parties. In addition there were the Mystical Anabaptists, the Pantheistic Anabaptists and the Anti-trinitarian Anabaptists, all of which have died out with the exception, perhaps, of small groups here and there which still tend to agree with one or the other party to a limited extent. For all practical purposes, however, the Anabaptists of today may be divided into the Swiss Brethern, Mennonites, and Hutterites. It is interesting to note that these three groups were the only ones professing pacifism during times of war, but whether this fact has done anything to help preserve and propogate their faith is a matter for conjecture. In the following statement of doctrine attention shall be paid mainly to the teachings of Menno Simons and those persons closely associated with him.

The Mennonites are not a "creedal" church, that is, no human system of doctrine is definitive for the life and activities of its members. They were and are a Bible-centered group. The reformers such as Luther and Zwingli permitted what was not specifically forbidden by the scriptures, the Anabaptists believed what was not specifically taught by scripture, or by the example of Christ and the Apostles, was an anathema.<sup>12</sup> It should be mentioned that a number of individuals in the Mennonite Church have, in the past, prepared

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12 Waltner, E., "Anabaptist Concept of the Church" Mennonite Life, Oct., 1950, p. 40.

formal statements of doctrine dealing with the practical aspects of Christian living. Menno Simons was not the least of those who prepared writings for the guidance of his followers; but there was a definite lack of theological treatises among the Mennonites, a fact that stresses the Biblical rather than the theological nature of Mennonitism. The writings which do exist, however, will serve as the basis of the following doctrinal statements.<sup>13</sup>

The Anabaptist doctrine has always viewed the church in its vertical relationship as the body of Christ of which He is the real and living head. Pilgrim Marpeck, one of the early leaders of the Swiss Anabaptists wrote, "Christus ist das haubt seiner kierchen, die da ist sein leib aus seinem fleisch und aus seinen gebainen warhaftig geboren."<sup>14</sup> Menno Simons in Holland echoed the same doctrine when he said, "For all who are in Christ are new creatures, flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone and members of His body."<sup>15</sup>

The Anabaptists always made a precise distinction between the 'true' church, by which they meant themselves, and the 'church of the anti-christ', by which they meant the Roman Catholic Church. There was great disappointment in their ranks when Luther and Zwingli failed to carry the reformation far enough and adopted, what the Anabaptists thought, were halfway measures, by compromising with political exped-

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<sup>13</sup> The following confessions shall serve as a basis: "The Schleithem Confession of Faith", adopted by the Swiss Brethern Conference, Feb. 4, 1527; "The Dordrecht Confession of Faith," adopted by the Dutch Mennonite Conference, April 21, 1632. Both Confessions are reproduced in Wenger, op. cit., pp. 206-228.

<sup>14</sup> Waltner, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Loc. cit.

iciency rather than carry their original ecclesiastical ideals into actual realization. Thus it remained for the "Brethern" to become the 'true' body of Christ on earth. Menno Simons listed the following six earmarks by which the "true" church of Christ was to be distinguished,

1. By an unadulterated pure doctrine...
2. By a scriptural use of the sacramental signs...
3. By obedience to the Word...
4. By unfeigned brotherly love...
5. By an unreserved confession of God and Christ...
6. By oppression and tribulation for the sake of the Lord's word.<sup>16</sup>

The Anabaptists believed in a visible Church of God consisting of those "...who have truly repented, and rightly believed; who are rightly baptized, united with God in heaven, and incorporated into the communion of the saints on earth."<sup>17</sup>

Luther accepted the concept of a Volkskirche or Landeskirche (State Church) because he believed that the church existed wherever the gospel is preached in purity and the sacraments are properly administered. To the Anabaptists this concept was most unbiblical, for the boundaries of the church could not be defined according to sacramental rites or geographical lines. As stated in the Dordrecht confession of faith, the church was a "church of believers," of those who had personally accepted Christ and who showed the true fruits of repentance. The Church was not a society of the baptized or a "church of the elect," as Zwingli taught. Menno Simons stated,

Those are the true church of Christ who were converted, who are born from above of God, who are of a regenerated mind, and by the operation of the Holy Spirit from the hearing of the divine Word have become children of God; who obey Him and live unblamably in His holy commandments and according to His holy will all

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<sup>16</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Loc. cit.

their days or after their calling. 18

In the Anabaptist concept of the church, regeneration, obedience, fellowship, brotherhood, were the key words defining the boundaries of the 'true' church. In the actualization of this church they believed that there were four necessary steps; the preaching of the Word; regeneration of the heart of the hearer; baptism of the regenerated; fellowship of the believers in the form of participating in the Lord's supper.

Because the Anabaptists believed that the Word must be preached before a renewal of spiritual life could be possible, they became active and vigorous preachers. Spreading the Word was considered the duty of not only the ministry but of all the members; every believer had the personal command of God to preach. The Anabaptists were the first to make the Great Commission (Christ's command to preach the Word to all mankind) binding upon all church members.

The necessity of a regeneration became a focal point in Anabaptist and Mennonite doctrine. There must be a genuine repentance from sin and a birth of a genuine faith in Christ, a process which produces an inward change manifested by outward conduct. Nowhere is the nature of this change elaborated upon by the leaders of the movement, but its necessity and results are emphasized by Menno Simons, who stated that with genuine faith must come obedience and true regeneration issues in a life of practical holiness making the individual a sincere Nachfolger Christi (follower of Christ). Faith alone is

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18 Menno Simons, Complete Works, Elkhart Indiana, 1871, I: 161-162, Quoted in Waltner, op. cit., p. 41.

not sufficient, there must be manifest the practical fruits of faith. In this concept Menno went beyond Luther's slogan of sola fida (faith alone).

In regard to baptism the Anabaptists differed markedly from the Roman as well as from the Reformed churches. The whole movement received its name from the fact that its adherents believed in baptism only after regeneration had taken place. Thus the name Anabaptist was attached to the new movement. Child baptism was rejected as unscriptural for neither Christ nor the Apostles ever practiced it. The leaders stated that it was the blood of Christ and not the waters of baptism that insured salvation of the individual. Baptism became to the Anabaptists an outward sign of the inward change, a pledge of the one baptized to walk in obedience to the words of Christ, and thus was merely of symbolic significance but had no sacramental value. Since regeneration required a degree of understanding (Vernunft), infant baptism was looked upon as a deception based upon superstition rather than upon the Word of God. Menno Simons wrote:

We are not regenerated because we have been baptized ...but we are baptized because we have been regenerated by faith and the Word of God (I Pet. 1:23). Regeneration is not the result of baptism but baptism is the result of regeneration. 19

In the Schleithem Confession of Faith (1527) the Brethern insisted that baptism be administered only to those "who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins have been taken away by Christ...." 20

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19 Menno Simons, op. cit., p. 215. Quoted in Waltner op. cit., p. 41.

20 Wenger, op. cit., p. 208.



In regard to the Lord's Supper, the Anabaptists believed that it was symbolic and had no sacramental quality. They rejected both the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation. For Conrad Grebel the Lord's Supper was purely "a symbol of the fellowship of the brethren with one another and with Christ... It is also a pledge of brotherly love and faithful sanctified Christian living."<sup>21</sup> It was the question of "Mass" which had caused the first spiritual struggle in Menno Simons and eventually led him out of the Roman Catholic Church. Menno considered the Lord's Supper as a proclamation of the death of Christ, as a sign of Christian love and peace in the church, and as a "fellowship of the flesh and blood of Christ."<sup>22</sup> The Anabaptists regarded the Lord's Supper as the most solemn act in which a Christian could participate, for it involved the renewal of the believer's covenant to devote his life unreservedly to the service of Christ renouncing all selfish and secular interests.<sup>23</sup>

Everywhere they went the Anabaptists took great pains to organize churches according to the biblical pattern. This objective they accomplished by adhering strictly to the doctrines as stated above and by a vigorous emphasis on "non-conformity to the world," by which the Brethren meant that the church must be kept without "spot or wrinkle" in as far as it was humanly possible. It was clear to them that the church could never be perfect in the sense of being entirely free of unworthy members, for human intelligence was capable only in

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<sup>21</sup> Waltner, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Newman, op. cit., p. 158.

a limited degree to separate the "goats from the sheep."

Even Menno Simons admitted the limitations of church discipline when he said,

The Church judges that which is visible. But what is inwardly evil, but does not appear outwardly to the Church, such God alone will judge and pass sentence on them; for He alone, and not the Church, discerns hearts and reins. 24

The aim of church purity has throughout Mennonite history posed some of the most difficult questions for this group. To maintain a "pure" church in the midst of a sinful society implies a separation from the world. In the Schleithheim Confession of Faith the early Brethern wrote,

A separation shall be made from the evil and from the wickedness which the devil planted in the world; in this manner, simply that we shall not have fellowship with them (the wicked) and not run with them in the multitude of their abominations. 25

To this day the Mennonites declare that the church is "in the world" but not "of the world." This ideal of "separation" has posed many difficult problems for the Mennonites in the past and has contributed much to the persecution and misunderstanding which have followed the Mennonite Church since its inception.

To be separate from the world meant that there must also be a separation from the state, for the state was of the world. This separation from the state was then carried out in three ways; they refused to take the oath, they refused to accept or fill public office or any position in the government, and they refused to bear arms or "take the sword" even

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24 Quoted in Waltner, op. cit., p. 42.

25 Wenger, op. cit., p. 209.

if threatened by death. The Schleithem Confession of Faith states,

The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ...and is ordained to be used by the worldly magistrates....it is not appropriate for a Christian to serve as a magistrate because... the government magistracy is according to the flesh, but the Christian's is according to the Spirit; their houses and dwelling remain in this world, but the Christian's are in heaven; their citizenship is in this world, but the Christian's citizenship is in heaven; the weapons of their conflict and war are carnal and against the flesh only, but the Christian's weapons are spiritual, against the fortification of the devil. 26

In practically all the migrations of the Mennonites this principle of "non-resistance" or "pacifism" has played a leading role. In Mennonite circles in Canada and the United States non-resistance is under discussion today as never before, and it has been throughout their history one of the most obtrusive features of the Mennonite branch of the Anabaptist movement and it will be expedient to examine this principle in a little more detail. 27

The Mennonites are, to a large degree, biblical literalists. A number of New Testament verses teach unqualified love for, and non-resistance to, evil men, as the divine ethic for Christian believers. Such passages as Matthew 5: 38-48, Luke 6: 27-36, John 18: 36, Romans 12: 17-21, and others require no special interpretation to the Mennonite but are accepted at face value. In simple acceptance of this as being the fundamental principle for Christian living as taught by Christ, the Mennonites oppose the use of force in private life and reject military service even during times of

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26 *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

27 Modern developments in this field are discussed in Chapter VII.

war as unbiblical and "unchrist like."

As early as 1524, Conrad Grebel wrote, "True, believing Christians are as sheep in the midst of wolves.... They use neither the worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ceased entirely, for we are no longer under the Old Covenant."<sup>28</sup> Felix Manz, a colleague of Grebel, said, "No Christian smites with the sword nor resists evil."<sup>29</sup> Dirck Philips declared, "The people of the Lord arm themselves not with carnal weapons...but with the armor of God, with the weapons of righteousness...and with Christian patience, with which to possess their souls and overcome all their enemies."<sup>30</sup> Menno Simons testified, "The regenerated do not go to war, nor engage in strife. They are the children of peace...and know of no war."<sup>31</sup> Article XIV of the Dordrecht Confession of Faith rejects defense by force.

Non-resistance is one key to Mennonite migrations. In order to live according to their faith, the Mennonites have sought refuge in countries enjoying the greatest degree of religious toleration. Soon they were scattered throughout Holland, Switzerland and the various German states including Prussia. In 1789, on the invitation of Catherine II, many Mennonites from Prussia migrated to Russia where they were promised religious freedom, their own schools, and military exemption forever. "Forever" lasted until 1870 when the Russian Government threatened to withdraw military exemption and the Mennonites looked around for a new home. In the end

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 153

<sup>29</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 154

<sup>31</sup> Loc. cit.

a form of alternative service not under supervision of the military was granted, but the confidence and the security of the Mennonites had been shaken and a great migration to U.S.A. <sup>spell out</sup> and Canada set in. During World War I the Mennonites who had remained in Russia were allowed alternative service. The Bolshevik Revolution, however, swept the Mennonite settlements with fire and sword and following the establishment of the Communist régime a new migration to Canada set in. Since the Second World War a new migration to Canada has been in progress and thousands of Mennonites have found new homes here. In all of these mass movements the motive to migrate has been religious freedom sparked by the principle of non-resistance. In Canada and the United States is found the bulwark of Mennonite Wehrlosigkeit (pacifism).

All of the Mennonite groups who have come to Canada or the United States have believed strongly in pacifism as a scriptural and essential Christian doctrine. Today it is in Canada and the United States where devotion to this principle is most clearly seen. When the Mennonites fled from persecution in Europe they were usually those who strongly believed in the principle of non-resistance who fled. The ones who stayed were forced to compromise with the civil authorities and usually consented to military service under pressure of losing their goods and property. This division has been going on among the Mennonites for 400 years and has been slow and inperceptible, but its effects have been world wide. The European Mennonites today have largely given up this position

on war. Through the troubled period of the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath the Mennonites of Holland, Prussia and Germany were gradually forced away from their non-resistant stand and today a clear division exists between the Mennonites of the Old and New worlds. A Mennonite World Conference is scheduled to take place in August, 1952, in Basel, Switzerland, and many informed Mennonite leaders fear that a permanent split will occur over the doctrine of non-resistance.<sup>32</sup>

The foregoing doctrines are the foundation stones upon which historical Mennonitism is built. Naturally there have been many divisions among the Mennonites in the last 400 years, most of them occurring because of differences in forms such as baptism, style of clothing etc. In Alberta alone there are four main Mennonite denominations; the Old Mennonites, Mennonite Brethern in Christ (now called United Missionary Church), General Conference Mennonites, and the Mennonite Brethern Church. In the far north at Fort Vermilion, a settlement of Old Colony Mennonites ekes out a meagre existence.

All Mennonite groups have similar doctrinal standards and agree that the New Testament dictates the rules for Christian living. They reject infant baptism and practice "believers" baptism; they believe that the Christian life involves a separation from the sin in the world and a striving after the simple life. They agree that the Bible prohibits

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32 For a more detailed discussion of the practical history of the doctrine of non-resistance see Schaefer, P.J., Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten! Die Mennoniten in Canada, 3 Teil, Mennonite Agricultural Advisory Committee, Altona, Man., pp. 147-155. Smith, op. cit., pp. 787-819. Wenger, op. cit., pp. 152-157. Also see chapter VII of this thesis.

participation in warfare and in litigation, and forbids the use of the oath. The dissensions in the ranks of Mennonitism arise chiefly in the varying attitudes towards such newer institutions of Christendom as the Sunday School, toward the adoption of new inventions in the realms of transportation and communication, and toward newer forms of clothing. These latter points of differences may seem trivial and even amusing to some observers, but they play a decisive part in the unraveling of Mennonite history.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS IN ALBERTA

Mennonite immigrations to Canada fall into four definite periods: the movement into Upper Canada from the United States in 1786, after the American Revolution; the movement in the 1870's from Russia into Canada and the United States; the coming of the Russian Mennonites, 1923 to 1930; the movement of displaced persons which occurred after World War II and is still in progress (1952). In this chapter brief attention will be paid to the first three phases with major emphasis on the third. The fourth movement will be dealt with in a later chapter. All of these migrations have given Alberta new settlers, and the purpose here is to examine briefly the history of each movement and the settlement in Alberta of the various Mennonite denominations entering with each group.

The first Mennonites came to North America from Switzerland in 1683 and settled in William Penn's newly founded colony, where Germantown became their centre.<sup>1</sup> Here they enjoyed peace and prosperity until the American Revolution burst upon them and military service was demanded of them. Disturbed by this call to arms many Mennonites joined the stream of the United Empire Loyalists who sought refuge in British North America. The year 1786 marks the first settlement of Mennonites in Vineland, in Lincoln County<sup>2</sup> where they

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<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, J.M., Canadian Mosaic, The Making of a Northern Nation, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1938, p. 171.  
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 170.



settled in block communities which were later assimilated but never lost the virtues of conservatism which have made the Mennonites "a stabilising element in a world of change."<sup>3</sup> Between 1800 and 1820 another 2,000 came to Upper Canada. It was not until the turn of the 19th century that the first of these Swiss Mennonites from Ontario penetrated West to start settlements in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The Alberta colonies of this Mennonite denomination started in 1902, and 1907 in Saskatchewan. These two provinces united in 1907 into the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference with E. S. Hallman as "overseer."<sup>4</sup>

This Mennonite group, usually called the Old Mennonites, form the oldest element among the Canadian Mennonites. They are the direct descendants of the Swiss Brethern who came to the United States when persecution in Europe was at its height. In 1951 this denomination had 69,537 members in 565 congregations, served by 180 bishops and 833 ministers.<sup>5</sup> The church in Canada had a membership of 6,335 with about 500 in Alberta.<sup>6</sup> This branch of Mennonitism is characterized by "staunch conservatism in faith and discipline coupled with a vigorous program of mission, publications, education, and mutual aid..."<sup>7</sup> Church discipline is rigid and the church rules necessitate simple and plain dress,<sup>8</sup> plus a denial of many

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from E.S. Hallman to P.F. Bargaen, dated July 21, 1952.

<sup>5</sup> Zook E.D. (ed.), Mennonite Yearbook and Directory 1952, Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, Pa., 1952, p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Wenger, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conference of the Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference, 1931, p. 5.

modern luxuries and ornaments such as wedding rings and conventional wedding gowns.<sup>8a</sup> The Mennonite Church holds firmly to the doctrine of non-resistance and is one of the most conservative denominations on this question. Life is to be lived simply, void of luxuries and the selfish indulgences of the wealthy. This simplicity is carried over to their churches where the structures are simple and lack any ornamentation of the interior. This group in Canada has refused to accept Old Age Pensions, Widows Allowances<sup>9</sup> and Family Allowances<sup>10</sup> because these measures involve a relation between the state and church and therefore should be rejected, and the members are urged not to apply for this aid.<sup>11</sup> This separation of church and state is carried over into the economic field and the members are advised not to participate in any of the co-operative efforts in the community, such as wheat pools, milk pools, cream pools and "kindred organization,"<sup>12</sup> for "the affiliation with organizations of the above character compromises and endangers the spiritual relations of our brethern and adds nothing to spiritual fellowship and growth."<sup>13</sup> Although originally speaking German, the Old Mennonites have now adopted the English language which is used in all church services and in Sunday School.

The Old Mennonites are counted as the first Mennonite settlers in Alberta. In 1889 a certain Elias W. Bricker settled near High River, Alberta, having come out on the C.P.R.'s

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8a Ibid., 1947, p. 5.

9 Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference, 1932, p. 2

10 Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference, 1945, p. 6

11 Loc. cit.

12 Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference, 1931, p. 4.

13 Loc. cit.

homeseekers excursion of that year.<sup>14</sup> In 1900 and later he was followed by other Mennonite settlers from Ontario and the United States, so that by 1920 most of the settlements by members of this denomination had been established in the province. In the High River area a church was built in 1902 and the Mount View Mennonite congregation came into existence. The organizational work was done by S.F. Coffman who had been commissioned by the Ontario Conference to ordain ministers and organize churches in the West. Today the Mount View Church has eighteen members, with H.R. Boettger as minister.<sup>15</sup>

At about the same time, the West Zion Mennonite Church was organized near Carstairs, Alberta. The first Mennonite settler in this district was Andrew Weber of Ontario who came West in 1894. The main settlement was established in 1901 and the church was organized by S.F. Coffman in the same year. A church was built in 1901 but soon became too small and a new structure was erected in 1929. This congregation is unique among Mennonite churches in that approximately half of the membership is composed of people of British origin who have accepted the Mennonite faith. The present membership of the church is seventy-six with Gordon Buschert as pastor.<sup>16</sup>

The Mayton Mennonite Church, located seventeen miles east of Olds, Alberta, was also organized by S.F. Coffman. The first Mennonite settlers to this area had come from northwestern Iowa. This congregation is now extinct, dissolution

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<sup>14</sup> Mennonite Encyclopedia and Questionnaire.

<sup>15</sup> Zook, E.D., op. cit., p, 59. Also Questionnaire.

<sup>16</sup> Questionnaire.

starting in 1915 when the minister, John K. Lehman, moved to Oregon. In 1918 practically the entire congregation moved to the Tofield district and united with the Salem Mennonite congregation there. Through inter-marriage they are now thoroughly amalgamated into this new church.<sup>17</sup>

The origin of the Tofield Old Mennonite settlement can be traced to the activities of two brothers O.C. and T.A. Blackburn, from Nebraska, U.S.A. They became interested in the Canadian West and its settlement possibilities. Having lived in the same community with the Amish Mennonites of Seward County, Nebraska, they became interested in selling land to them and were instrumental in directing the first group of home-seekers to the Tofield district. The home-seekers excursion took place in 1907 but it was not until 1910 that the first group of Mennonite settlers moved to the Tofield district. There had been settlers in the district, particularly Norwegians, for twenty years previous to 1910, and homesteading had occurred on every other section. This left about half the land still unsettled and the Mennonites found ample opportunity to found prosperous farms. Originally this group of settlers belonged to the Amish Mennonite Church, but they joined the Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference in 1915. Membership increased by newcomers from Ontario and the United States and in 1918 as the Mayton Congregation moved to Tofield. The first church was built in 1911 and enlarged in 1915 and 1926. Today the Salem Congregation has a membership of 220 with John B. Stauffer as Bishop.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>18</sup> Questionnaire and Mennonite Encyclopedia.

Other districts settled by the Old Mennonites will be dealt with very briefly. The Clearwater Congregation near Youngston, Alberta, was formed by Mennonites from Michigan and Indiana. Due to drought the Mennonites moved away and this congregation is now extinct. In the Duchess area, S.B. Ramer was the first Mennonite settler and a congregation was organized in 1917, the settlers coming mainly from Pennsylvania and are often referred to as Pennsylvania Dutch. This congregation at present has a membership of ninety-eight. Near Westward Ho, Alberta, we find the Mount Calvary Congregation which was organized in 1945, although Mennonites had been in the area since 1935. Present membership is 27. At Stirling, Alberta, there is a small congregation of seventeen members, who in 1947 broke away from the Hutterian Brethern and joined the Old Mennonite Church. Near Smith, Alberta, a congregation was organized in 1947 and now has a membership of twenty. A small congregation of seven members is also located near Acadia Valley. The total membership of the Old Mennonite Church in Alberta (1952) is 493.<sup>19</sup>

Another Mennonite denomination which belongs to the first Mennonite movement into the West was the United Missionary Church, previously called Mennonite Brethern in Christ. This group arose out of a schism that developed in the Old Mennonite Church in 1857, and was led by William Gehman of Pennsylvania, and Daniel Hoch and Solomon Eby, both of Ontario.<sup>20</sup> This group broke away from the main body of Mennonitism because they thought the old church was too conservative. In

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19 Zook, E.D., op. cit., p. 59. Also Questionnaire.

20 Wenger, op. cit., p. 108.

faith the United Missionary Church is in line with the historic Mennonite Confessions. They emphasize a vigorous program of evangelism, an emotional type of conversion and immersion as the mode of baptism. In economic and political areas they do not draw such a conservative line between the church and state as the Old Mennonites.

In 1893, Jacob Y. Janz of the Mennonite Brethern in Christ came from Ontario and selected Didsbury, fifty miles north of Calgary, as a suitable location for a new Mennonite settlement. In 1894 a colony was established containing thirty-four residents from Waterloo County, Ontario. This pioneer settlement has grown rapidly, others were established, and today members of this church may be found at Acadia Valley, Allingham, Cremona, Bergen, James River Bridge, Olds, Galahad, and Edmonton. In Alberta this denomination is being served by twenty-four ministers and has a membership of approximately five hundred.<sup>21</sup>

Another group of Mennonites belonging to the first era of settlement in Alberta is the Church of God in Christ denomination. The Mennonite Brethern in Christ had broken with the Old Church because the latter was considered too conservative, the Church of God in Christ, led by John Holdeman of Ohio, broke away in 1857, because it considered the Old Church too liberal.<sup>22</sup> This is a Mennonite denomination where strict discipline is practiced, shunning or avoidance is still emphasized, and the men are required to wear beards,

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21 Zook, E.D., op. cit., p. 118. Little more information is available about this denomination in Alberta. The questionnaires sent out have not been returned.

22 Wenger, op. cit., p. 108. This group is widely known as Holdemans.

"for this is considered a part of the moral law of God."<sup>23</sup>

As the Russian Mennonites came to Canada many of them joined this denomination and as a result the discipline was relaxed to the extent that this denomination will allow fellowship with other Mennonite denominations. Yet they still adhere to the strict letter of the confession of faith and some characteristic doctrines are taught, notable among them being the refusal to take interest on money loaned, which is called usury and considered wrong.<sup>24</sup>

There are two congregations of the church in Alberta; at Linden and at Rosedale. The first settlers of this denomination came to Linden in 1902 from the state of Oregon and were led by Rev. Samuel Boese. In 1903 more came from Manitoba under the leadership of Rev. Peter Baerg. Today there is a well-established community at Linden, the church having a membership of 363 and a Sunday School enrollment of 455 (1948). The Rosedale congregation at Crooked Creek, in Northern Alberta, was organized in 1928 and now has a membership of ninety-four.<sup>25</sup>

These then are the Alberta Mennonite settlements which owe their direct origin to the Mennonites of Swiss or Dutch ancestry, and who belong to the first movement of Mennonites into Western Canada. The total number of church members in these groups in Alberta is approximately 1250, while the total church membership of all Mennonite groups is approximately 3800.<sup>26</sup> From this it is evident that the larger Mennonite

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<sup>24</sup> Department of Commerce and Labour, op. cit., p. 419.

<sup>25</sup> Mennonite Encyclopedia.

<sup>26</sup> Figures compiled by author from various sources: Mennonite Encyclopedia; Zook, E.D., op. cit.; Questionnaire.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

element in Alberta owes its origin to later immigrations, mainly from Russia. The churches dealt with here, with the exception of the United Missionary Church, belong to the more conservative Mennonite elements, and consequently their influence on the general course of Mennonite history in Alberta has been less than that of the groups entering later.

The second great Mennonite immigration to Canada came from Russia, beginning in 1874, the settlers going partly to the Western United States but largely to the Canadian Prairie Provinces. Manitoba was chosen as the main area of settlement. These settlers were seeking new homes because the religious freedom promised forever by Catherine II of Russia, to entice the settler from Prussia, suddenly lapsed under Czar Alexander II, who thought that he might make up for lost manpower by Russifying the Mennonite farmer. Thus it was that three years after the suppression of the first Riel Rebellion, a large Mennonite settlement arose in the Red River Valley of Southern Manitoba. This group was directed to Canada by William Hespeler, a Canadian of German origin from Waterloo County, Ontario.<sup>27</sup>

J.M. Gibbon points out the effect of this new immigration on the settlement of the West.<sup>28</sup> These settlers came well equipped with clothing for the Manitoba winter, but they needed supplies, implements and tools, which they purchased with gold Russian roubles, "which were a godsend to the Winnipeg merchants, who saw little enough cash in these pioneer days." Ashdown's Hardware Store is reported to have sold over

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<sup>27</sup> Gibbon, *op. cit.*, p. 182. (For many years Gibbon was chief publicity agent for the C.P.R.)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.



\$4,000 worth of implements to the Mennonites in one day. In addition, the new settlers brought with them the seeds of new grains and vegetables such as flax, muskmelons and watermelons. "They are also credited with introducing groves of trees as windbreaks on hitherto treeless prairie."

The Mennonites had come as strangers to a new land, and had chosen Canada because of the many privileges offered them by the government. In 1873 a delegation of four men had been sent out to scout the land and make arrangements with the Canadian government. The privileges granted were very liberal and consisted of <sup>29</sup> exemption from military service, the reservation of eight townships of land for the exclusive use of the Mennonites; to each settler over twenty-one years of age the government promised 160 acres of homestead land and the Mennonites received the fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privilege was extended to the education of their children. In addition the government advanced \$100,000 to the immigrants to help them get established. Many Mennonites took advantage of this generous offer.

In the summer of 1877 Lord Dufferin visited the Manitoba settlement and welcomed the newcomers. His welcome read in part:

I have come here today in the name of the Queen of England to bid you welcome on Canadian soil. You have come to a land where you will find the people with whom you are to associate engaged, indeed, in a great struggle, and contending with foes whom it requires their best energies to encounter. But

those foes are not your fellowmen, nor will you be called upon in the struggle to stain your hands with human blood - a task which is so abhorrent to your religious feelings. The war to which we invite you as recruits and comrades is a war waged against the brute forces of nature; but those forces will welcome our domination, and reward our attack by placing their treasures at our disposal. It is a war of ambition, - for we intend to annex territory, - but neither blazing villages nor devastated fields will mark our ruthless track; our battalions will march across the illimitable plains which stretch before us as sunshine steals athwart the ocean; the rolling prairie will blossom in our wake, and corn and peace and plenty will spring where we have trod. 30

In this address Lord Dufferin revealed clearly that he understood the Mennonite psychology, for the type of warfare depicted therein would thrill the hearts of these new settlers.

It was a month later that Lord Dufferin paid his personal tribute to the progress of the Mennonite settlement when speaking in Winnipeg:

Although I have witnessed many sights to cause me pleasure during my various progresses through the Dominion, seldom have I beheld any spectacle more pregnant with prophecy, more fraught with promise of a successful future than the Mennonite Settlement. (Applause) When I visited these interesting people, they had only been two years in the Province, and yet in a long ride I took across many miles of prairie, which but yesterday was absolutely bare, desolate, and untenanted, the home of the wolf, the badger, and the eagle, I passed village after village, homestead after homestead, furnished forth with all the conveniences and incidents of European comfort, and a scientific agriculture, while on either side of the road cornfields already ripe for harvest, and pastures populous with herds of cattle stretched away to the horizon. (Applause) Even on this Continent - there has nowhere, I imagine, taken place so marvellous a transformation -- (cheers) -- and yet when in your name, and in the name of the Queen of England, I bade these people welcome to their new homes, it was not the improvement in their material fortunes that pre-occupied my thoughts. Glad I was to have the power of applotting them so ample a portion of our teeming soil - a soil which

seems to blossom at a touch-- (cheering)-- and which they were cultivating to such manifest advantage -- I felt infinitely prouder in being able to throw over them the aegis of the British Constitution --(loud cheering)-- and in bidding them freely share with us our unrivalled political institutions, our untrammelled personal liberty. 31

The \$100,000 which had been advanced to the Mennonites by the Canadian government was paid back in 1892. In announcing this the Minister of the Interior stated,

In all the history of our country, there is not to be found a case in which a Company or individual has more faithfully met his obligation to the Government than has been the case here. - Not a single instance is known where one of the settlers or of the men who had given security made any attempt to withdraw from his obligations. 32

This characteristic of honoring the given word was a large factor in persuading the C.P.R. to extend about \$2,000,000 worth of credit to the Mennonite Immigrants 1923 to 1930.<sup>33</sup> l.c.

The Mennonites who settled in Manitoba were composed of three well defined communities.<sup>34</sup> Two of these groups had lived in separate settlements in Russia where they had been fairly self-sufficient, namely the Fuerstenland and Bergthal colonies. The Fuerstenland group is better known as Altkolonier or Old Colony Mennonites. The third group was the Kleine Gemeinde, a dissident church group which had sprung up in the Molotschna Colony in Russia about 1812.<sup>35</sup> The name of the latter group, "Small Church," is very appropriate for it has (1952) only 1,920 members.<sup>36</sup> The Bergthaler group

31 Ibid., p. 185

32 Loc. cit.

33 Discussed in chapter III.

34 Francis, E.K., "Tradition and Progress Among the Mennonites in Manitoba," Mennonite Quarterly Review, Oct., 1950, p. 5.

35 Wenger, op. cit., p. 128.

36 Zook, op. cit., p. 53.

belong to the original Mennonite group but today belong largely to the General Conference Mennonite Church.

*several  
negotiations*

The Altkolonier represents all that is reactionary among Mennonites today. The members are very strict in the exercise of the ban or shunning of expelled members. They have few Sunday schools, no evening or protracted meetings, church conferences, missions, or benevolent institutions. They worship for the most part in private homes and use the German language exclusively in their services. They do not associate in religious work with other Mennonite bodies, and are distinctive and plain in their costume, using hooks and eyes instead of buttons. They cling to old traditions, reject progress and fight the modern school. The Altkolonier settled mainly in the West Reserve in Manitoba.

In Manitoba the privileges granted to the Mennonite settlers had been very liberal, the result being that the communities grew, having complete freedom in the organization of schools and local government. The responsible "authorities were more concerned with attracting efficient settlers than with their cultural assimilation, or their social or political integration."<sup>37</sup> Thus the Mennonites in these colonies lay down the law according to their own traditions rather than to the Canadian political and legal system.

This period of peaceful development came to an end in the early 1880's when the Provincial government demanded that the Mennonite reserves be reorganized into municipalities. This proposal met with little difficulty except in the ranks

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37 Francis, op. cit., p. 6.

of the Altkolonier who refused to accept the proposed changes, for they meant that the local schools would be controlled by the government.<sup>38</sup> As the "world" closed more tightly around them the Altkolonier looked for an escape. They found this escape in the 1920's when many migrated to Mexico and Paraguay, with a number going to Saskatchewan.<sup>39</sup> In 1932 Old Colony Mennonites left Saskatchewan and founded a new colony on the north bank of the Peace River in Northern Alberta. These were soon joined by newcomers from the Chihuahua plateau in Mexico and as late as July 12, 1952, about forty Altkolonier from there crossed the 49th parallel at Coutts, Alberta, on their trek north to join their Brethern at Fort Vermilion.<sup>40</sup>

The Altkolonier Colony at Fort Vermilion, about 400 miles north of Edmonton, is completely isolated from the rest of civilization -- an isolation that must be near the Altkolonier heart. The only contact with the outside world is the plane, the boat or dogteam. Here in this wilderness, where they have assumed squatters rights, the Old Colony Mennonite has found, to a certain degree, that isolation from the "world" which he seeks. There are no schools, no interference from authority, and interlopers are rare. The other Mennonite denominations are concerned about the spiritual welfare of these people and have sent ministers to the area. The ministers have been received but not allowed to speak in public; their offers to send up good teachers have been firmly refused.

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38 The school question is too complex to be dealt with here. Those interested see Ibid., pp. 7-19.

39 Mennonite Encyclopedia

40 The Albertan, July 12, 1952.

One visiting minister said, "They are culturally retarded and spiritually blind, and yet they think they are suffering for Christ's sake." The settlement is scattered forty miles along the Peace River on either side of Fort Vermilion. The church membership of this group at present is 320.<sup>41</sup>

The other two Mennonite denominations that reached Canada in the 1870's also expanded into Alberta, although only to a very small degree.<sup>42</sup> The Kleine Gemeinde started a settlement in the Peace River area in the year 1924. The settlers came from the United States and were well supplied with funds, having sold their holdings profitably in that country. Due to disunity and friction among them, coupled with poor business management, the settlements never prospered and the settlers slowly moved away. By 1940 none of the Kleine Gemeinde settlers remained in Alberta.

The first Bergthaler settlers came to Alberta from the West Reserve in Manitoba in 1901. They came to the Didsbury area where they found a number of Mennonite settlers who had previously come from Ontario.<sup>43</sup> The open prairie between Didsbury and Red Deer impressed the settlers favorably. More families came, some from Oregon, some from the East Reserve in Manitoba, but many also moved away so that the settlement stayed small. The beginnings were made by growing feed grain, and cattle raising became a profitable occupation,<sup>44</sup> In 1903

<sup>41</sup> Zook, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> The following information from a pioneer of the Peace River district, H. Kornelson.

<sup>43</sup> Schaeffer, op. cit., p. 135

<sup>44</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1935. (Protokoll der Vertreterversammlungen der Mennonitischen Siedler von Alberta)

the first church was built and in 1912 this group joined the General Conference Mennonite Church. Today this group, through intermarriage and co-operative association, is identified completely with the immigrants of 1923-1930.

It is evident that the Mennonites of this second immigration to Canada, left their imprint largely on the Province of Manitoba. Even today they are the main Mennonite group there. Alberta, however, even though eventually receiving a few of their numbers remained outside the orbit of their settlements. The groups that did settle in Alberta now live in isolation, moved away, or have become amalgamated with the immigrants who came later.

The coming of the Russian Mennonites in the 1920's marks a new chapter in the colonization of Western Canada. When the new immigration started in 1923 the newcomers often settled in areas of previous Mennonite settlement but overflowed more into the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta than the previous movements. These last settlers belonged mainly to two church divisions, the Bruedergemeinde (Brethern Church), and the original group from which the Mennonite Brethern had broken in 1860. These groups entered Canada penniless and in the early years sought employment as labourers on farms. Some were fortunate enough to obtain farms either on a rent or sale basis. Because of three men, David Toews, B.B. Janz, and C.F. Klassen, and their efforts on behalf of the immigrants, the Canadian Pacific Railway extended credit to the newcomers which enabled them to enter Canada.

Besides showing a philanthropic spirit, the C.P.R. in aiding these new immigrants, was looking to the future when the products of newly opened areas in the West would provide traffic for its struggling rail lines.<sup>45</sup> The West, one of the richest agricultural areas in the world, was to be turned into a huge production machine. As Sir Edward Beatty later put it, "Our task was to convert Western Canada into a land of homes."<sup>46</sup>

The Russian Mennonites were to help in this task of opening the West and were encouraged to take up land. The C.P.R. was aware of the Mennonites desire to settle in communities and consequently large areas of land were thrown open for mass settlement. Since Alberta contained large areas of C.P.R. land which had been granted to the Company as a subsidy for building the railway, the officials of the Company were anxious to obtain settlers of the Mennonite calibre for these lands. Without settlers the land was of no value and the Company saw that only through efforts and expenditures of its own funds and the private funds of its organizers, and through organized colonization schemes, could the West be populated and made profitable. This was the general policy but the Mennonites played a very large part in the fulfilment of that policy.<sup>47</sup>

The Canadian West opened its doors and the Mennonites thronged in. As water settles in low areas so the Mennonites tended to establish themselves in homogeneous groups on the prairies. A settler would move to an area and find it rich

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45 C.P.R., Irrigation Farming in Sunny Alberta, 1925, p. 2.

46 Canadian Pacific Staff Bulletin, Feb. 1, 1940.

47 Loc. cit. - For C.P.R. and settlement see chapter IV.



and rewarding; relatives and friends were notified and joined the group. Slowly large areas of land fell exclusively into the hands of the newcomers. The Mennonite settlement at Coaldale, today the largest in the province,<sup>48</sup> began when one man, Klaas Enns, and his family consented to clean beets for a local farmer. Through the years there have been movements of Mennonite settlers to and fro across the plains and foothills of Alberta. The picture seems as restless as the waves of the sea. One year an area would contain a number of settlements, the next year the settlers were gone. Many families moved alone and remained isolated from others of their faith; they were not as fortunate as Klaas Enns - no new settlers followed and they remained alone, either to move away or remain and be absorbed into the dominant culture of the area. Although there are records of such cases, absorption has been rather a rare occurrence.

The two Mennonite denominations participating in the third Mennonite migration to Canada were the Mennonite Brethern Church, and the original body from which the Mennonite Brethern had broken in 1860. The former body originated as a revivalist movement in the Molotschna Mennonite Colony in Southern Russia. In the eyes of this dissident group the original Mennonite body was no longer pure and therefore it could not approve of the life and conduct of many of the church members. On January 6, 1860, eighteen family heads signed a statement of withdrawal from the parent body. The

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<sup>48</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 12.

man who lit this new religious flame was a German evangelical by the name of Edward Wuest. Fundamentally the Mennonite Brethern Church remained a true Mennonite body, but emphasized a more Bible-centred life for its members. In spite of persecution from the parent body, the Mennonite Brethern Church prospered and by 1885 membership had risen to 1800.<sup>49</sup>

The distinctive views of this new branch of Menno- nitism were summarized by P.C. Hiebert, a leading minister of the new church.<sup>50</sup>

1. A definite religious experience followed by a changed life, as a prerequisite of admission to membership.
2. Baptism by immersion upon confession of faith as the only recognized form.
3. A negative reaction against all tendencies toward formalism as it hindered early church procedure, and toward systematic religious instruction of children.
4. Definite opposition to all participation in military training and service.
5. Limiting communion to baptized members in good standing in the local church.
6. Active evangelism characterized by a keen personal interest in the personal conversion and salvation of one's associates.
7. A thorough study of all the Scriptures, which is recognized as the Word of God, and an urgent demand that every member live up to what God requires in the Bible of those who have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour.

Although the largest number of Mennonite Brethern came to America in the 1920's, they had, as early as the 1870's, settled in Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and South Dakota,<sup>51</sup> while only a small number reached Canada and settled mainly in Manitoba.

In the 1920's many members of the parent Mennonite

<sup>49</sup> Wenger, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>51</sup> Lohrenz, John H., The Mennonite Brethern Church, the Mennonite publishing House, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1950, pp. 61-71.

body in Southern Russia also migrated to Canada. Once in their new homeland this group was faced with two alternatives: either to form a church conference of their own or to join one of the existing Mennonite conferences in Canada. Small numbers joined the Bergthaler church and the Church of God in Christ (Holdeman), but by far the largest percentage affiliated with the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America.<sup>52</sup> This latter body had originated when two small Mennonite congregations in Leeds County, Iowa, held a conference to discuss the possible union of all the Mennonite bodies in America. Among those especially interested was John Oberholzer of Pennsylvania, who had taken an advanced stand in the matter of aggressive work and missions. Together with sixteen other ministers he was charged with insubordination to the then established Mennonite Church government, and was disowned. As a result Oberholzer, in Oct. 1847, organized a separate conference in Eastern Pennsylvania. The new union movement gained strong support and promised to advance along broader and more liberal lines than the old conference had permitted. In May of 1860, these dissident groups organized the General Conference Mennonite Church of America. Membership grew rapidly and the movement spread north into Canada. By 1920 a well organized branch of the church existed in Canada.<sup>53</sup>

In doctrine the General Conference Church is, with few exceptions, in strict accord with other Mennonite confessions, but it does not interpret the Mennonite confession of faith as literally as other Mennonite bodies do. The main

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>53</sup> Department of Commerce and Labor, op. cit., p. 416.

difference between this body and the Mennonite Brethern Church is in the demand of the Brethern for a personal religious experience leading to a manifest emotional conversion. They differ also in the form of baptism; the General Conference baptize by pouring, the Mennonite Brethern by backward immersion. While the Mennonite Brethern Church joined their own Brethern Church on arrival in Canada, the parent body largely joined the General Conference Mennonite Church. In Alberta today, these two groups form the largest Mennonite element, having a combined church membership of approximately 2,274.<sup>54</sup>

There are very few Mennonite settlements in Alberta that consist of only one Mennonite denomination. In most areas there is a medley of General Conference and Mennonite Brethern with perhaps smaller elements of other denominations. This statement applies especially to the settlements started in the 1920's. In the early years necessity compelled co-operation on economic as well as religious lines, and often one church building served all denominations in the area. It was not until prosperity set in that each denomination erected its own building and segregated its services from that of the others. Today, in some smaller areas such as Lacombe and Chinook, one building still serves the purposes of all. Since the Mennonite Brethern broke away from the parent body in 1860 a definite division has existed between these two branches of Mennonitism. That division has been carried over to Canada since the Mennonite General Conference Church

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<sup>54</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 12.

in Canada consists largely of members of the original Mennonite body in Russia. By the latter the Brethern are considered rebels while the Brethern in turn, look upon the General Conference as having lost the true fundamentals of Christianity and consequently can no longer be regarded as truly Mennonite. In the higher circles of Mennonite organization a determined effort is being made at co-operation between these two denominations. During the war this co-operation was achieved especially in the field of relief work and on the question of non-resistance. As is the case even among nations peace often brings disunity, and this has been discernable among the Mennonites also. These complex emotions exist among the Mennonites at large and greatly hinder any co-operative movements which try to heal the breach between the two bodies. Thus, as often is the case, the misunderstandings of the past may lead to further alienation in the future. As subsequent chapters will prove, however, a certain degree of co-operation does exist and may well provide the basis for future rapprochement. The Vertreterversammlung has done much to repair the shattered ranks of Mennonite unity in Alberta.

The first General Conference Mennonite settlers moved into Alberta from Manitoba as early as 1901 and settled near Didsbury.<sup>55</sup> The majority, however, settled in the province after World War I, most being of the new immigration from Russia.<sup>56</sup> Today the largest Mennonite Conference church

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<sup>55</sup> Mennonite Encyclopedia.

<sup>56</sup> Questionnaires were sent out to all Mennonite Conference Churches in Alberta, but only one has been returned. Since no written information on these churches, outside of the reports of the Vertreterversammlung, exist, the discussion of these settlements is of necessity meagre and incomplete.

exists at Rosemary, and has a membership of 285.<sup>57</sup> The first Mennonite settlers were brought to this area in 1929 by the Canada Colonization Association which sponsored the settlement.<sup>58</sup> The settlers were able to buy their land so that by 1937 about 8323 acres were Mennonite owned. In 1935 the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, who owned the land, handed the whole area of 350,000 acres over to the district, at the same time cancelling the land debt of the farmers.<sup>59</sup> This step was taken in order to escape the high cost of constructing and operating irrigation facilities, while at the same time transferring these problems to community co-operation. Lying in the heart of an irrigation district, Rosemary has prospered and today is the centre of a populous Mennonite area.

The General Conference Church also has large denominations at Coaldale<sup>60</sup> and Didsbury. The latter settlement was started in 1901, when a group of about twenty Mennonite families came from the West Reserve in Manitoba and settled there.<sup>61</sup> The church continued to grow and in 1951 had a membership of 194.<sup>62</sup> The following table shows the location and membership of the various Mennonite Conference churches in Alberta:<sup>63</sup>

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57 Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 12

58 This was a subsidiary organization founded by the C.P.R. for the specific purpose of settling people on the land. General Manager was T.O.F. Herzer of Winnipeg. This organization had then, and still has, branch offices in the four Western Provinces, and has in a long range work settled the majority of the Mennonite farmers. See Chapter IV of this thesis.

59 Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 18.

60 Coaldale shall be dealt with later.

61 Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 13.

62 Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 12.

63 Loc. cit.

| <u>Place</u> | <u>No. of Families</u> | <u>Members</u> | <u>Persons</u> |
|--------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Coaldale     | 98                     | 254            | 387            |
| Vauxhall     | 21                     | 53             | 96             |
| Springridge  | 19                     | 52             | 96             |
| Rosemary     | 109                    | 285            | 584            |
| Gem          | 15                     | 45             | 98             |
| Munson       | 8                      | 21             | 31             |
| Calgary      | 16                     | 54             | 70             |
| Didsbury     | 68                     | 194            | 361            |
| Tofield      | 55                     | 141            | 264            |
| Wembley      | 8                      | 13             | 54             |
| New Brigden  | 2                      | 4              | 6              |
| Chinook      | 1                      | 7              | 10             |
| Lacombe      | 4                      | 11             | 21             |

In 1951, the Mennonite Brethern Church in Alberta had a total membership of 1162.<sup>64</sup> The first settlement of this denomination in Alberta began in 1926 with the establishment of the community at Coaldale. With Coaldale as centre other settlements soon came into existence, and in 1928 the various churches united into a provincial organization known as the Provincial Conference of the Mennonite Brethern Church. In 1951, the following churches in Alberta constituted the Conference:<sup>65</sup> Coaldale (610), Gem (142), Grassy Lake (45) La Glace (61), Lindbrook (38), Linden (91), Namaka (40), Pincher Creek (26), and Vauxhall (109). All of these congregations, outside of Coaldale, are relatively small and shall be dealt

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<sup>64</sup> Mennonite Brethern Church, Statistics, 1951.

<sup>65</sup> Loc. cit. Membership shown in brackets.

with only briefly.<sup>66</sup>

The Gem Mennonite Brethern Church was organized in June, 1929, with a membership of thirty-five, and was accepted into the Mennonite Brethern District Conference the same year. The Grassy Lake congregation was founded in 1927 with a membership of seven; the first settlers having come to the area in 1926. In La Glace, located in the Peace River area of Northwestern Alberta, a Mennonite Brethern Church was organized in 1928; the same year a church was organized at Lindbrook. The Linden Mennonite Brethern Church is located about eight miles north of Acme, Alberta, and was formerly affiliated with the Evangelical Mennonite Brethern Conference, but in 1948 united with the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethern. The church at Namaka, organized in 1927, also belonged to the Evangelical Mennonite Brethern until 1942, when it became a member of the Mennonite Brethern Church. At Pincher Creek a Mennonite Brethern Church was organized in 1946 and remained affiliated with the Coaldale church until 1948. In that year it organized itself as a separate church and constructed its own church building. In 1933 a Mennonite Brethern Church was organized at Vauxhall, and a church was erected in 1936. In 1940, as a result of arson, both the Mennonite Brethern and the General Conference Churches at Vauxhall were destroyed by fire. In addition to the above mentioned organized Mennonite churches small groups exist at Carstairs, Crossfield, Carseland, Strathmore, Duchess, Brooks, Irma, Castor, Provost, Drumheller, Craigmyle, Monitor, Consort,

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66 The following information obtained from Questionnaire and Mennonite Encyclopedia.



Ryley, Countess, Lymburn, and Beaverlodge.<sup>67</sup> Coaldale, the centre of Alberta Mennonitism, deserves special attention.

At Coaldale we find the greatest concentration of Mennonites in Alberta. It is estimated that Coaldale and its environs contain 1362 Mennonites including Mennonite Brethern and General Conference Mennonites.<sup>68</sup> Situated in the centre of 100,000 acres of good irrigation land Coaldale became the first settlement in Alberta dominated by the Russian Mennonites. Through private efforts, and efforts of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, the Mennonites were brought to this area in 1925 and 1926; today, amidst a cosmopolitan population of twenty racial groups,<sup>69</sup> they form the dominant element there. When the Mennonites arrived Coaldale already had a twenty-five year history behind it.

The pioneer founder of Coaldale is considered to be H.A. Suggit who came from Illinois about 1904, and with the co-operation of a family named Cokeley, organized a company to colonize and settle a block of some twelve thousand acres of irrigated land.<sup>70</sup> Suggit promoted numerous community plans and also built the first house at the present site of Coaldale, only to lose his investments during the depression. Being in dire financial difficulties Suggit misappropriated about \$2000.00 of the School Board funds and served a six months jail term as a result.<sup>71</sup> Alfalfa and grain were the staple crops around Coaldale until the sugar beet came and ushered in a new period. The sugar beet brought drastic chan-

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<sup>67</sup> See map at end of this thesis.

<sup>68</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> Coaldale Flyer, December 12, 1952, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Material--- J.B. Janz.

ges in farm practices, and practically overnight extensive farming gave place to intensive cultivation. The local farmers, unwilling to make the change and unable to meet the demands of new methods, looked for greener pastures elsewhere and moved away. The change to intensive farming also demanded a much larger population than Coaldale possessed at that time, and the C.P.R., who owned most of the land, began to look around for new settlers. Their choice fell upon the Mennonites who just then were entering Canada. On their arrival the Mennonites were told by T.O.F. Herzer, an official of the company, that only on condition that they raise sugar beets could that land be turned over to them.<sup>72</sup> It was a wise condition, for the sugar beet has become the staple product of the Coaldale area and has enabled the Coaldale Mennonites to attain their present level of prosperity.

The Mennonite pioneer of Coaldale was Klaas Enns, who came to Canada from Russia with his family in 1925. He was not satisfied with conditions in Manitoba and shortly after his arrival there journeyed on to Alberta. His family acquired a job as beet workers near Stirling, Alberta, but still not satisfied Mr. Enns began to look around for a place of his own. One of his journeys took him to Coaldale, where a Mr. Lathrop, who had been an agent for the C.P.R. for many years, offered him his large farm for sale. In agreement with his three brothers and their families Mr. Enns accepted the offer and in the spring of 1926 the first four Mennonite families moved to Coaldale.<sup>73</sup> The nature of the purchase was unheard

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<sup>72</sup> Material--- J.B. Janz.

<sup>73</sup> Material--- J.B. Janz.

of, for it involved a sum of \$53,000.00 without the security of a written contract and without the safeguard of a down payment. The only condition made upon the buyers was that they raise 150 acres of beets annually and deliver them under the name of Mr. Lathrop, until the farm was paid for. The neighbors shook their heads over the simplicity of the newcomers and watched the outcome with interest. In due time the farm was paid for and ownership was transferred to the Mennonites. The deal proved to be a success.

The Coaldale settlement grew rapidly as the Canadian Pacific Railway Company continued to bring in more Mennonite settlers. The majority of Mennonites of Coaldale received their lands directly from the C.P.R., without any down payment but under the condition that for every eighty acres of land received they would raise ten acres of sugar beets, the proceeds of which were to go to the company for the payment of the farm. As a further gesture the company advanced lumber and materials to the settlers for the construction of necessary farm buildings. By the end of 1926 about forty Mennonite families were in the area.<sup>74</sup> Ten years later Coaldale contained 208 families with 1144 persons and the Mennonites owned and worked about 20,700 acres of land.<sup>75</sup>

Steps to foster the spiritual growth of the settlers were immediately undertaken in 1926 when the first settlers arrived. Meetings first took place in the barn loft of the Lathrop farm which had become the centre of Mennonite activity in the area. A year later permission was obtained

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<sup>74</sup> Material---J.B. Janz.

<sup>75</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 15.

to hold weekly meetings in the local school and in 1929 services were started in the newly built church. The Mennonite Brethern Church was organized in the area in 1926, under the leadership of Klaas Enns, while the General Conference Church did not organize until 1928.<sup>76</sup> Although the two denominations had held joint meetings until then, the organization of the latter church inaugurated a policy of separatism. The present Mennonite General Conference church building was erected in 1936, while that of the Mennonite Brethern was erected in 1939. The latter church has a seating capacity of 1300 and a membership of 610.<sup>77</sup>

Prosperity and numerical dominance have made Coaldale the headquarters of Alberta Mennonitism. Locally Coaldale possesses more Mennonite economic establishments than any other area. Mennonites there not only own farms but also the two largest general stores, two blacksmith shops, a garage, a hatchery, a feed mill, a restaurant, a photographic studio and the towns only printing shop. On a co-operative basis the Mennonites of Coaldale support and operate a cheese factory, a Credit Union Society, a doctor and hospital society and a local hospital. On a provincial basis Coaldale is headquarters for the Provincial Relief Committee, the Mennonite Fire Insurance Society, and the Burial Fund Society. In addition the Mennonite Brethern Church of Alberta sponsors the Alberta Mennonite High School situated at Coaldale.<sup>78</sup> Coaldale is indeed the heart of Alberta Mennonitism.

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76 Coaldale Flyer, Dec. 12, 1952, p. 10.

77 Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 12.

78 These various institutions are dealt with in chapter V of this thesis. For the Alberta Mennonite High School see chapter VI.

Of the three Mennonite migrations to Canada the last one has had the most profound and lasting effects upon Alberta. The Mennonites of the first two movements were of the more conservative Mennonite elements and have now been numerically swamped by the Russian Mennonites who soon assumed active dominance of Mennonite affairs in the province. Outside of very minor exceptions a distinct division has remained between the immigrants of the 1920's and the earlier Mennonite settlers. This division has been the result not only of differences in belief but also variations in interests resulting from alien backgrounds. Therefore when one speaks of the Mennonites in Alberta, just precedence must be given to the Russian Mennonites, the latest but the most active Mennonite element in the province.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REISESCHULD

Reiseschuld, what a colorful variety of response this word has called forth on the part of the Mennonites! Prior to 1946, the word engendered anger in some, despair in others, indifference, weariness, and hopelessness in still others. It compassed the field of human emotions and on its return the word was still there to trouble the dreams of the Mennonite people. Some faced it with determination and resolve and due to such people the word since 1946, has found a smaller place in the Mennonite vocabulary and is incapable of arousing the fierce emotions associated with it previously. Today the word is greeted more often with a faint show of pride and engenders a sense of a job well done. But there are still a number of those who face it with shame, even after over a quarter of a century has passed since it was first coined. The connotations which the one word Reiseschuld has had for the Mennonites in the past, cannot be fully understood by someone unless they too have lived under its grim shadow for over twenty years.

Reiseschuld, literally translated, means "travelling debt," and refers specifically to the Canadian Pacific Railway debt incurred by the Russian Mennonites in their great migration to Canada in the 1920's. The Canadian Pacific had extended to these people a credit of nearly \$2,000,000.00, to be repaid as soon as possible. Unfortunately for the immigrants

they entered Canada when the earning possibilities were decreasing and the world was on the brink of the greatest economic depression in its history. Reiseschuld was a word that for the next twenty years was to hang over the Mennonites like a black cloud; it was to haunt many dreams and shatter many hopes. But the Mennonites plagued by this great debt which it seemed impossible to repay, owed their lives to the credit which this debt represented; there were those who forgot this fact and later cast shame upon the name "Mennonite" by their indifferent and often hostile attitude to this "debt of honour." Those who remembered redeemed the Mennonite honour by the liquidation of the debt on November 19, 1946.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the Mennonite immigration movement of the 1920's, the Canadian Government had passed a law forbidding the entrance into Canada of people of the Mennonite faith.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Mennonites in Russia, who were looking to a new home, chose Canada as a refuge from the Communist terror. This choice was largely dictated by the fact that so many of them had friends and relatives in Canada who had come to the New World in the second great Mennonite migration of the 1870's. But the doors to Canada were closed and possibilities of settlement there seemed very remote. The work of paving the way for the new movement fell to the Canadian Mennonite Board of

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1 Thiessen, J.J., "30 Jahre C.M. Board", Mennonitische Rundschau, Wed., March 12, 1952.

2 Protokoll der Vertreterversammlung der Mennonitischen Siedler Alberta's, 1938, p. 14. Hereafter Noted as Vertreterversammlung.

Colonization.<sup>3</sup>

In the year 1921, after the annual convention of the Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Churches, a delegation was appointed by that body to go to Ottawa to petition the government to revoke the law forbidding the entrance of Mennonites into Canada. The delegation then formed was typical of the executive of the C.M.B.C., in that it contained members from the largest Mennonite groups in Canada, the General Conference and the Old Mennonites. The first delegates were H.A. Neufeld representing the Mennonite Brethern, H.H. Ewert and A.A. Friesen representing the General Conference, and S.F. Coffman, representing the Old Mennonites. The latter was the same man who had so energetically organized Mennonite churches in Alberta in the early 1900's. In Ottawa the delegation was given hope that its wishes would be considered. In February or March, 1922, the same delegation with three new members, Gerhard Ens, G. Goudie, and David Toews, again went to Ottawa. The new Prime Minister, W.L. Mackenzie King, gave them to understand that the restricting law would be lifted as soon as possible. It was removed on July 2, 1922.<sup>4</sup>

The C.M.B.C. was founded in Gretna, Manitoba, on May 17, 1922, with the understanding that the main office was to be in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. The first executive consisted

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3 Hereafter referred to by the initials C.M.B.C. Unless otherwise stated the following dates and figures are taken from Thiessen, J.J., op. cit.

4 This is one reason why the Mennonite settlers in Canada have, almost exclusively, supported the Liberal Party. Mackenzie King had been raised in an area inhabited by Mennonites and was a personal friend of David Toews, first Chairman of the C.M.B.C.



of: David Toews---Chairman  
 C.J. Andres---Secretary-Treasurer  
 H.A. Neufeld--Member  
 A.A. Friesen--Corresponding Secretary

Almost immediately a delegation was sent to Montreal to begin talks with the C.P.R. regarding the immigration of Mennonites. The Company was interested, for they remembered the sturdy Mennonite pioneers of the 1870's, and were looking for such farmers for their lands in the West.<sup>5</sup> The delegation presented the situation to Colonel J.S. Dennis, Chief Commissioner of the Department of Immigration and Development for the Canadian Pacific Railway, and asked if it would be possible to obtain credit from the Company for immigration purposes. Colonel Dennis promised to present the case to Sir Edward Beatty, then President of the C.P.R. Dennis gave the delegates to understand that since the Mennonite Immigrants of the 1870's had been so honorable in regard to the credit extended to them then, there should be little difficulty in making new arrangements for credit.<sup>6</sup> On June 20, 1922, Dennis reported that the C.P.R. was willing to bring 3000 Mennonites to Canada on credit, and on June 26, the first credit contract was signed between the C.P.R. and the C.M.B.C., with David Toews signing for the Board. Thus Toews made himself responsible for repaying the loan and on his return home he was severely criticized for signing away, by a simple stroke of the pen, the future financial security of the Mennonites. Later Dennis informed Toews that he had received letters and

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<sup>5</sup> See chapters two and four of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Mennonitische Rundschau, Dec. 21, 1938.

telegrams from Mennonites protesting against the credit contract. One letter had pointed out that the contract had been drawn up in such a way that legally the C.P.R. could not collect the money later. This observation was true enough and makes the Reiseschuld that much more unique as a long term credit loan.<sup>7</sup> Little did the Mennonites in Canada then realize that not only 3000 but nearly 14,000 Mennonites would enter Canada on their credit.

David Toews, a teacher at Gretna, Manitoba, had indeed assumed a grave responsibility, As a result he was loved, criticized, and made fun of. During the 1930's someone wrote the following sarcastic poem about him:

Mein lieber Bruder "Irgendwie"  
 Verzweifelt wirklich nie.  
 Er laesst die Dinge ruhig gehen,  
 Ohn' ihnen in den Weg zu stehen,  
 Und glaubt, die allerschwersten Sachen  
 Werden sich irgendwie schon machen...  
 Und sieh' wir leben Tag fuer Tag,  
 Was immer uns auch kommen mag;  
 Behalten unsern frohen Mut;  
 Am Ende wird doch alles gut. 8

But the situation had not been handled as haphazardly as the poem suggested, for David Toews considered it a "work of Faith, of a trust in God and the honor of the immigrants."<sup>9</sup>

The new immigration began in 1923, governed by the

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<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Janzen J.H., David Toews, Rosthern, D.H. Epp, Publisher, 1939, p. 16. Free translation of the poem:

My dear brother "Somehow"  
 Is discouraged nohow.  
 He lets thing go  
 Without standing in their way you know,  
 And believes that problems of the greatest kind  
 Will solve themselves as you will find.  
 And look, we're living and we sing,  
 What'er the future has to bring;  
 And our high spirits keep we shall,  
 For the end will always turn out well.

<sup>9</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p.8.

Order-in-Council, P.C. 185, issued on January 31, 1923.<sup>10</sup> This law removed the monetary qualification of \$250.00 necessary for immigrants and which had been established by P.C. 2668 in 1921.<sup>11</sup> The only requirement necessary for immigration to Canada was the assurance of an agricultural occupation upon arrival. In the case of the Mennonites this occupation was guaranteed by the C.P.R. and the C.M.B.C.<sup>12</sup> Difficulties arose, however, as large numbers of immigrants were brought forward from interior points of the continent to the ports of embarkation, only to be rejected by failure to meet the health requirements for Canada. A solution to this problem was found in that the C.P.R. appointed inspectional officers designated as "Certificate Issuing Officers", whose duty it was to "inspect the prospective immigrants at internal points and to issue certificates which guaranteed placement, certified his eligibility from the standpoint of the occupational test, and carried a statement from the immigrant that he was proceeding as an agriculturalist and would take up agricultural work in Canada."<sup>13</sup>

In Moscow the representative of the Mennonites, Mr. B.B. Janz, who had also been chosen by the C.P.R. as a Certificate Issuing Officer, pointed out that not all the Mennonites sought to enter Canada on the credit terms arranged by the C.M.B.C.; many Mennonites had money to pay cash. This latter group was eagerly accepted by the C.P.R. as "paying

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<sup>10</sup> England, R., The Central European Immigrant in Canada, Toronto, Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1929, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Personal information from B.B. Janz.

<sup>13</sup> England, op. cit., p. 26.

customers."<sup>14</sup> Thus, two types of Mennonite immigrants entered Canada, those on credit and those paying their way. The following chart shows the number entering each year either on credit or cash terms:<sup>15</sup>

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Credit</u> | <u>Cash</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1923        | \$2,759       | \$ ----     | \$2,759      |
| 1924        | 3,894         | 1,154       | 5,048        |
| 1925        | 2,171         | 1,601       | 3,772        |
| 1926        | 2,479         | 3,461       | 5,940        |
| 1927        | 340           | 507         | 847          |
| 1928        | 408           | 103         | 511          |
| 1929        | 1,009         | 10          | 1,019        |
| 1930        | 294           | 11          | 305          |
| Total       | 13,354        | 6,847       | 20,201       |

The total credit extended to these immigrants by the C.P.R. was \$1,767,398.68,<sup>16</sup> a sum that the Mennonites soon came to call the Reiseschuld.

The duty of the C.M.B.C. now was to collect this money and repay the C.P.R. in the shortest possible time. Before the immigrants could be expected to pay, however, they must be settled and put into a position where payment was possible. In 1924 the Mennonite Land Settlement Board was founded to aid the settlers in acquiring land. In co-operation with the C.P.R. and the C.M.B.C. this body was success-

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<sup>14</sup> Information from B.B. Janz.

<sup>15</sup> Mennonitische Rundschau, Wed., March 12, 1952.

<sup>16</sup> Loc. cit.

ful in providing land for many Mennonites. In 1934, the Land Settlement Board was absorbed by the C.M.B.C., the latter taking over the settlement duties of the former.<sup>17</sup> The C.M.B.C. was incorporated in 1925 and H.B. Janz was appointed as "Collector" of the Reiseschuld. Janz held this position until 1930, when he was succeeded by C.F. Klassen, who remained on the job until the debt was liquidated. On April 4, 1946, David Toews resigned as Chairman of the C.M.B.C. and was succeeded by J.J. Thiessen who is still in that position. David Toews died on February 25, 1947, a scant four months after the liquidation of the debt had again made him a free man.

From the beginning the C.M.B.C. realized that the collection of the Reiseschuld would not be an easy task. It was practically impossible for the Board to supervise closely the collection work in all areas where the new immigrants had settled. In order to facilitate collections and increase the efficiency of the organization, the new immigrants in each province were requested to form a "Provincial Committee" to supervise the work of collection.<sup>18</sup> The provinces were then to be divided into districts each having a Distriktmann (district representative), who would be responsible for the Reiseschuld payments in his area. Of the 200<sup>19</sup> districts formed in Canada, forty-three were in Alberta.<sup>20</sup> The Provincial committees and the Distriktmaenner were responsible to the Ver-

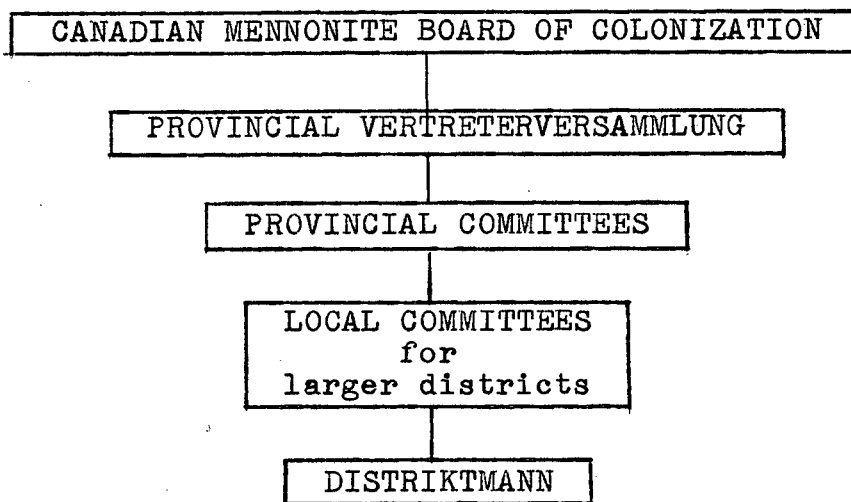
17 Vertreterversammlung, 1939, p. 18.

18 Ibid., p. 17.

19 Vertreterversammlung, 1938, p. 11.

20 Vertreterversammlung, 1945, p. 30.

treterversammlung (Representative Meeting), which in turn was responsible to the C.M.B.C. in Rosthern. In most of the larger Mennonite settlements, such as Coaldale, an Ortskomitee (Local Committee) was formed to aid the district representative in his work. In general, the following diagram portrays in a simplified way the organization as it functioned until 1946:



To finance this organization a levy of three dollars was placed on each immigrant over 16 years of age. This levy had to be repeated in 1934, and an additional charge of fifty cents, in 1938. Much trouble was encountered in collecting this levy in its entirety.

The main function of the organization, until 1947, was the elimination of the C.P.R. debt. Closely associated with this purpose was the effort to help the Mennonite immigrants obtain land and settle in areas where they would not be isolated from others of like faith. As the years progressed, other functions of an economic and co-operative nature fell to its lot, as well as the supervision of relief work,

particularly during and after World War II.<sup>21</sup> In fact these latter duties soon became so important that on one occasion a representative said, "Gut dass wir noch die Reiseschuld haben, sonst haetten wir keine Provinzierversammlungen mehr und das waere schade; denn nebenbei besprechen wir ja noch manche andere Fragen."<sup>22</sup> In later years the Provincial Vertreterversammlung became the centralizing body and ultimate authority for most Mennonite endeavors in Alberta.

The first gigantic task, however, was the liquidation of the C.P.R. debt. By 1926 only about 228 credit contracts had been repaid in all of Canada.<sup>23</sup> The promissory notes, signed by the immigrants when they entered Canada, were not returned however, because the debt was considered not an individual one but the debt of the Mennonite people as a whole. The Board intended to keep the notes until the entire debt was paid. This step caused much opposition and had to be abandoned,<sup>24</sup> and consequently since 1926, promissory notes were returned when an individual paid his own share of the Reiseschuld in full.

Payments lagged and the Canadian Pacific expressed concern over the matter.<sup>25</sup> By July, 1936, the debt plus interest still amounted to \$1,467,823.60, of which \$232,058.87 was owed by the Mennonites in Alberta.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the

21 These functions shall be dealt with in later chapters.

22 Vertreterversammlung, 1939, p. 29

23 Vertreterversammlung, 1936, p. 28

24 Loc. cit.

25 Protokoll der Versammlung der Mennoniten Gruppe bei Coal-dale, March 5, 1934. Hereafter referred to as V.M.G.

26 Vertreterversammlung, 1936, p. 26.

generous premiums for prompt payment, extended to the Mennonites by the C.P.R., it took Alberta until the end of 1945 to liquidate her debt, and she was the first province to accomplish this feat. The following table gives a comprehensive picture of payments made and premiums received in the province of Alberta:

| Year  | Premiums Received | Debt Paid   | Interest Paid | Levy (\$3.00) | Total       |
|-------|-------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1932  | \$-----           | \$ 4,980.54 | \$-----       | \$-----       | \$ 4,980.54 |
| 1933  | -----             | 5,407.46    | -----         | -----         | 5,407.46    |
| 1934  | -----             | 12,349.83   | -----         | -----         | 12,349.83   |
| 1935  | 1,758.84          | 8,771.14    | 707.80        | 444.21        | 9,923.15    |
| 1936  | 2,902.74          | 10,253.21   | 679.85        | 637.08        | 11,570.14   |
| 1937  | 4,133.62          | 12,666.85   | 559.50        | 502.37        | 13,728.72   |
| 1938  | 3,636.23          | 10,182.47   | 1,107.31      | 703.58        | 11,993.36   |
| 1939  | 2,605.95          | 8,033.32    | 704.00        | 965.12        | 9,702.44    |
| 1940  | 2,180.58          | 5,913.85    | 80.85         | 860.29        | 6,854.99    |
| 1941  | 13,376.34         | 19,356.35   | 513.50        | 1,442.92      | 21,312.77   |
| 1942  | 10,712.76         | 16,337.62   | 1,754.85      | 1,502.30      | 19,594.77   |
| 1943  | 41,057.32         | 35,328.23   | 3,156.10      | 1,588.86      | 40,073.19   |
| 1944  | 57,670.39         | 51,554.09   | 2,328.17      | 1,502.60      | 55,384.86   |
| 1945  | 12,521.60         | 10,529.24   | 541.07        | 978.34        | 12,048.65   |
| 1946  | 3,392.67          | 3,020.24    | 3,103.43      | 1,196.25      | 7,319.92    |
| Total | 155,944.04        | 214,684.44  | 15,236.43     | 12,323.92     | 242,244.79  |

The total C.P.R. debt paid by the Mennonites in Alberta:



|                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Total debt paid-----    | \$ 229,920.87     |
| Premium Received-----   | 155,944.04        |
| Total debt covered----- | <u>385,864.91</u> |

The total C.P.R. debt paid by the Mennonites in Canada:

|                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Principal----- | \$ 1,767,398.68     |
| Interest-----  | <u>180,000.00</u>   |
| Total-----     | <u>1,947,398.68</u> |

This figure does not include the more than \$1,000,000.00 granted to the Mennonites as premiums by the C.P.R.<sup>28</sup>

Why did it take so long to repay the debt?

The great majority of the Mennonites at all times recognized the moral obligation to pay, a fact that is clearly evident when the Mennonite newspapers of the period and the reports and minutes of the various organizations are studied. Yet there was a small but stubborn minority who took either an indifferent attitude or even a hostile stand against the debt and sought every possible escape from their obligations. Eventually some did evade payment by an outright refusal to pay, but it was at the price of having the Mennonite public opinion against them even though the church ban was not used.

The greatest difficulty in connection with the payment of the Reiseschuld was the depression of the 1930's, which hit Canada soon after the immigrants arrived. The conditions during the great depression are familiar and need not be discussed here. Scarcity of jobs, weakness of earning power, low prices of farm products, and drought, played havoc with the plans of the Mennonites as they did with those of

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<sup>28</sup> Thiessen J.J., op. cit.

other people. During the first years of the depression the willingness to pay was there, but the possibilities were not. Considering the circumstances it is rather amazing that so much was paid during the time. The total debt paid by the Mennonites in Canada from 1931 to 1935 inclusive was \$199,365.51, a figure that definitely speaks of a will to pay.<sup>29</sup> However, it did take the wartime boom to eliminate the debt entirely.

As was mentioned, there were always those who tried to escape payment by discreditable, if legal means. One method tried was a declaration of bankruptcy;<sup>30</sup> it was not successful. Others believed that with the death of the head of the family the Reiseschuld could be buried with him.<sup>31</sup> There is even record of some debtors who tried to return to Germany, although they had promised not to leave Canada until the debt was paid.<sup>32</sup> The C.M.B.C. did everything in its power to hinder any attempt to evade making payments. There were, of course, those who outright refused to pay. The C.M.B.C. had to point out that the Reiseschuld was not an insured debt and that it was not a debt in the ordinary sense of the term; it had not arisen through business transactions which looked to a profit, rather it arose through "relief action" aimed at "saving lives."<sup>33</sup> The debt was to be considered not only as the debt of an individual but also as a debt of the Mennonite society; not only the head of the family was responsible for

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29 Vertreterversammlung, 1936, p. 26

30 Ibid., p. 24.

31 Ibid., p. 28.

32 Vertreterversammlung, 1939, p. 17.

33 Vertreterversammlung, 1936, p. 28.

it but the entire family must assume the obligation.<sup>34</sup>

In Alberta various methods were employed in order to stimulate payment. In the Vertreterversammlungen of the 1930's a representative of the C.M.B.C. was always present. On most occasions David Toews, Chairman, and C.F. Klassen, Collector, gave reports and attempted to stimulate enthusiasm. The reports given usually contained more of an emotional appeal to the "honor of the Mennonites" than actual figures as to the progress made. This was particularly true of David Toews; C.F. Klassen, as collector, kept meetings informed of payments made and the amounts still owing. Constant stress was laid in the fact that the C.P.R. credit had been made possible by the "honorable" dealings of the 1870 immigrants with the Canadian government at that time.<sup>35</sup> The C.P.R. debt was a debt of honor that had to be repaid.<sup>36</sup> If the Mennonites now failed to live up to the moral obligations in regard to the present debt, the possibilities for helping future Mennonite immigrants would be greatly damaged. Mr. C.F. Klassen urged that if large payments were impossible to make then small payments should be made. This would at least bear witness that the will to pay was there.<sup>37</sup>

It was urged that the children of parents owing the C.P.R., should be made fully aware of the responsibility in regard to the Reiseschuld. When the children became of age (16), they were required to sign promissory notes making them-

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<sup>34</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>35</sup> See page 30 of this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Report of David Toews in Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Report of C.F. Klassen in Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 8.

selves directly responsible for the debt. In the case of marriage the husband assumed the debt for his wife.<sup>38</sup> By these means a sense of responsibility for the debt was passed on to the children.

A scheme that was initiated in the early thirties was that of insuring the head of the family, that in case of his death money to pay the debt would be available.<sup>39</sup> This scheme seems to have been a failure for it was given up.<sup>40</sup> In 1932, it was requested by the Mennonite settlers at Coal-dale that the C.P.R. be contacted and requested that all payments on the debt should be used to reduce the principle, and that no interest be paid on the interest.<sup>41</sup> The C.M.B.C. was informed of this wish but there is no record of action being taken regarding it. As a last attempt to stimulate payment, it was decided to publish the names of the families still owing as well as the amounts outstanding.<sup>42</sup> This step may have been successful in a minor degree but seemed to call forth more anger than payments.

In the late summer of 1937, Sir Edward Beatty was visiting Western Canada. He had plans to visit Calgary and Lethbridge and expressed the desire to visit a Mennonite sett-

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38 Vertreterversammlung, 1936, p. 28. The writer recalls how his mother often prevented the purchase of some desired but unnecessary article with the words, "Kinder, nicht ehe die Reiseschuld bezahlt ist." (Children, not before the Reiseschuld is paid). How many youthful hopes were shattered by that word!

39 Vertreterversammlung, 1938, p. 14

40 Loc. cit.

41 V.M.G., Dec. 29, 1932.

42 V.M.G., Jan. 27, 1941.

lement in Alberta. The Mennonite leaders eagerly seized the opportunity and it was decided to have Sir Edward come to Coaldale, the largest Mennonite settlement in Alberta. The time was very opportune for such a visit. Because of the general discouragement occasioned by the depression and the apathy of many Mennonites regarding the Reiseschuld, this visit was utilized to refresh the memory of the Mennonite people of their great escape from Russia. The leaders also looked to the future and saw clearly that the time might come again when the goodwill of the C.P.R. would be a necessary ingredient of future Mennonite migrations.<sup>43</sup> Again, the Mennonites wanted to show that even if they had been slow to pay, they were thankful for the great help which had been extended to them by the C.P.R. It was a move in which diplomacy and thankfulness had an equal share, and to the frayed financial bonds between the C.P.R. and the Mennonites were now to be added the bonds of sentiment.

The settlers in Coaldale all remember "Sir Edward Beatty Day" with genuine warmth and thankfulness. It is one day which will go down in the history of the Mennonites of Alberta as a high-water mark of their relations with the great company. Colonel J.S. Dennis, who had been in retirement since 1930 in Victoria, B.C., was also invited, and with him came a number of C.P.R. officials including W.M. Neil, Vice president of the C.P.R. Present also were T.O.F. Herzer, Chairman of the Canada Colonization Association, Senator Buchanan of Alberta, and Mr. Elton, the Mayor of Lethbridge.

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<sup>43</sup> Personal information from B.B. Janz.

On September 19, 1937, these noteables entered the Mennonite Brethern church at Coaldale, to experience something new.

In the speeches which followed, the whole story of the Mennonite escape from Russia was reviewed, first by Rev. B.B. Janz and then by Rev. David Toews. The C.P.R. was portrayed as the saviour of the 20,201 Mennonites who had entered Canada in the 1920's. Then came the most impressive part of the ceremony. Ten Russian born Mennonite girls, aged nine to twelve, all dressed in white, came to the front in pairs to where Sir Edward and Colonel Dennis sat, and each placed a bouquet of flowers at their feet. In doing so one said, "You saved our lives," the other, "We thank you." This was repeated by each pair of girls. The Mennonitische Rundschau, later reported, "President Beatty was deeply moved and tears filled the eyes of Colonel Dennis."<sup>44</sup>

In the address of welcome Rev. B.B. Janz said,

Faithful prayers of thousands of our people in Russia have knocked at the gate of our Heavenly Father, who transferred these knocks to the office of Sir Edward Beatty and Colonel Dennis, who in turn allowed their offices to become a house of God, where the resolution to save so many lives was passed and carried out, an act of Christian charity unequalled in the history of today. <sup>45</sup>

Following the presentation of the bouquets by the girls, an illuminated address was presented to Sir Edward Beatty. It read;<sup>46</sup>

It will be recorded in the pages of history and engraved on 20,000 living, grateful hearts that the association with the Canadian Pacific Railway was an essential and indispensable link in the

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<sup>44</sup> Mennonitische Rundschau, Dec. 12, 1938.

<sup>45</sup> Gibbon, op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>46</sup> Photographic copy of address obtained from J.B. Janz.

chain of circumstances by which our people were saved from spiritual and moral ruin. Under the guidance of Divine Providence, a door of escape was opened for our people by the Canadian Pacific Railway, and subsequently by the Government and people of Canada. In this land of adoption we have found peace, security, daily bread and a Home.

All this was accomplished on a basis of good faith. We on our part shall always endeavour to do all in our power to justify the confidence placed in us, and we hope that the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Government and people of Canada will never have reason to withdraw their confidence. Our people, men of faith and conscience, will guarantee this.

Your personal decision favourable to this movement, esteemed Sir Edward Beatty, was a determining factor in the deliverance of our people. Neither the present nor the future generations of our people will ever forget. God be with you.

The Mennonite settlers  
at Coaldale, Alberta.

September 19th, 1937.

A similar address was presented to Colonel Dennis.<sup>47</sup>

More than 20,000 people who were rescued from a spiritual and moral disaster remember gratefully, that 15 years ago there sat in the councils of the Canadian Pacific Railway a man who had the vision and the faith to save a whole people - total strangers to him - who were financially crushed and ruined.

This noble confidence and the act of transporting them to Canada, was under the Providence of God, the cause of their deliverance. While ravages continue overseas, we here enjoy liberty, peace, security, subsistence and a home.

Your great confidence in us, noble Colonel Dennis, as well as that of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the government and the people of Canada, will not be dishonored by us. Our people, strong in faith and faithfulness will vouch for that. Your confidence in us stands out as one of the most glorious pages of our history. Never shall we forget. God be with you.

The Mennonite settlers  
at Coaldale, Alberta.

September 19th, 1937.

Following the presentation of these addresses Sir

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<sup>47</sup> Photographic copy of address obtained from J.B. Janz.

Edward and Colonel Dennis were asked to speak. Sir Edward said that the manner in which the Mennonites of Western Canada were repaying their obligations was ample justification for what the C.P.R. had done. He expressed the hope that the Mennonite communities might continue long to enjoy the homes they were carving out for themselves.<sup>48</sup> Colonel Dennis said, "May I say in all sincerity that I appreciate the sentiments expressed in this memorial. I have been associated with the movement of Mennonite people into Western Canada ever since my boyhood. The first colonies were brought to Canada because of a loan of a million dollars made by the Dominion Government. Every cent of that loan was repaid."<sup>49</sup> He went on to say that the fact that the loan had been repaid had much to do with his being able to persuade Sir Edward to advance some \$2,000,000 to help bring the Mennonite refugees to Canada ten years previously. The ceremony ended with the singing of God Save the King.

The Beatty celebration was a diplomatic triumph for the Mennonites in Alberta. By this is not meant that the settlers were insincere in the expression of their thankfulness. The large majority had never forgotten the debt they owed to the C.P.R., and the sentiments expressed were sincere. The celebration stirred the sluggish consciences of the people, and many, who until now had been indifferent, recalled the suffering and the misery of the past and the resolve to live up to their obligations was born again. This is clearly seen by the fact that in 1937 the Mennonites of Alberta paid a

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<sup>48</sup> Canadian Pacific Staff Bulletin, Oct. 1, 1937.

<sup>49</sup> Loc. cit. Dennis seems to have made an error. The sum was \$100,000.00



total sum of \$13,226.35, the highest figure paid in any one year before 1941.<sup>50</sup> On the death of Colonel Dennis on November 26, 1938, and of Sir Edward Beatty on March 23, 1943, deep grief and genuine sympathy were expressed by the Mennonites. Of Colonel Dennis, Rev. David Toews wrote, "Sie haben einen guten Mann begraben. Uns aber war er mehr."<sup>51</sup>

Sentiment alone was not enough and the Provincial Committee had to make renewed efforts to collect the remaining money. The end of the depression made a marked change in the paying abilities of the Mennonites. This change is clearly evident in the payments made to the C.P.R. after 1941.

In 1937, C.F. Klassen made arrangements with the C.P.R. that if any one of the 200 districts paid their entire debt, a premium of 50% or more of the interest would be granted to that area.<sup>52</sup> This was a new stimulus and the districts in Alberta, under the leadership of the Provincial Committee, began to organize in an effort to eliminate their entire debt in three years.<sup>53</sup> It was again stressed that all Mennonites were debtors, and that as long as one dollar debt remained the Mennonites of Canada were bound by a moral obligation. The debt was incurred by the Mennonite society and must be paid by them.<sup>54</sup> The Vertreterversammlung decided that pressure be brought to bear on debtors to pay in full. Some would still not pay, but the remaining money was to be collected from the Mennonite society at the rate of \$45.00 per family and thus the debt was to be liquidated.

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<sup>50</sup> See table page 59 of this thesis.

<sup>51</sup> Mennonitische Rundschau, Dec. 21, 1938

<sup>52</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1937, p. 31

<sup>53</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1938, p. 14

<sup>54</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1937, pp. 7-8

Although this plan was not completed in three years, the province of Alberta was the first to cast off the burden of the Reiseschuld. Slowly, by districts, the debt disappeared. Gem, Rosemary, Duchess, and others, accomplished this in 1943.<sup>55</sup> In 1944, Lindbrook, Tofield, Wembley and La Glace were successful in their efforts.<sup>56</sup> On February 9, 1945, at the Vertreterversammlung held at Rosemary, the chairman of the Provincial Committee, Mr. A.A. Toews, announced the liquidation of the Alberta Reiseschuld in the following related words,<sup>57</sup>

....Wir wissen eigentlich garnicht was uns und euch geworden ist, nachdem endlich die grosse Schuldenlast abgewaelzt ist. Es geht uns so wie in Psalm 126 geschrieben steht: dann werden wir sein wie die Trauemenden. Ist es Wirklichkeit, oder ist es nur ein schoener Traum? Das, was uns vor etlichen Jahren ganz unmoeglich schien, ist jetzt zur Tatsache geworden: die Provinz Alberta hat als solche keine Reiseschuld mehr der C.P.R. gegenueber und auch die Notenschuld ist abgetan. Ja, wir koennen mit Recht ausrufen: Der Herr hat grosses an uns getan, des sind wir froehlich. Ihm in erster Linie alle Ehre.

Outside of a few sums overlooked previously, the Mennonites of Alberta were free of the persistent heavy C.P.R. load. Of late the word Reiseschuld has again attained a respectable place in the Mennonite vocabulary.

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<sup>55</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1944, p. 14

<sup>56</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>57</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1945, p. 22.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LAND SETTLEMENT POLICIES

Throughout their entire history the Mennonites have tended to settle in groups, and whenever migration and resettlement have been necessary, as it often was, the Mennonite leaders endeavoured to obtain land in "blocks" which would insure group settlement. The motives behind group settlement are simple. The Mennonites have always striven at "separation" from the world and this in turn meant the Gemeinschaft (fellowship) of the believers. Group settlements, therefore, have been motivated as much by the desire to have the fellowship of those of like belief, as they have been to remain apart from the "sinful" world. On the part of the Mennonites there has always been the justified fear that unless they settled in homogeneous groups, it would be impossible to avoid assimilation with, and absorption into, the main stream of the country's culture. For four-hundred years this has been a dominating principle of Mennonite group settlement, and in Canada the pattern has been largely the traditional one. Although economic factors do play a minor part in stimulating the Mennonites to adhere to their own kind, they are only of very minor importance. In Canada the Mennonites have been largely absorbed in an economic sense, but socially and religiously they remain an ethnic group. Fear of losing their faith in the stream of modern complex culture and beliefs has been, and remains, the dominant incentive to Mennonite group settlement.

In Canada the desire to settle in "closed" communi-

ties met with exceptional success. As has already been seen, the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870's had blocks of land reserved for their special use. Even today, in the East and West reserves in Manitoba, the Mennonite element is completely dominant. Although such large areas were never again set aside for the settlement of any particular ethnic group, the C.P.R. and the large landowners in Canada were greatly interested in settling their large tracts of land with groups of people. The work of settlement which was attempted by the C.M.B.C. was accelerated by the private interests of the railway company and large landowners. The pre-war and wartime booms were things of the past, and the large landowners in the Canadian West were eager to reduce or sell entirely, their large holdings. There were only two alternatives: either to cut up the large land areas and sell to individuals or to sell entire holdings to groups of families. The latter method was preferred as being simpler and cheaper for the vendor and more promising of success for the fundless Mennonite settlers. Since the C.P.R. was concerned to make the Mennonite colonization in the West a success, they also favored this method. The Mennonites had no objection; for them it was an answer to prayer.

The desire of the Mennonites to live in groups has often led uninformed observers to accuse them of tendencies toward communism. Nothing could be more erroneous. The average Mennonite is an individual with the best of them, and communism has no appeal for him whatever. Co-operation with persons of his own faith has always been near to the Mennonite

heart--but communism never has. Rarely is property owned communally among the Mennonites, and then only where conditions make it necessary to use the communal form in order to make the beginnings somewhat easier. The Mennonite is an individual with an individualistic desire for complete personal freedom within the limits of his own group.

The majority of the newcomers of the 1920's, settled on C.P.R. lands, or lands found for them by the C.P.R. and its affiliated organizations. James B. Hedges, in his book Building the Canadian West, has clearly and authoritatively told the story of the colonization of the Canadian West through the efforts of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.<sup>1</sup> The Company, in close co-operation with the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, put forth every effort to make the Mennonite colonization scheme a success. The Company also maintained the Canada Colonization Association as a "medium for the settlement of private land,"<sup>2</sup> and in order to achieve a greater harmony and unity in the work of settling the Mennonites, the Mennonite Land Settlement Board was organized, which, although containing a Mennonite member, was dominated and directed by Colonel Dennis of the C.P.R. The Mennonites as a society, at all times lacked a well defined settlement policy, a fact that was to work in a detrimental way on the plans and hopes of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. The element of planning which did exist was a direct result of the organ-

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1 Hedges, J.B., Building the Canadian West, The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1939, pp. 370-377.

2 Ibid., p. 370

ization under the direction of the C.P.R. itself.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that the C.P.R. has been the most important factor in the settlement of the lands in the Canadian West. After the completion of the railway, the company had 25,000,000 acres of crown lands to dispose of and consequently desired to create in the West a rich and productive farming community which would furnish traffic for the company's struggling rail lines. To aid in this venture and to meet the demands of colonization, the Department of Colonization was formed in 1916 with Colonel J.S. Dennis at its head. In 1930 this name was changed to Department of Immigration and Colonization.<sup>4</sup>

In selecting the land subsidy which the C.P.R. was to receive for constructing the railway, the company was obliged to accept areas which were not "fairly fit for settlement."<sup>5</sup> As far as the lands in Alberta were concerned, the C.P.R. declined to accept the area along the main line between Moose Jaw and the mountains because the land was too dry and therefore unfit for settlement. By 1903 not all land had been selected and the government issued an order that the balance of the land grant must be selected before the end of that year, the deficiency at that time being 3,000,000 acres.<sup>6</sup> The possibilities of irrigation in the dry belt in Alberta had been investigated under the direction of J.S. Dennis, then the In-

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B p. 142

<sup>4</sup> Colley, J., "Company Colonization Activities Aid Settlement of the Dominion", Canadian Pacific Staff Bulletin, March 1, 1940, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Porter, S.G., "The Canadian Pacific Land Grants and their Administration", Canadian Pacific Staff Bulletin, Feb., 1, 1940.

<sup>6</sup> Loc. cit.

spector of Surveys for the Dominion Government. The investigation showed that potential fertile lands were tributary to the St. Mary's and Bow rivers east of Calgary. The C.P.R. accepted this block of land and decided to build irrigation works to serve it.<sup>7</sup>

The entire irrigation block was subsequently divided into three sections known as Eastern, Central, and Western sections.<sup>8</sup> Although the central section is only now being fitted out with irrigation facilities the Eastern and Western sections were soon completed. The Western section comprises 1,002,304 acres with 218,980 under irrigation.<sup>9</sup> The cost of the irrigation construction in these two sections amounted to \$18,000,000. In 1912, the C.P.R. purchased the Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company system, which lies directly south of the main C.P.R. irrigation block.<sup>10</sup> This area was first developed by the Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company and is the oldest irrigation area of any size in Canada. It was opened for operation in 1900.<sup>11</sup>

Thus two types of farming land were opened to the Mennonites when they came west in the 1920's--irrigated land and dry land. Being unfamiliar with irrigation the pioneer Mennonites preferred the dry land, but it was inevitable that some would come into contact with irrigated land. In 1924 the settlers bought land at Didsbury and Tofield, both situated in

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7 Loc. cit. See map page 76.

8 Irrigation Farming in Sunny Alberta, 1925, p. 2.

9 Porter, op. cit., p.

10 See map page 76.

11 Irrigation Farming in Sunny Alberta, p. 3.


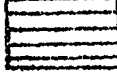
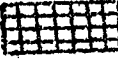

dry areas, while the irrigation area around Lethbridge was at first neglected. Slowly the Mennonites also penetrated the irrigation blocks, not as farmers at first, but as laborers in the sugar beet fields. Soon farms were bought and regular Mennonite homes established. The superiority of the irrigation land over dry land was proven in the next decade when drought brought the dry land settlers to the verge of starvation while the settlers in the irrigated areas prospered. Since the early thirties the movement of Mennonites to irrigated land has been persistent and today the larger portion of them are situated on irrigible land. Most of the settlements in the dry areas have remained small while the reverse has been the case in the irrigation blocks. In the dry land the chief areas of Mennonite settlement are Didsbury and Tofield. Smaller settlements are found east of the Calgary-Edmonton line and in the Peace River area. In the irrigation areas the main Mennonite settlements are Coaldale, Rosemary, Gem, Vauxhall, Brooks and Duchess.

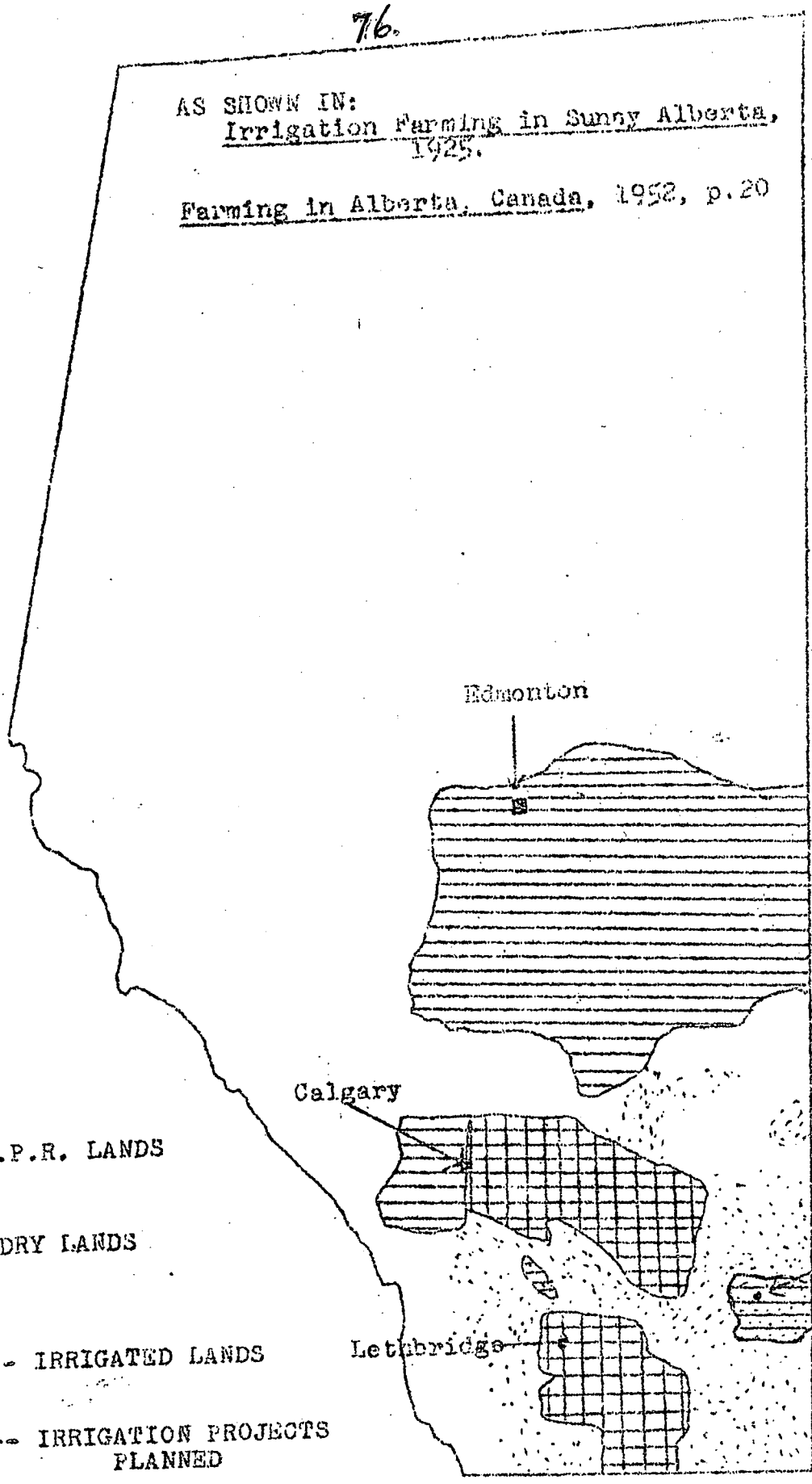
Group settlements were established in Alberta as well as in the other western provinces. Large tracts of land, owned by wheat farmers or cattle ranchers, were rented or sold to groups of Mennonite families, who then worked the land on a communal basis, at least for the first few years. This scheme met with a fair amount of success but also had its difficulties, the main ones being the individuality and the independence of the settlers. One such group settlement was made in the Carseland-Namaka-Strathmore district where, in 1925,



AS SHOWN IN:  
Irrigation Farming in Sunny Alberta,  
1925.

Farming in Alberta, Canada, 1952, p.20

-  -- C.P.R. LANDS
-  -- DRY LANDS
-  -- IRRIGATED LANDS
-  -- IRRIGATION PROJECTS PLANNED



the Russian Mennonites took over a large tract of land from the George Lane Company Ltd., Calgary. The land was to be paid for with one half the crop produced in a period of ten years.<sup>12</sup> The work in the early years was of necessity done communally, and the machinery bought and the buildings erected in the same manner. As among all good individualists differences of opinion soon brought friction. When one farmer wanted to leave work for a day and go to Calgary, the reply was, "Wann ena no Calgary foet, dann well wi aulla foere." (If one goes to Calgary, then we all go). As soon as possible the land was divided among the families and gradually individual farms arose until today the communal system here has entirely disappeared. Although many families from here have moved away, mainly to British Columbia, this area still contains a prosperous Mennonite settlement.

A similar story can be told of the Wembley district. The Russian Mennonites arrived in Swalwell in 1925, where they spent the winter under the care of the earlier Mennonite settlers. Land scouts were sent out and had no difficulty in making arrangements to purchase a ranch of twenty-two quarters, with 1000 acres under cultivation, from the Adair Ranch Company. The deal was made for \$18.00 per acre with machinery, to be paid by half the crop in fifteen years at 4% interest for the first two years and 6% for the remaining time. The total purchase price was \$63,350.00. Contrary to Mennonite practice this purchase was made solely by the group concerned

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<sup>12</sup> Questionnaire.

without assistance or direction by the Mennonite Land Settlement Board. The latter organization immediately informed other immigrants not to purchase land independently.<sup>13</sup> The first two years the land was worked communally but in 1927 it was parcelled out to the individual families. Today very few scattered Mennonite families still live in the area.

In the Didsbury area another group of eleven families comprising seventy-four individuals, settled on the Burns Ranch. As in other places, the work was started on a communal basis and later divided into small farms. These cases show clearly that a community of goods is not desired by the Mennonites, although they will "tolerate" such conditions if necessity dictates. The settlements at Irma, Crowfoot, Rosemary, Countess and many others were first settled by groups, many of whom practiced communal ownership in the first years. This was done to insure progress while supplying the means of attaining independence. The large tracts could be bought at cheaper prices than the then existing small farms. In Alberta today there is not one case of communal ownership of land among the Mennonites.<sup>14</sup>

The settlement of the Mennonites on the land was one of the main functions of the Mennonite Provincial Committee.<sup>15</sup> Under the supervision of the Vertreterversammlung (Representative Meeting of the Mennonites in Alberta), it watched over the

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13 Vertreterversammlung, 1936, p. 11.

14 Community of goods is practiced by the Hutterites, but they are not Mennonites.

15 The other functions was the collection of the Reiseschuld. See chapter three of this thesis.

religious, social and cultural development of the infant settlements. This control, however, was very limited, consisting mainly of reports and recommendations to the areas and the Committee had no force but persuasion to see that its recommendations were carried out. Its suggestions consisted mainly of encouragement to establish Religious and German schools on Saturday, and the establishment of a German library. When a settlement found itself in difficult economic straits, a recommendation for financial help was usually brought at the next Vertreterversammlung. Large group settlements were recommended and Mennonites who were living alone in isolated areas were constantly urged to resettle in Mennonite centres.<sup>16</sup>

During the years 1925 to 1932 Mr. Jacob Gerbrandt was the Alberta representative on the Mennonite Land Settlement Board. Through his office in Lethbridge he was kept informed of the settlement possibilities in the province. Efforts were made to settle the Mennonites on land as soon as possible and landless families were encouraged, and often aided, to rent or buy farms.<sup>17</sup> Coaldale has always had the largest number of landless Mennonite families of any area in Alberta, the reason probably being that those wishing to take up farming in the province chose Coaldale as a stopover until land was found. In addition, the irrigation area, and the large acreage sown to sugar beets, provided these families with sufficient work while they waited. In 1932 there were fifty-one landless fam-

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<sup>16</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 11, and 1938, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> V.M.G., Oct. 23, 1929.

ilies in Coaldale alone.<sup>18</sup>

Traditionally the Mennonites belong to the land and the large number of families without farms caused great concern. There were reasons, however, why the number was so large. Since most of the settlers had come from Russia without funds, the lack of money was the greatest cause of failure to purchase farms.<sup>19</sup> The depression offered little opportunity to better their finances. Many of the areas available for settlement in the 1930's could not be accepted by the Mennonites because of the large amount of cash necessary for purchase. In 1930 the Provincial Committee reported that good irrigation land north east of Coaldale, was available for \$45.00 to \$50.00 per acre. A cash payment of 20% was required and because of this the land could not be purchased for Mennonite purposes.<sup>20</sup>

In 1934, Rev. B.B. Janz reported that land was available near the Athabasca River, ninety miles north of Edmonton. The terms were favorable, being \$10.00 down payment and \$40.00 when the title was received. But this area was homestead land and to the Mennonites who were acquainted with the well equipped farms in Southern Alberta, the thought of clearing bush and breaking land was not very attractive.<sup>21</sup> The pioneer spirit seemed to be lacking and escape was sought from the rigors of pioneer life. At about this time a settlement was started at Irma, but after long years of drought and

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18 V.M.G., Dec. 29, 1932.

19 Vertreterversammlung, 1937, p. 12.

20 V.M.G., Nov. 8, 1930.

21 V.M.G., March 19, 1934.

hail, very few Mennonite families remain in the area. Good open land required much cash, inferior homestead land was not desired, and the number of landless families grew.

The lack of unity among the Mennonites themselves, regarding the best settlement policy, was in itself a detrimental factor in the Mennonite land settlement policy. There was a clear division of thought regarding group settlement. The C.M.B.C. and the provincial organizations emphasized the necessity of co-operative efforts in which land was found and settled by the Mennonite society as a whole; others thought that the search for land was the concern of the individual only. Although this difference caused difficulties, and the group scheme often suffered because of lack of interest on the part of the settlers, the co-operative method has enjoyed the greatest popularity and success. The individualists received a great boost in their views when in 1937, David Toews, chairman of the C.M.B.C., discouraged over the many failures of this branch of the Boards activities, stated that perhaps it was better that people find land independently of Mennonite organizations.<sup>22</sup> The settlements which found their beginnings in the co-operative method have been mostly successful, although a few failures can be noted.

The Mennonite settlement at Blue Ridge was founded in 1934-1935, and consisted originally of six families comprising thirty individuals. The settlement, situated on the south bank of the Athabasca river north-west of Edmonton, consisted of homestead land and original pioneer conditions exist-

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22 Vertreterversammlung, 1937, p. 24.

ted. Constant appeals for help were made to the Vertreterversammlung, with special emphasis being put upon the necessity of more settlers if the success of the settlement was to be assured. New settlers did not materialize and in 1937 the area was closed to further homesteading by the government.<sup>23</sup> The resident Mennonite settlers were left isolated and by 1942 only two families remained. Today there are no Mennonite settlers in the area.

The story of Blue Ridge is not typical but it portrays developments in certain other areas as well. In Irma, Castor, Crowfoot, Beaverlodge, Provost, Munson, New Brigden, Monitor, Dawson Creek (B.C.), Gundy (B.C.) and Pouce Coup small Mennonite settlements grew up in the thirties, but today they have either died out entirely or contain only a few Mennonite families. Most of the settlers in these areas soon became discouraged because of the severe conditions or because their crops either dried, froze or were haled out, and most moved to the southern part of the province, or to British Columbia.

During World War II, all active attempts at opening new Mennonite settlements ceased because of the unfavorable attitude of the general public to Mennonite land expansion. The Mennonites considered the situation serious enough without aggravating it by excessive land acquisitions. In 1941, however, a new settlement was started just north of Gem, and was named New Gem. This project was carried through because arrangements had been started prior to the war,<sup>24</sup> but were comple-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>24</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1941, p. 19.

ted only in 1941 when fourteen Mennonite families settled there on bought land. In spite of the help extended to the new settlers by the Eastern Irrigation District<sup>25</sup> and the Mennonite society in general, the settlement failed to grow and the farms were lost through lack of payment. Today the settlement here does not exist.

Since World War II only one large settlement project has been undertaken by the Mennonites of Alberta. It is not yet completed. The Canada Land and Irrigation Company had, since the war, been preparing a block of land for irrigation in the Central Irrigation District of the old C.P.R. block.<sup>26</sup> In 1949, they informed the Mennonite Provincial Committee that the land would be ready for settlement within two years.<sup>27</sup> The Committee immediately gathered lists of applicants who desired to take up land in the area. By August, 1951, there were 365 Mennonite applicants listed.<sup>28</sup> The project had not been completed in the time announced and the area had not been opened to date. The latest information regarding this area was received on August 11, 1952, when H.C.P. Creswell,<sup>29</sup> Head of the Department of Immigration and Colonization for the C.P.R., stated that the area would not be ready until 1954, and then priority would be given to veterans of World War II and dried out farmers from Saskatchewan. When the demands of these two groups had been met general applications from Alberta would be accepted.

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<sup>25</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>26</sup> See map page 76.

<sup>27</sup> Protokoll des Mennoniten Provinzieles Hilfskomitee, Sept. 21, 1941, Hereafter noted as M.P.H.

<sup>28</sup> M.P.H., Aug. 15, 1951.

<sup>29</sup> On a visit to Rev. B.B. Janz on that date.



Mention should be made of the Mennonite Agricultural Society established in 1939 in Alberta for the purpose of supplying funds, on a loan basis, to those Mennonites wishing to buy land but lacking the financial means to do so. The Society as a whole was a failure because it lacked the confidence of the general Mennonite public. The Society was later liquidated and a Credit Union was formed on a sound financial basis. The latter organization had extended large sums to Mennonites and still exists as one of the successful Mennonite endeavours.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps if the Mennonites had not attempted to organize a body to supervise the settlement of Mennonites on land, the failure of their planned land settlement would not be so obvious. It is true that these people did tend to settle in groups, but this was not the result of a conscious policy on the part of the Mennonites, but rather the consequence of a natural adhesion of the Mennonite for his own people, and the fruits of the efforts of the C.P.R. and the Canada Colonization Association. The Mennonites on their own lacked the unity necessary for success in this field, and the few settlements such as Blue Ridge, which were established as a result of a defined and supported policy, often proved a failure. No small ingredient in this failure is the essential individuality of the average Mennonite who is willing to bear the consequences of his own misjudgement but cannot forget if his illfortune is due to someone else!

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<sup>30</sup> These organizations are dealt with more fully in chapter V.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Economic co-operation among the Mennonites has its origin in two factors which arise out of the nature of the Mennonite religion. Co-operation is looked upon as an aid in keeping the Mennonite people close adherents to their group in a social and spiritual sense. To the Mennonite religious ties economic ones have been added. Among the Mennonites co-operation largely takes the nature of "relief", in that many economic services are offered by organizations which do not look to a profit but are concerned with extending these services at as low a cost as possible. This latter fact makes it possible for the Mennonites in Alberta to receive Health Insurance, Fire Insurance, and related services for a much lower price than would be possible by ordinary insurance companies. Such organizations as the Co-operative Cheese Factory and the Credit Union are established for the same purposes. The men serving on the executives and in the committees of these organizations do so with only small financial remuneration, and often none at all. Only travel expenses and operating expenses of the members are paid for.

In studying the economic phases of Mennonite life in Alberta a few evident facts have to be taken into consideration. The first is that the Mennonites are an agricultural people and, not including the latest immigrants, about 85% live on farms.<sup>1</sup> This is as it always has been and as the

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<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire.

Mennonite leaders desire it. The second fact is that in matters of economic organization there is a clear rift between the Mennonite settlers who came in the first movement to the West and the ones who came in the immigration of the 1920's. In spiritual matters there is sympathy and co-operation but on non-spiritual lines the two groups remain distinct. The earlier group has few activities that are not controlled by the church. The attitude of the Old Mennonites to pools and co-operatives has already been indicated.<sup>2</sup> It has remained to the later immigrants to build economic organizations to serve their society, and it will be to the later immigrants that emphasis shall be given throughout this chapter.

The reasons for this division in the economic field are not too clear but certain observations can be made. The general attitude of the Old Mennonites to economic co-operatives has already been mentioned and is, perhaps, the best answer to this question. There are other factors involved, however. Most of the organizations which have been founded among the Mennonites as a whole are directly or indirectly responsible to the Vertreterversammlung, many having their origin in this body. The Vertreterversammlung came to life in 1928 and was concerned with two main problems: Reiseschuld and Settlement. Both of these problems had no interest to the Old Mennonites because they were not concerned in those matters. Consequently the Vertreterversammlungen were not attended by the Old Mennonites nor by the United Missionary Church or the Church of God in Christ, and no part was taken in this

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<sup>2</sup> See page 21 of this thesis.

organization. During World War II and immediately following it the Old Mennonites did attend the meetings; but then the common problems of military service and relief work temporarily gave all Mennonite groups the shadow of a common ground upon which to meet. To some extent, therefore, the basis of non-co-operation between these two groups lies in the lack of common problems.

One has to look a bit deeper, however, if the true nature of this economic rift between the various Mennonite denominations is to be understood. The Old Mennonites have been in America since 1683 and have always been a minority group in a society that was progressive and enjoyed economic leadership. From the early years they have taken advantage of the local businesses and industries and did not find it necessary to co-operate as a group in order to have economic services extended to them. The individualism of the American frontier also played its part in the life of the Mennonites. The group from Russia has had a different history. In that country the Mennonites enjoyed a much higher standard of living and culture than their Russian neighbors. The Russian peasants, for centuries suppressed by despotic rulers, had lost all individual initiative and were content to live their life of dependency upon the aristocracy. In order to have the necessary economic facilities to ensure progress the Mennonites had to build them on their own. The wide powers of self-government granted to the Mennonites in Russia enabled them to supply their own needs. Within seventy years after

their founding in southern Russia the Mennonite settlements were blooming with flour mills, factories of various kinds, and other economic establishments. In order to attain this economic leadership it was necessary that economic co-operation become a reality. This spirit of co-operation among themselves has not been lost by these people and has been carried over into Canada.

In Alberta this co-operative movement got underway about the year 1927, when the Mennonite settlers around Coaldale began holding regular meetings of all Mennonite immigrants, regardless of denomination, for the purpose of mutual aid and the solution of common problems.<sup>3</sup> In 1928 this movement was expanded to a provincial scale and the Vertreterversammlung came into existence to act as the "Assembly" of Mennonite economic and relief efforts in the province. The fruits of this movement can now be seen in the activities of the various economic and social organizations which have their origin in this co-operative effort.

One of the earliest organizations to be formed by the Mennonite group at Coaldale was the Doktor Verein (Doctor Society) in 1926 when a contract was entered into with Dr. W.S. Galbraith of Lethbridge, who agreed to render all professional services to the members of the society and their families for a monthly fee of \$1.00 per family.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the society was to extend medical services to the Mennonites at a price payable by the average settler.<sup>5</sup> The society

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<sup>3</sup> V.M.G., Nov. 1, 1927.

<sup>4</sup> V.M.G., Dec. 22, 1928

<sup>5</sup> "Statutes of the Society" given in V.M.G., Jan. 9, 1942.

started with twenty-five members but membership grew rapidly and today 240 families are listed as members. In 1932 a contract was secured with the Galt Hospital in Lethbridge and hospital services were extended at a much lower rate than previously.<sup>6</sup> This contract expired and a new one was made with the St. Michaels Hospital in Lethbridge.<sup>7</sup> The need for a local Mennonite doctor was keenly felt because many of the settlers could not speak English sufficiently to make themselves understood.

In 1933 Dr. D.L. Epp, a Mennonite, declared himself willing to serve the community on a contract basis.<sup>8</sup> A Mennonite graduate nurse, Miss Helen Martens, next suggested that Coaldale was prosperous enough to be able to support a Mennonite Hospital. The result was the formation in 1934 of the Coaldale Mennonite Hospital Society, and the founding of a three bed hospital in a vacant building.<sup>9</sup> The Society has grown, has acquired a twelve bed hospital building and is served at present by a doctor of Japanese extraction, Dr. Okamura. The membership in the society is restricted to Mennonite families.<sup>10</sup>

Closely akin to the Doctor and Hospital societies is the Beerdigungskasse (Burial Fund) which was established in 1928 for the purpose of providing financial aid for the burial of the deceased.<sup>11</sup> In 1952 the registration fee was fifty cents per family and a levy of \$2.00 for every ten deaths

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6 V.M.G., April 5, 1932.

7 Loc. cit.

8 V.M.G., Oct. 1, 1933.

9 V.M.G., Sept. 24, 1934.

10 V.M.G., Nov. 18, 1935. V.M.G., Jan. 9, 1942.

11 Statutes of the Mennonite Burial Fund Society.

making a demand on the treasury. The sums paid out in case of a death are \$90.00 for adults and \$50.00 for children under ten years of age.<sup>12</sup> In 1951 this organization had a total membership of 421 families and seemed financially sound.<sup>13</sup>

The Mennonite Fire Insurance Society has a unique history of its own. In 1927, the Mennonite settlers of Alberta decided to join the Canadian Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company, which had its headquarter in Plum Coulee, Manitoba.<sup>14</sup> This organization was not a commercial business looking for a profit, but had been undertaken for the purpose of providing a relief program in the insurance field. In the next few years four districts were organized in Alberta and all Mennonites were urged to join the company. The company was not registered or incorporated.

In 1942 the company was registered in Manitoba by the provincial government and one of the requirements for this step was that its activities be confined to the provincial boundaries. A short time later Saskatchewan took a similar step and Alberta found itself left alone.<sup>15</sup> The only solution was to organize on a provincial basis and this was done by the formation of the Alberta Mennonite Fire Insurance Society.<sup>16</sup> The province retained the previous four districts, Coaldale, Rosemary, Didsbury, and Peace River, each with a representative on the executive of the Society.<sup>17</sup>

12 Loc. cit.

13 Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 14

14 V.M.G., Dec. 30, 1927.

15 Protokoll des Brandaeltesten, Aug. 10, 1943.

16 Vertreterversammlung, Nov. 1943, pp. 22-23.

17 Loc. cit.

The question of incorporation was immediately discussed and statutes were drawn up and submitted to the provincial government. Government officials, however, advised against incorporation because this step would necessitate the society to meet certain conditions as well as face higher costs of operation. The Mennonites were assured that as long as the society stayed within the boundaries of "relief" and showed no profit no obstacles would be put in its way by the government.<sup>18</sup> Although incorporation was waived on the receipt of this information, the Mennonites felt that the government might not always be as "well wishing" as it was then, and many favoured incorporation while the possibilities for such a step were still there. In December of 1951, there were 789 Mennonite families registered as members with insured property worth \$3,676,891.00. Money in the treasury at that time amounted to \$36,954.70.<sup>19</sup> The society extended insurance not only for fire but also for storm damage to crops and buildings. To date the society has functioned very successfully and has extended a very necessary service to the Mennonites at rates that are below the regular insurance costs, the premium at present (1952) being \$.30 per \$100.00.<sup>20</sup> The last authority in matters of the society is the Vertreterversammlung.

In 1946 the Provincial Mennonite Relief Organization of Alberta<sup>21</sup> was organized for the purpose of uniting all

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18 Vertreterversammlung, Dec. 1944, p. 9

19 Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 11.

20 Vertreterversammlung, 1947, p. 14.

21 Following information from the Statute of the Provincial Mennonite Relief Organization of Alberta.



Mennonite denominations in the province into a cohesive and active society for carrying on various relief activities at home and abroad. This organization has remained subordinate to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization in that it has confined its activities more or less to a provincial scale. Its activities include, support of Mennonite sick and insane; support in case of death in a family; support in case of fire or storm destruction; regulation of the settlement questions and search for new areas of settlement, and many other activities not clearly defined in the Statute. All Mennonites, who are members of a denomination supporting the organization, are automatically members of this body. This organization, as many others, is under the final supervision of the Vertreterversammlung.

Mennonite economic co-operation was also practiced on a local scale. The Coaldale Mennonite Credit Union had its origin in the Coaldaler Wirtschaftlicher Verein (Coaldale Agricultural Society). The latter society had been formed in 1938 for the purpose of giving financial aid to the needy in the community especially those who wanted to buy land but did not have the funds to do so.<sup>22</sup> After this society was formed great efforts were made to enlist new members but by 1942 the society had acquired a capital of only a little over \$300.00 and had made only ten loans totalling less than \$400.00 to seven persons. The society proved a total failure and was

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<sup>22</sup> Protokoll des Coaldaler Wirtschaftlicher Verein, July 5, 1938.

liquidated in 1942.<sup>23</sup> In its place a new organization arose, the Coaldale Mennonite Security and Credit Union, which without much effort or many membership drives, in three years had a membership of 130, and in the last year (1951) it made loans to 158 individuals to the value of \$28,671.69.<sup>24</sup>

This change in fortune and public support can be explained by the fact that from its inception the Credit Union has been under the control and supervision of the government. It operates in accordance with government regulations and the books are regularly inspected by official auditors. Loans are made according to government regulations. The Agricultural Society, on the other hand had been built on the trust and honesty of the settlers and there was no governmental supervision. The Agricultural Society, therefore, lacked the security which was necessary before the people would invest money in it. The Credit Union today has a capital of \$68,160.86 with a membership of 216.<sup>25</sup>

Among the few financial failures experienced by the Mennonites was the Coaldale Cannery which was built in 1939. The reasons for this failure are difficult to determine because no records are available and information has to be gathered verbally from various individuals who were shareholders in the enterprise. It is a story which most Mennonites wish to forget and very little information is voluntarily given. Certain generalizations regarding the unsuccessful venture can be made from the information gathered.

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<sup>23</sup> Protokoll der Coaldale Mennonite Security and Credit Union,  
March 18, 1942.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., May 23, 1952.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Feb. 4, 1952.

The cannery faced keen competition from the Brodar Canneries in Taber and Lethbridge. In how far this is a valid reason for failure and in how far it is merely an excuse is difficult to determine. Other enterprises, with as much or more local competition, have prospered and it is inconceivable that this competition had very much to do with the collapse, except in so far as it added the "last straw" to an already weak and struggling business.

More to the point seems to be the all around poor management of the cannery from its founding to its collapse. The cannery was built as a co-operative effort and shares were sold at \$20.00 each. Arrangements were made by which individuals might obtain shares by helping in the construction of the building. This was an easy way to obtain shares and many took advantage of it for it meant that it required no cash to become a shareholder. The end result, however, was that the cannery was erected but the money on hand fell far short of the capital necessary to cover the amount of the shares given out. This weak financial basis, seems to be the main reason for the eventual collapse.

Then again the machinery bought to equip the building was second-hand and very old and it required double the labour necessary to operate a more modern cannery. The building was also erected on an extremely low site and the drainage system had to be constructed at a far greater cost than would have been necessary had a higher site been chosen. Taken all together these factors were enough to insure finan-

cial failure, and three years from its founding the cannery closed its doors and was given over to the executive of the Cheese Factory to dispose of with as little financial loss as possible. Although it had operated for three years the struggling enterprise never really paid for itself. The cannery was used during 1947 and 1948 to can local meat for the European relief program.

A co-operative cheese factory appears to find great support among the Mennonites in Alberta. Since 1930 no less than four cheese factories have been built by the Mennonites of this province, and some young settlements, such as Vauxhall, have not lost the dream of building one.<sup>26</sup> The Mennonite immigrants of the 1920's had become acquainted with creameries and cheese factories in Russia where in Siberia, Orenburg and Samara they had their own establishments of this kind.<sup>27</sup> These enterprises were very successful in Russia and when the Mennonites came to Canada this type of co-operative again found favor.

The first Mennonite cheese factory in Alberta was built in the early 1930's by the Mennonites around Swalwell. Due to the scattered nature of the settlement and the difficulties of transportation (many still used oxen), the factory failed because not enough milk was delivered.<sup>28</sup> By 1936 more Mennonites had moved to the area and the transportation facilities had improved, and a new factory was built in that year. This factory is still operating and seems financially sound. At Didsbury and Rosemary cheese factories were established in

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<sup>26</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1944, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1938, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 20.

1939, but remained in operation only a few years. At Didsbury disunity among the shareholders and outside competition forced the factory into bankruptcy. At Rosemary not enough support-  
and  
ers could be found/the struggle came to an end when the factory burned to the ground. It was never rebuilt.

At a meeting on July 26, 1937, of the Mennonite groups around Coaldale, it was decided to canvas the district and solicit support for the building of a cheese factory.<sup>29</sup> In August of the same year a committee of five was voted to organize the work.<sup>30</sup> The committee visited the cheese factory at Swalwell in order to obtain information and draw up building plans. In November of 1937, the committee reported that the factory in Coaldale had been completed except for the machinery which had not yet arrived.<sup>31</sup> All who delivered milk to the factory were to become shareholders on the following basis: those with one cow to pay a fee of twenty-five cents; those with two cows must buy a quarter share at \$5.00; those with three or four cows must buy half a share at \$10.00; those with six cows one share for \$20.00.<sup>32</sup> The total cash cost of the building and machinery was \$4,000.00.<sup>33</sup> The factory soon became too small and a new building was erected in 1939, and the old one was converted into an egg-grading station and a locker plant. The profit from the factory in the first year was \$680.90,<sup>34</sup> while in 1951 it had a total income of \$109,516.00,

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29 V.M.G., July, 26, 1937.

30 V.M.G., Aug. 16, 1937.

31 Loc. cit.

32 Vertreterversammlung, 1938, p. 22.

33 Loc. cit.

34 Income tax file of Cheese Factory for 1939.

less expenses, and showed a clear profit of \$12,214.43.<sup>35</sup>

Since 1937 other functions have been taken over by the cheese factory co-operative. It now operates an egg-grading station, a poultry feed retail store, a locker plant and a lumber yard. These aspects of the business in 1951 brought a profit of \$1,175.78.<sup>36</sup> The cheese factory at Coaldale has also been outstanding in that it has taken first prize for its cheese at the Canadian Pacific Exhibition in Vancouver in 1940, and at the Edmonton and Calgary Exhibitions in 1941; it took third prize at the British Empire Exhibition in 1940, and in 1951 received eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh prizes at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto. Today the factory has much support and under its manager, J.J. Klassen, appears to be one of the more successful economic ventures of the Alberta Mennonites.

In addition to the activities involving economic co-operation the Mennonites of Alberta organized for direct relief activities which were extended to all people regardless of faith. During and after World War II the two continents of Europe and South America were the spheres of Mennonite relief programs. These relief activities were organized on a provincial basis and were under the control of the Vertreterversammlung. The first meeting of the Vertreterversammlung was held in 1929, and since that time has supervised most Mennonite activities within the province. Since this body was too large to function efficiently as an executive, a Provincial Committee

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35 Trading Profit and Loss Statement of the Cheese Factory, Dec. 31, 1951.

36 Loc: cit.

was elected to be the executive of the Mennonite relief efforts. As has been previously noted, the two main problems dealt with by this committee until 1946 were the Reiseschuld and the Mennonite settlement problem.

In 1946 it was felt that a new chapter in the history of the Mennonites in Alberta was beginning. The Reiseschuld had just been paid and the Vertreterversammlung turned from that problem to the one of relief for Europe and other needy countries. It was decided to create a Mennonitisches Provinzieles Hilfskomitee (Mennonite Provincial Relief Committee), which was to replace the old Provincial Committee and take over the supervision of the relief program.<sup>37</sup> The committee was to be open to representatives of all Mennonite denominations in Alberta who desired to co-operate in this work.<sup>38</sup> In each congregation a Local Relief Committee was to be organized to control the activities within the district. The old Provincial Committee was dissolved and its activities and funds taken over by the new organization. The first chairman of this new committee was J.J. Klassen, of Coaldale. He is still serving in that capacity.

The duty of the M.P.R.C. was to offer help on two general lines: to help preserve life and clothe the naked, and to aid in the new Mennonite immigration to Canada.<sup>39</sup> Numerous other minor but important duties, such as support of the ill and poverty stricken Mennonites within the province, encouragement of Mennonite endeavours along cultural and spiritual lines, and the supervision of the co-operative Mennonite

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<sup>37</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1946, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>39</sup> See chapter VII.

enterprises which operated on a provincial basis, were taken over by the committee. The foreign relief program, however, was one of its main concerns.

Following World War II, the economic chaos in Europe resulted in starvation and suffering for the people there. The Mennonites declared themselves willing to aid in a relief program to alleviate this suffering as much as possible. In Alberta the M.P.R.C. in 1947 immediately went to work on a project of meat canning as a first step in the relief effort. The cannery at Coaldale was still standing idle and all the Mennonite districts in Alberta were urged to send meat to Coaldale, or if that was not possible, to send money to be used to cover the cost of canning.<sup>40</sup> All labour in connection with this project was to be voluntary. Work started on January 6, 1947, and by March 11, a carload of canned meat, containing over 50,000 cans, was sent to Europe via New York.<sup>41</sup> This carload represented 136 head of cattle and ten sheep killed and canned at a cost of \$4,771.93.<sup>42</sup> In addition to this meat 500 blankets and thirty pairs of shoes were sent to Europe. The Alberta Mennonite relief effort in 1947 totalled \$47,470.00, including the value of the meat canned.<sup>43</sup>

The relief effort was continued and in 1948 meat was again canned, this time using 155 head of cattle and two sheep totalling 72,428 lbs. which gave 51,936 cans of meat worth \$38,086.40. Blankets were bought and collected and also

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<sup>40</sup> Reports of the M.P.R.C., Dec. 6, 1946. Hereafter M.P.R.C.

<sup>41</sup> M.P.R.C., March 11, 1947.

<sup>42</sup> Vertreterversammlung, Dec. 1947, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Loc. cit.



sent to Europe. Clothes and agricultural tools (hoes, spades, etc.) were collected and sent to Paraguay.<sup>44</sup> In 1949 meat could not be canned because the cannery had been dismantled, and as an alternative a carload of flour was sent to Europe. In 1950 and 1951 the relief program of the Alberta Mennonites consisted of sending rolled oats, canned beans, soap, clothes, blankets, and other necessary items to Europe and South America. By the end of 1951 the Mennonites in Alberta had donated or spent a sum of \$186,466.10 on foreign relief work.<sup>45</sup>

It must be remembered that this relief activity included the efforts of all Mennonite denominations in Alberta. The Old Mennonite congregations, who until now had remained aloof from the main stream of Mennonite endeavours, joined in the work and did help to make it a success. Basically, however, the relief effort was the work of the Mennonite General Conference Church and the Mennonite Brethern; they initiated it, directed it and financed it, with only voluntary help from other Mennonite denominations. During the war the Mennonites had proclaimed that they refused to take life but were prepared to save life. In the post-war period they had the opportunity to prove that these were not empty words. The relief program continues today, but has diminished since Europe has been on its way to economic recovery.

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<sup>44</sup> Vertreterversammlung, Dec. 1948, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Figure compiled by the writer from the annual reports of the Secretary-Treasurer of the M.P.R.C.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS, AND EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS

The Mennonites have always been a group that has stood apart from the general culture in which they found themselves. In Russia this separation was not difficult to attain due to the many privileges enjoyed by the Mennonites. It was made easier by the fact that the Mennonite culture there was higher than that of their Russian neighbors, and there was little desire to acquire the social customs of the Russian peasant. (The greatest legacy of Russia to the Mennonite way of life seems to have been the world renown soup Borscht, which today can still be found in the best Mennonite homes.) In Canada this separation has been preserved with greater difficulty, for the "world" here offers many things which the Mennonites, especially the young people desire. Consequently the efforts to remain a group apart must be so much more determined and energetic if success is to be assured.

The motive behind the Mennonite separation from the "world" are simple but fundamental. Contrary to modern philosophic thought, the Mennonites have always believed in absolute good and absolute evil. Between these two extremes exist the amoral elements which may be used either for good or evil. The one absolute truth dominating their faith is that man is born a sinner and cannot achieve salvation except through "heart" faith in the only Son of God, Jesus Christ, who shed his blood on Calvary for the salvation of mankind. This work of salvation must be accepted by each individual by

faith, and he must then become a follower of Christ. The Mennonites do not believe that only they are right, but any church is wrong if it denies the above absolute truth and makes salvation a matter of good works or individual endeavor. Humanism, with its high sounding principles, is good in itself but will not "save" mankind, and in modern times serves to confuse the real truth of the salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

Therefore separation from this "world spirit" is an absolute necessity if the "true" faith is to be preserved, and the preservation of their faith is the fundamental cause of all social, religious, and educational activities among the Mennonites. There is a fear that if the modern world with its humanism, evolution, and sanction of all religions is allowed to poison the minds of their children, without an antidote being administered, the extinction of Mennonitism would be a matter of only a short time. In the battle between absolute good and absolute evil there can be no compromise; fundamentally there is a right and a wrong with numerous amoral factors which can be used in either way depending upon their application to the Word of God. In this philosophy of life lies the key to the Mennonite faith with its resultant spirit of separatism.

The social activities of the Mennonites are not numerous and those which exist are largely controlled by the church. A Jugendverein (Young Peoples Society) exists in every denomination in Alberta, except for the Old Colony Menno-

nites at Fort Vermilion. The purpose of the Jugendverein is to provide spiritual refreshment which is accomplished by means of religious programmes brought on an average of once every two or three weeks, depending upon the denomination. The choir supplements the work of the Young Peoples Society and practices are held every week. About 85% of the Mennonite churches in Alberta have choirs.<sup>1</sup> Such activities as musical programs, annual church picnics, and in some districts orchestras offer social outlets for the Mennonite youth. Of course there are often gatherings of groups at private homes where sports and games are enjoyed, and this offers the best opportunity for young people to get acquainted. As a whole the social organizations among Mennonites have been neglected, mainly because so few social activities are sanctioned by the church. This latter statement is a generalization which, perhaps, does not hold true for all Mennonite denominations in Canada. The great local autonomy of the churches gives room for great divergence in the social field.

The church has always been the centre of Mennonite life. In Alberta, the first organization to arise in each settlement was a church. If a building could not be erected immediately, meetings were held in private homes, or more often in the local school building. Of the sixty odd areas in Alberta where the Mennonites live, or have lived, church meetings were held from the first week of the founding of the settlement. As soon as possible a building was erected and weekly services were held. Closely allied with the church is,

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1 Questionnaire.

of course, the Sunday School for the children and often for the adults also. Since it is the Sunday School which acquaints the children with the Bible and with the particular doctrines of the Mennonite Church, it has always received great emphasis, and is organized at the same time as the church.

In Canada today it is not the social or the purely religious beliefs of the Mennonites which draws the attention of the public eye. Many other denominations such as Presbyterian, Baptist, and Missionary Alliance, have similar fundamental beliefs along religious lines. Rather it is the matter of education and military service which draws the attention of the public, because in these fields the Mennonites seek special privileges under the law. The matter of military service shall be discussed later.

Outside of the very conservative Mennonite elements (Altkolonier), the Mennonites have always been enthusiastic advocates of education. Contrary to public opinion that the Mennonites sought escape from knowledge, they have rather tried to use it as a means to educate their young people in harmony with their faith. To them knowledge is amoral, and the objection is not to knowledge itself but to its application to daily living and to their faith. In Canada there is no illiteracy among the Mennonites and the younger generation usually is acquainted with two languages, English and German, in addition to what is called Low German, the language used in the majority of the Mennonite homes apart from the Old Mennonites. In Russia schools were built in Mennonite settle-

ments even before education became compulsory there. In their time in Russia the Mennonites supported 400 public schools, 13 high schools, 4 high schools for girls, 2 normal schools, one school for the deaf and dumb and one college. In all of these institutions the regular curriculum set by the government was taught.<sup>2</sup> In Canada and the United States, however, the same freedom of school administration has not been granted, rather the schools are supported by the government and free compulsory education is extended to all inhabitants. Yet in spite of this the Mennonites have established their "private" schools in order to control, to a certain degree, the education of their young people. In 1943 there were 15 Mennonite colleges and high schools in the United States.<sup>3</sup> In Canada today seven high schools are operating as private Mennonite institutions, in addition to two Mennonite colleges in Winnipeg. Of these institutions one is in Ontario, four in Manitoba, one in Saskatchewan, one in Alberta, and two in British Columbia.

The Bible Schools play an important part in Mennonite education. The purpose of these schools is to give the young people a sound foundation in the Bible and to propagate the Mennonite faith. The Bible schools operate during a five month period (November to end of March), and are supported by the various congregations who establish them. In 1943 the number of Bible schools in Canada and the United

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<sup>2</sup> Lethbridge Herald, March 15, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> Warkentin A., and Gingerich M., Who's Who Among the Mennonites, Newton Kansas, Bethel College Press, 1943, pp. 333-334.

States numbered twenty-nine.<sup>4</sup> In Alberta today six are operating with an enrollment of approximately 130 students. The largest Bible schools are at Coaldale, Didsbury and Gem. It would not be an exaggeration to say that of all the Mennonite young people in Alberta about 80% can be expected to attend a Bible school for one or more years.

The desire for private schools arises directly out of the fact that modern education teaches many things contrary to the fundamentals of the Mennonite faith. Private schools employing Mennonite teachers are to insure that Science and Scripture are kept in harmony and not in conflict. For example, the children are acquainted with the theory of evolution but if this theory presents a conflict with the Scriptures, they are told it is the theory that is wrong and not the Bible. It is therefore, a matter not of the material taught but of the manner in which it is taught and how it is interpreted. Some writers have stated<sup>5</sup> that the "attempt to retain the German language," is one of the basic motives for the establishment of Mennonite private schools. This factor may play a small part but when one considers that German is taught regularly in the "German Schools" on Saturdays or after regular day school, and the fact that the nature of the instruction in the private school is overwhelmingly English with only a few religious subjects taught in German, one cannot accept such a theory. The schools are not established to retain the German language but to retain the Mennonite faith and the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 334-336.

<sup>5</sup> Reimer, D.P., The Mennonites of British Columbia, Thesis, U.B.C., 1946, p. 62.

German language is a by-product.<sup>6</sup> Not only Mennonites have private schools in Canada; In Alberta alone there are 63 private schools and only one is Mennonite.<sup>7</sup>

As early as 1935 the settlers around Coaldale sought information regarding the founding and operation of their own school. In January, 1936, Rev. B.B. Janz and Mr. J.B. Janz were sent to Edmonton to investigate the rights enjoyed in educational matters by minority groups.<sup>8</sup> An audience with the Prime Minister, Aberhart, satisfied them that they had the right to build their own school if they so desired, but they had to support it themselves and were not exempt from the local school tax which went to the support of the local public school. To receive recognition, however, the school must be supervised and the curriculum prescribed by the Provincial Department of Education.<sup>9</sup> Because the depression made extra financial burdens impossible the plan was dropped until a more opportune time. The coming of the war in 1939 postponed the plans indefinitely.

The question arose again on the annual Provincial Conference of the Mennonite Brethern Church held at Namaka, on November 17 and 18, 1944. A committee of six was voted to gather information and report to the next conference.<sup>10</sup> In November, 1945, the committee reported that government permission had been received for the founding of a school and a

<sup>6</sup> The language problem is more fully discussed on pages 110-114.

<sup>7</sup> Official list of private schools obtained from the Department of Education.

<sup>8</sup> V.M.G., Jan. 11, 1936.

<sup>9</sup> V.M.G., Feb. 13, 1936.

<sup>10</sup> Protokoll der Provinziellen Wahressitzung der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde von Alberta, 1944, p. 9.



piece of land was being held in reserve by the Coaldale settlers as a location for the school. A group of Mennonites (Ready Made Corner) had donated a building which had already been moved near to the desired location.<sup>11</sup> The site was to be a 70 acre farm one half mile north of Coaldale, of which six acres were to be reserved for the school and the rest rented or sold to meet expenses. The conference passed two resolutions on this occasion: 1. The school was not to be a "church" school in that the required finances be supplied by that body, but that a society be formed within the Mennonite Brethern Conference and membership be voluntary. 2. Shares in the school to be available at \$50.00 each.

On March 8, 1946, the Mennonite Educational Society of Alberta was organized and steps were taken to open the school in the fall of that year.<sup>12</sup> In September the school opened with 41 students and two teachers, Mr. Henry Thiessen, principal, and Mr. Jacob Regehr. Grades nine to twelve were taught. In 1949, two new classrooms were added and at present (1952) the construction of two more classrooms is in progress. In 1951 the grades seven and eight were added thus making the school a Junior-Senior High School with an enrollment of 90 students, employing four teachers. In the last year the tuition fees for the various grades were as follows:

|                          |          |
|--------------------------|----------|
| Grades VII and VIII----- | \$ 65.00 |
| Grade IX-----            | \$ 70.00 |
| Grade X-----             | \$ 75.00 |

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Protokoll des Komitees der Mennonitischen Hochschule, March 8, 1946.

Grade XI----- \$ 80.00

Grade XII----- \$ 85.00

These fees are too low to cover the cost of operating the school and the deficiency is made good by private donations, collections and money gathered when the school presents a program at the various churches. In the course of the last six years three teacherages have been constructed, the last being completed in 1950. All construction work on and at the school is done by voluntary labour. The total value of school property in 1952 stood at \$ 28,669.21,<sup>13</sup> not including the new classroom additions valued at roughly \$ 6,000.00 without labour.

The curriculum of the Alberta Mennonite High School is that prescribed by the provincial Department of Education, and the school is under the supervision of the divisional High School Inspector. In addition to the regular curriculum religious subjects such as Bible Story in the lower grades and Christian Ethics in the higher, are taught; this is only natural since the lack of religious instruction in the public schools was a major factor for the establishment of this institution. The aim in religion is not so much one of indoctrination as one of providing "God and Bible centred" knowledge and information to the children. As a required foreign language German is taught. German also receives emphasis in that it is taught in the lower grades where a foreign language is not required.

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<sup>13</sup> Protokoll der Jahresversammlung des Mennonitischen Bildungsverein, April 9, 1952, p. 12.

The instruction ~~in~~ the German language takes place mainly in the Saturday Schools organized by the various Mennonite churches. From the month of October to the end of March, the Mennonite children are gathered in the local schools or Bible schools and instruction is given in German and religion, with the greatest emphasis on the latter. Only if the settlement is too small or the settlers scattered with poor means of transportation, is this branch of education neglected. The Vertreterversammlung has constantly urged all churches, if at all possible, to open Saturday schools in their areas. In Alberta there are fourteen Mennonite areas which make a determined effort to teach German and religion, either on Saturdays or during a few weeks in the summer months.<sup>14</sup> Where general organization in this respect is not possible many parents make efforts in the home to educate their children in these two fields. In 1935 the settlers in Coaldale had six Saturday schools in operation with six teachers and 124 students.<sup>15</sup> In 1950 these schools were consolidated and at present function as one school with seven teachers and an enrollment of 185. German schools are not supported by the early Mennonite settlers (Old Mennonites) since this denomination has long used the English language in its services and Sunday schools. The Russian Mennonites are making a determined effort to retain the German language in order to avoid a rift between young and old.

The German library is closely associated with the

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<sup>14</sup> Questionnaire.

<sup>15</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1935, p. 23.

German school. The Vertreterversammlung has urged each settlement to acquire German books which could be made available to the children. The areas boasting Saturday schools almost all have libraries of this nature. It is a general observation, however, that though the books are there, the vast majority of children would far rather read English. The danger is there that the more pressure is put on to read German the more antipathy will develop towards the language. The efforts are being made but the German language must eventually be given up. At present the language serves to bridge the gap between the older generation who do not master English and the younger generation interested mainly in the English language.

The German language has posed some of the most difficult problems for the Mennonites, especially during a time of war. The war-year newspapers of Alberta are filled with accusations against the Mennonites charging them with disloyalty and treason, mainly because of their language and the efforts to retain it.<sup>16</sup> Various organizations made efforts to root out the German language among the Mennonites. They were unsuccessful because the government seemed a little more tolerant than many of the citizens. The Lethbridge City Council in 1940 passed a resolution which, if endorsed by the education authorities, would deny instruction in other than the English or French language to be given in any religious community schools.<sup>17</sup> The endorsement was not forthcoming. In Coaldale the local Women's Institute "resolved to co-operate with the

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<sup>16</sup> Lethbridge Herald, Nov. 2, 1940.

<sup>17</sup> Loc. cit.

local board of trade in the protest to be sent to the proper authorities against Bible school and Saturday school being taught in German at the local Mennonite church during the duration of the war."<sup>18</sup> Under constant public pressure the Mennonites did close the Saturday schools and the German library for the duration, but in 1946 they were once more opened.

The bulk of the feeling of the general public against the German language was caused by emotion rather than by reason. Yet the Mennonites, failing to understand the hatred the general public had for anything German, stubbornly refused to yield to the pressure. The concessions made by the closing of the German school and library did soothe the aroused feelings somewhat, but emotions still ran high. The public resented the sound of German in public places. "Why should our ears be offended by the sound of a non British language...",<sup>19</sup> was the opinion of many. Many Mennonites very untactfully refused to listen to these warnings and continued to speak German in public places.

If one considers the bitterness and the difficulties caused for the Mennonites by the German language, why is there such a real attempt at its preservation? The answer from a Mennonite point of view is given by Rev. B.B. Janz in the Lethbridge Herald of July 6, 1940. He points out that the German language is not a fundamental part of the Mennonite faith as many have believed. The history of the Mennonites shows that they have changed their language several times.

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18 Lethbridge Herald, July 5, 1940.

19 Lethbridge Herald, July 5, 1940.

Originally they spoke Dutch or Swiss, but in Prussia, under constant pressure they adopted the German language. This change at that time occasioned as much difficulty as the transition from German to English does now. In Russia, due to the privileges enjoyed there, the Russification of the Mennonites did not take place. In Canada the Mennonites are again faced with the problem of adopting a new language. The solution of this difficulty is clearly demonstrated by the history of the Mennonites who in the 18th century migrated to the United States; the majority in America have lost their former language and adopted the tongue of their new homeland. The same process of the indicated change among the Mennonites in the United States is also clearly seen in its beginnings among the younger generation of the latest immigrants to Canada.

Rev. Janz further pointed out that fifty per cent of the Mennonite people were unable to follow an English sermon with its Biblical terminology. Even though many of them had learned through the years to express themselves in English in the realm of everyday affairs, it remained for them an altogether more difficult thing to learn the English language for religious purposes. In addition, the ministers were mostly men who had come over from Russia and it was impossible for them to use the English language in Biblical discourse. The change from one language to another should not and could not be expected in one generation. "This makes it evident that the religious body, the Mennonite Church, considers it imperative to teach their children the literary book language of Ger-

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man, in order to prevent the catastrophe of a division within the church between the young and old."<sup>20</sup>

Mr. Janz goes on to say,

Our Dominion government is very wise in not applying any force in this matter because the change of language for the immigrant takes care of itself historically, in the course of time.....

The Mennonites in their efforts to maintain a Saturday school of their own for the children do not pursue any other aim but an exclusive<sup>(sic)</sup> religious purpose...

They are to enable the child to read the same Bible which its (sic) mother reads, that it (sic) may sing the same song which mother sings, and understand the worship in which the family participates. 21

The German language therefore, is to serve as a link between young and old, until the English language can serve the purposes of all.

Thus the general public and the Mennonites both have arguments for their stand and justifications seem to be found on both sides of the question. What is needed, perhaps, is a little more understanding on the part of the English speaking public, who have never been in the position of a minority group, and a little more effort to learn English on the part of the Mennonites who do not master it. But the general course of history in this matter is clear; the Mennonites have already changed their language once and they can be expected to do it again. There is the fear in the hearts of some Mennonites that they will also lose their faith when the German language is given up; this is not the view of the general Mennonite public.

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20 Loc. cit.

21 Loc. cit.

The Mennonites have tried to maintain their group individuality in the midst of a culture strange to them. Their social, religious, and educational endeavors have been motivated by the desire to maintain their religious separation. This struggle has often led them into conflict with their non-Mennonite neighbors in areas of activity which seem unimportant to the latter but constitute a vital link in Mennonite religious development.

The question is often asked, "To what extent have the Mennonites been assimilated?" This question is rather difficult to answer and depends upon the field of activity which is considered. Economically the Mennonites have been assimilated, socially and educationally they maintain a reserve, religiously they make no compromise. Some observers think<sup>22</sup> that when the German language has disappeared from among them assimilation will have been completed. This is a fallacy; it may make assimilation somewhat easier and more rapid, but the Mennonites of the United States have proven that the foundation of Mennonitism is not a language but a belief, it is a philosophy of life. As long as this philosophy remains unassimilated the Mennonites also remain so.

The core of Mennonitism is still firm, even though in recent years there has been evident a "breaking away" from the Mennonite faith. This was especially true during the war years when accompanying social and economic upheavals also reached into the Mennonite way of life. It is indeed doubtful if complete assimilation of these people would be desirable.

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<sup>22</sup> Woodsworth, J.S., Strangers Within Our Gates, Frederick Clarke Stephenson, Toronto, 1908, p. 191.



Their beliefs and conservative political leanings have a place in the modern world; their industry and thrift could serve as a noble example to many others. The majority of the young people remain with the faith of their fathers and are assuming responsibilities in all walks of Canadian life as teachers, engineers, University professors, Doctors, agriculturalists and many other occupations. In Alberta alone (1950-1951) there were 198 Mennonite high school students of which 108 were in public high schools and 90 in Mennonite private schools; there were thirty-seven University students, and thirty-two nurses or nurses in training.<sup>23</sup>

The majority of Mennonite youth, however, stay on the farm. Writing in the Family Herald and Weekly Star of June 22nd, 1938, Marian Green Ellis said,

It is estimated that 96% of the Mennonite sons have stayed on the farm, and that has not just happened. It has been by definite intent and training.

The other four per cent, are the exceptions. You will find a Mennonite doctor in Golden, British Columbia, an extension worker in Brandon, an interpreter in Winnipeg, a University professor in British Columbia and another at Oxford. The latter went over in the first place as a Rhodes Scholar from Manitoba, and remained to become head of the department of Romance languages.

But Mennonite boys and girls are by tradition and training 'of the soil', and the problem which worries the Mennonite fathers today is what is going to happen when the surplus is forced away from the community. Undoubtedly it will weaken the church, but it will also hasten their absorption into Canadian life. 24

During and following World War II this list of professional

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23 Questionnaire and Vertreterversammlung, 1951, pp. 12-13.

24 Quoted in Gibbon, op. cit., p. 186.

Mennonite men and women has increased greatly, because the "surplus" has already been forced away from the community, especially in Ontario and British Columbia. In Alberta agriculture is still the dominant aim of the young people. In another ten years the picture here will also have changed.

## CHAPTER VII

### MILITARY SERVICE AND POST WAR DEVELOPMENTS

"If they were only as good Citizens as they are good Christians." (Calgary Herald, June 25, 1942)

The Mennonite stand to military service in the past has been briefly mentioned in chapter one. They were, and in Canada and the United States, still are pacifists who declare, "We should not provoke or do violence to any men - even, when necessary, to flee for the Lord's sake from one country to another, and take patiently the spoiling of our goods, but to do violence to no man."<sup>1</sup> This attitude has been affirmed and reaffirmed in the past and has been extended also into the field of government where office holding is considered "unspiritual," because the "world can be controlled only by the sword and the weapons of our warfare are not carnal."<sup>2</sup> What then is the Mennonite relation to the state? The answer, as given by the majority of pacifist Mennonites the world over is as follows:

We accept the teaching of Scripture that the governments of the world are instituted of God for the purpose of keeping law and order in (sic) the earth among men. To do this the state enacts laws, judges between parties in contention (I Cor. 6:16), threatens and punishes criminals and if necessary bears the sword in order to curb crime (Rom. 13:4). According to the same Scripture the state is also given for the purpose of praising the well doer and protection of the good. I Pet. 2:4.

Since the Bible is our rule of conduct, we want to take the Christian attitude toward the state. The following we believe to be the scriptural relationship:

1. Honor the King. I Pet. 2:17

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1 Gibbon, op. cit., p. 170

2 Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference Reports, 1934, p. 3

2. Pray for the rulers, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. I Tim. 2:1-3.
3. To obey the laws of the land, with this only exception that when the state asks something of us that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible, we ought to obey God rather than man. Acts 5:29.
4. In no case to resist the government (Acts 13:2), nor speak evil of rulers (Tit. 3:2), nor take part in seditions (Gal. 5:20).
5. To gladly pay tax, customs, and revenues that may be required of us. Rom. 13:6; Matt. 17:27. 3

This general attitude of the Mennonites to the state has been a point of vigorous discussion at the Mennonite World Conference in Basel, Switzerland, which was held in August, 1952.<sup>4</sup>

The Mennonites of the world reaffirmed their fundamental objection to the use of arms, but left unresolved the differences which have grown among the European and American Mennonites since the 17th century. A compromise was reached in a unanimously adopted message:

As citizens of our countries, we desire to be subject to our governments, to pray for them and to seek the welfare of the nation, under the condition that where the requirements of human laws are contrary to the word of God, we must obey God rather than man. Our rule of life must always be the word of God. 5

This resolution gives ample room for individual interpretation, but the principle is clear - non-resistance is still a deep-seated part of the Mennonite faith.

During times of war the hostile feeling against the Mennonites increases because of these pacifist principles. Yet the attitude of the Mennonites has always been that one should "obey God rather than man" in such circumstances, even

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3 Ibid., 1935, p. 3. Underlining is mine.

4 Lethbridge Herald, Aug. 16, 1952.

5 Loc. cit. Underlining is mine.

if it means the loss of "wordly" goods and possessions. During the Reformation the Mennonites resisted any attempts to make them perform military service and as a result they were forced to flee or suffer persecution--they fled to Prussia. Here again, in time, they found it necessary to defend their pacifist principles and although alternative services were for a time allowed many accepted the invitation of Catherine II of Russia and migrated to the lower Dneiper area. In 1870 an act of the Russian government (Ukas) withdrew recognition of the Mennonite principles and the great influx of the 1870's into Canada and the United States took place. The Mennonites remaining in Russia escaped with alternative services or with medical service in the Russian army. After the Communist revolution had withdrawn all privileges enjoyed by the Mennonites the great migration of the 1920's began. The alternative service men in Russia were supported and supplied by the various Mennonite churches, and at the height of World War I, there were 12,000 Mennonites in the various services, costing the churches \$ 1,500,000 annually.<sup>6</sup>

In North America the experience of the Mennonite pacifists has been varied. During the American Revolution the Mennonites in the United States were forced to bear arms or join the stream of United Empire Loyalists to British North America. In the War of 1812, the Mennonites in Canada were exempt from military service but had to furnish their horses and oxen and serve as teamsters.<sup>7</sup> During the American Civil

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<sup>6</sup> Vereinigten Mennoniten Gemeinden in Ontario, Jahrbuch, 1951, p. 18. Hereafter noted as V.M.G.O., Jahrbuch.

<sup>7</sup> Gibbon, op. cit., p. 177.

War the United States allowed military exemption in return for a money payment called commutation fee.<sup>8</sup>

World War I again raised the question of military service. Non-combatant service in the army was allowed by the Canadian government, but there was no guarantee that the draftee would not be shifted around and placed in a combatant position. The situation grew serious and the Mennonites of Canada, on Jan. 8, 1917, handed an address to the Government of Canada, asking it to remember the promised privileges to the Mennonites.<sup>9</sup> The government stated that its promises had not been forgotten.<sup>10</sup> Through the Civilian Board of Inquiry, all the conscientious objectors were screened and the insincere cases eliminated from the pacifist ranks. The others were given work on farms. The whole affair, however, frightened the more conservative elements and caused another Mennonite migration in the 1920's when the Altkolonier treked to Mexico.<sup>11</sup>

World War II caught the Canadian Mennonites unprepared for the emergency. Prior to the war no efforts had been made to arrange for alternative services in case war came. This lack of foresight was not caused so much by indifference as by the differences of opinion among the various Mennonite denominations regarding the type of service to be done. The very conservative elements (Altkolonier) absolutely refused any type of service during wartime; the Old Mennonites were willing to do work under civilian supervision, but rejected all

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<sup>8</sup> V.M.G.O., Jahrbuch, 1951, p. 18

<sup>9</sup> Text of address in Schaeffer, op. cit., pp. 148-151.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> Some of these have returned to Canada and settled at Fort Vermilion in northern Alberta.

non-combatant service, even under special conditions in the Medical Corps; The General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren were willing to do forestry and farm work but were also inclined to accept non-combatant service in the Medical Corps. When the war broke out the Mennonites were incapable of presenting a united front on this question.

Under pressure of war, however, compromises were soon reached and the government granted alternative services. In this respect there was no distinction made between Mennonites and other groups who professed pacifist principles. Alternative service was granted on the basis of the Militia Law passed in 1927, which stated in part,

The following persons only shall be exempt from liability to serve in the militia....Persons, who from the doctrines of their religion, are averse to bearing arms or rendering personal military service, under such conditions as are prescribed. 12

Alternative service camps arose first in Ontario near Montreal River, and then in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. The majority of camps were in British Columbia, where at the height of the war nineteen camps were occupied by approximately 740 men.<sup>13</sup> The duties of the men were mainly fire fighting, felling scorched trees and planting new ones. It is estimated that 450,000 trees were planted by men in these camps.<sup>14</sup> These conscientious objectors received only fifty cents per day and had to supply their own clothing and support their own families. The government undertook the support of

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12 Schaeffer, op. cit., p. 153.

13 V.M.G.O., Jahrbuch, 1951, p. 19.

14 Loc. cit.

the camps. In 1943 these men were given the choice of work on the farm at \$ 25.00 per month, with the rest of the salary being paid directly to the Red Cross, or to remain in camp. Most of the men accepted the new service and all forestry camps except seven were closed.<sup>15</sup> During the last years of the war conscientious objectors were also allowed to serve in hospitals throughout Canada. The ones who chose this service were usually sent to the various mental hospitals as orderlies.

The delegation which was sent to Ottawa to arrange for alternative service consisted of Mennonites of all denominations; a difference of opinion was soon evident. The members of the Old Mennonites rejected any service which was controlled by the military, even if this service involved only care of the sick and wounded. They argued that if a man took such services he became an integral part of a "fighting force" and a cog in the wheel of a fighting machine. The suggestion was made by Rev. B.B. Janz that service in the Medical Corps, under special conditions, would expose Mennonite young men to the same physical dangers as the ordinary soldier, and yet require of them only to perform acts of mercy and healing. Because this still involved participation in "part" of the army which was under military supervision, this plan was rejected by the delegation. The main obstacles to this plan seemed to be that basic training, even in this noncombatant unit, required arms training and there was no guarantee that the men would not be transferred to an active combatant unit. The plan was therefore, rejected in its entirety. Of the eight

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<sup>15</sup> Loc. cit.



delegates only one, B.B. Janz, seemed to favour the plan.

In September 1943, an Order-in-Council allowed the services of the conscientious objectors in the Medical and Dental Corps. Special conditions stated that even basic training was to be done without arms and the men could not be transferred to another unit without their consent. When this became known the pacifists of all religious complexions joined this branch of the service. It is not definitely known how many joined but the first of this group received basic training in Peterboro, Ontario, in December of 1943 and January of 1944. In this first group there were forty-three men representing the Mennonite, Pentecostal, Seventh-Day-Adventist and Plymouth Brethern churches; of these men twenty-five were Mennonites.<sup>16</sup> As far as is known, this was the largest number to be trained as a group. The men who joined later went through training as individuals and not as a part of a large "restricted" group. The privileges enjoyed by these men on discharge were the same as those of the regular serviceman.

In tracing the origin of this Order-in-Council no written information or sources are available.<sup>17</sup> Rev. B.B. Janz relates that after the Mennonite delegation had arranged for alternative service, he personally got in touch with Major General Lafleche, Minister of War, and proposed a scheme which would make it possible for Mennonite young men to serve in the Medical Corps. A paper was drawn up stating the conditions under which such services could be made possible. These conditions included no training with arms, non<sub>^</sub>transferibility

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<sup>16</sup> Personal experience of writer.

<sup>17</sup> The following information is obtained from Rev. B.B. Janz.

to other units, and service in groups with arrangements for spiritual supervision by the Mennonite Church. General Lafleche was enthusiastic and promised to do all in his power to aid in such a program. He promised B.B. Janz to keep him informed as to developments. A year later Janz was informed that the Department of Defense had rejected any plan by which conscientious objectors could serve in the army except under regular conditions. The issue seemed dead. Then came the Order-in-Council of September, 1943, in which part of the conditions asked for by Mr. Janz were granted, evidently a result of the audience with Major General Lafleche. It is clear that the "restricted" service in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and the Royal Canadian Army Dental Corps, originated outside of the united action of the Mennonite churches and therefore did not enjoy church endorsement. Today the public seems much more favorable to such a plan and it can be expected that in case of another war this service shall receive major emphasis.

In Alberta the situation of the Mennonites regarding military service was the same as of those in other provinces. The picture in Alberta was the following:<sup>18</sup>

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| In the armed services-----                   | 77  |
| In the restricted Medical Corps service----- | 8   |
| In the C.O. camps and farms-----             | 173 |
| In Hospitals-----                            | 0   |
| In prison because of pacifism-----           | 2   |
| Other services-----                          | 8   |

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<sup>18</sup> Questionnaire & Vertreterversammlung, 1944, 1945, 1946.

In cases where the young men joined the regular military services special action was taken regarding them on their return. The General Conference and the Mennonite Brethern Churches did not take a uniform action concerning them. In some localities the men lost their church membership while in others no action was taken. The members of the Old Mennonite denomination who joined the services automatically forfeited church membership.<sup>19</sup> In all but the latter church, the matter of military service seems to have been made a matter of individual conscience.

Since World War II the Mennonites in Canada and the United States have made determined efforts to ensure that a united stand shall be made regarding military service in case of another war. To this end various "Peace Conferences" have been held throughout both countries, where the question of non-resistance and military service have taken the spotlight. In Alberta such conferences have been held at Coaldale in 1951, and at Didsbury in June, 1952. In February, 1951 a nine man delegation was sent to Ottawa to interview the new Prime Minister, St. Laurent, in regard to this question. The Prime Minister promised that no action on the part of the government would be taken in this regard without prior consultation with the group or groups concerned.<sup>20</sup> This gave the Mennonites assurance that in the future the Government of Canada would lend a sympathetic ear to their wishes regarding military service.

The Mennonites have been accused of hypocrisy in

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19 Questionnaire

20 See Appendix C. p. 146

the matter of military service. The question has been asked, "In how far are the Mennonites sincere when they claim military exemption?" In some cases the charge of hypocrisy may be well founded, for some have used the privileges of conscientious objection to escape military service not because of personal convictions but rather because of pressure from the home, fear of combatant duty, prospects of financial gain, or other "ulterior" motives. The number of such cases is small, however, for the principles of pacifism has been indoctrinated into the Mennonite child from his early years. The Mennonite stand is a sincere one, and the motives of the men who have been active in obtaining the alternative services cannot be questioned.

The popular stand of the Mennonites in regard to the military question was expressed in 1940 by Rev. B.B. Janz of Coaldale, Alberta, when he said,

I may well say that our restriction in the matter of war does not mean for us to sit at home and do nothing. No; where our fellow-citizens are required to go out, then also our young men can go out to serve their country, but without blood. Whether the government should place them in any civil service for the upbuilding of the country, or Red Cross work to the (sic) care for the sick and wounded, or even patients with most contagious diseases. Whatever the service may be, though it requires sacrifice, sickness, suffering or even death, we have no right to shrink back before anything. Only one request: "Don't require of us to kill or work for destruction -- and place all service, also the most dangerous under a civil command"... Under no condition fear or cowardice or comfort or anything else should be permitted to keep our young man back, only the point of conscientious objection as indicated above is to receive due consideration. 21

This statement is clear and speaks of a sincerity that cannot be questioned.

During World War II the matter of Mennonite loyalty to Canada was a topic of frequent discussion, especially in districts where Mennonites lived. In this regard the Mennonite himself was rather confused at times. He knew that he was no Nazi, but at the same time he had a deep regard for Germany as a country. It was Germany that had given shelter to the thousands of refugees from communist Russia and had clothed and fed them free of charge for many months while they had waited for embarkation to Canada. It took the Mennonites a while to adjust to the fact that the Nazis had taken power and the very government which had extended aid to them had been eliminated. It took only a few stories of Nazi atrocities to set the Mennonites right, and outside of a few fanatics, the Mennonites all rejected Nazism as unchristian and terrible. As a rule the Mennonites do not mix in politics and even sympathy for Germany never carried within it the seeds of danger for Canada. The tie with Germany is sentimental and not political.<sup>22</sup>

In the post-war period the Mennonites have attempted to readjust themselves to the dislocations caused by the war. Some young men once more took up land while others entered the schools and universities of Canada and the United States to seek occupations in other fields. The older generation again seemed more content now that the war was over and their young men home. The word came from Europe that many Mennonites among them friends and relatives of Mennonites in Canada, sought

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix D for the Official Mennonite view of National Socialism.

entrance into Canada. Immediately the organizational machinery of the North American Mennonites was geared in an effort to help open Canada's doors to these unfortunates.

Thus a fourth great movement of Mennonites into Canada got underway. Most new comers originally came from Russia, having escaped from there with the German forces in their retreat from the east in 1944. These Mennonites have come to Canada as displaced persons. In the last year of immigration Mennonites from the Danzig area and some German nationals have been included in this movement which started in 1947.<sup>23</sup> The new immigration to Canada has been made possible by the aid and the efforts of the Canadian Mennonites. By March, 1952, nearly 8,000 Mennonites from Europe, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and China have entered this country. Their distribution in Canada has been as follows:<sup>24</sup>

|                           |             |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Prince Edward Island----- | 2           |
| New Brunswick-----        | 2           |
| Quebec-----               | 7           |
| Ontario-----              | 1193        |
| Manitoba-----             | 2500        |
| Saskatchewan-----         | 1115        |
| Alberta-----              | 1049        |
| British Columbia-----     | 1791        |
| Total                     | <u>7839</u> |

These Mennonite refugees have entered Canada under four categories.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mennonitische Rundschau, March 12, 1952.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., March 19, 1952.

<sup>25</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 16.

The first group to receive entrance permission were near relatives of Mennonites in Canada. The applicant in Canada filled out an application stating his circumstances and the degree of relationship with the immigrant, and made himself responsible for the travelling expenses of the refugee. He also guaranteed that when the immigrant was in Canada he would not become a public charge. By the end of 1946, about 1200 applications had been accepted by the C.M.B.C. for the bringing over of near relatives,<sup>26</sup> and by 1950 about 4,781 of these refugees had entered Canada.<sup>27</sup>

On October 22, 1948, the President of the C.M.B.C., J.J. Thiessen, and a representative of the Mennonite Central Committee,<sup>28</sup> W.I. Snyder, handed a petition to the Canadian government asking for permission to bring to Canada about 2000 Mennonite displaced persons who had no relatives or friends in Canada.<sup>29</sup> Although promised an answer within two weeks it was given only in January, 1949. It appeared that other religious groups such as Lutherans, Baptists and Roman Catholics had made similar requests at about the same time.<sup>30</sup> The following is part of a letter dated January 9, 1949, by Mr. A.L. Jolliffe, Director of Immigration, allowing the movement but setting definite conditions:

I am pleased to advise that approval has been given for the admission to Canada of up to 1000 such workers together with their dependents. It is understood that these displaced persons are under the mandate of the International Refugee Organization, but

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26 Vertreterversammlung, 1946, p. 10

27 Minutes of the Meeting of the C.M.B.C., August, 1949.

28 A Mennonite Relief organization in the United States supervising the Mennonite immigration from Europe to South America.

29 Report of the C.M.B.C., Feb. 2, 1949.

30 Loc. cit.

are not persons eligible for entry into Canada under the close relative classes, but will have to be selected on an occupational basis for employment on farms.

It is desired that the selections of family groups be given priority and that every encouragement will be given to the movement of family groups to Canada.

The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization will be responsible for finding employment and suitable housing for these displaced persons.

Applications for the employment of families or individuals on the farms will be completed on the forms supplied by the Department of Labour, by the individual farmer applicant applying for the family or individual farm labourer for employment on the farms. The applicant will be required to give the usual assurance of a minimum of twelve months employment at going wages and adequate housing accommodation. Each applicant will be endorsed by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization as having satisfied itself that employment is available, that the applicant is a satisfactory employer, and that suitable housing accommodation is available. The completed applications as so endorsed will be sent in to the Dominion-Provincial Committee for the province where the applicant farmer resides. Arrangements will be made, if desired, and where practicable, to enable a representative of your organization to be present at meetings of the Dominion-Provincial Committee at which the applications are considered. The Dominion-Provincial Committee will undertake the necessary investigation to satisfy itself that the applications are in order.

The selection of the above persons will be made in the usual manner overseas by the Canadian Government Selection Teams. If the overseas representatives of your organization are in a position to assist the International Refugee Organization in locating and presenting these Mennonite displaced persons to the Selection teams, this will be of definite assistance.

All persons selected for employment will be required to complete an undertaking to take employment for a period of at least twelve months following their arrival in Canada. The undertaking will be in accordance with the usual undertaking required from other displaced persons selected on an occupational basis.

The I.R.O. will be responsible for the payment of the transportation costs to Canada. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the Mennonite Central Committee will be responsible

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for paying the costs of transportation from the port of entry to the place of employment in Canada. The latter costs may be paid on a recoverable basis.

It is understood that arrangements covering this movement can be cancelled on sixty days' notice. 31

Thus the way for these new immigrants was opened and on March 5, 1949, at a general meeting of all Mennonite churches with representatives of Lutheran, Baptist, and Catholic groups as well as representatives of the Dominion and Provincial governments, the last minute arrangements were made. It was stressed that priority was given to farm workers and domestics and the applicant should be a farmer in actual need of farm help.<sup>32</sup> By August of 1949, about 136 persons in this category had entered Canada.<sup>33</sup> Today this movement has been completed.

The third category consisted of immigrants coming to Canada through the efforts and sponsorship of the Canadian Department of Labour. This group included workers for the various industries in Canada. By the end of 1951 about 465 Mennonites had entered Canada under this arrangement.<sup>34</sup> The C.M.B.C. did not encourage Mennonites to seek entrance in this category, because on arrival the refugees were scattered all across Canada and it was practically impossible for the church to remain in contact with them. The Board made efforts to get permission to place this group near large Mennonite settlements where spiritual supervision would be possible. They met with success only in Southern Alberta where the immigrants were given work in the large sugar-beet fields of that region.

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31 Report of C.M.B.C., Jan. 28, 1949.

32 Letter of J.J. Thiessen to members of the C.M.B.C. and the Provincial Committees, March 17, 1949.

33 Bericht der C.M.B.C., Aug. 17, 1949.

34 Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 16.

Some of the Mennonites in Europe were German nationals and this group posed a particular problem. They received no rights under the International Refugee Organization arrangements and their entrance into Canada was barred until 1950. This group included not only Mennonites but Lutherans, Baptists and Roman Catholics as well. In order to unify their efforts on behalf of this group the above mentioned religious denominations founded the Canadian Christian Council for Re-Settlement of Refugees (C.C.C.R.R.) in 1947, with Dr. T.O.F. Herzer (Lutheran) as President.<sup>35</sup> On February 2, 1950 a C.C.C.R.R. delegation headed by Herzer interviewed the Minister of Immigration, the Hon. Walter E. Harris, with reference to the further extension of regulations for the admission to Canada of refugees of German ethnic origin and possibly of German nationals.<sup>36</sup> By Order-in-Council P.C. 1606 of March 28, 1950, the refugees of German ethnic origin were allowed to immigrate to Canada. In September of the same year an Order-in-Council, P.C. 4364, allowed all German nationals interested in immigration to apply for entrance into Canada.<sup>37</sup> This group could not enter on credit but had to come on a cash basis. Of the 10,000 Germans brought over by the C.C.C.R.R. since 1947 about 268 were Mennonites.<sup>38</sup>

The financing of the Mennonite immigrants was undertaken by the C.M.B.C. In each province the Provincial Committees provided a fund on which applicants might draw to finance the immigration of their near relatives and friends. By Dec-

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<sup>35</sup> M.P.H., Aug. 8, 1947

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the C.M.B.C., Feb. 7, 1950.

<sup>37</sup> Vertreterversammlung, 1951, p. 17

<sup>38</sup> Loc. cit.

ember, 1951, the total amount of credit extended by the C.M.B. C. was \$131,221.14, of which \$94,495.73 had again been repaid.<sup>39</sup> Originally the C.M.B.C. and the Provincial Committees had been against the creation of a new Reiseschuld for they still remembered the difficulties encountered in the liquidation of the old one. If a policy of "no credit" was to be carried out, however, it meant that thousands of refugees would have to remain in Europe. The situation seemed to warrant it and credit was once more extended. Even the C.P.R. offered the Mennonites a credit of \$180,000 for immigration purposes, if the Mennonites would come to Canada on the Company's ships. The credit was to be repaid within two years at 3% interest. By March, 1952, about \$77,000 of this credit had been used.<sup>40</sup>

In December, 1946, the Mennonites of Alberta created the "Immigration Fund", from which money was to be used to help the new immigrants come to Canada. Although the fund then contained only \$794.48, there was still over \$1,000 in the Reiseschuld fund; this was transferred to the new treasury. The fund was to be filled by personal loans, gifts, collections and any other means which could be carried out with reasonable success. From the fund, loans for two or three years could be made at a rate of 3% interest.<sup>41</sup> Vigorous efforts were made by the Committee to fill the treasury and the support of all Mennonite denominations was solicited. By April, 1952 a total of ninety-seven loans had been made amounting to \$46,086.92.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup> Mennonitische Rundschau, March 19, 1952.

<sup>41</sup> M.P.H., Feb. 6, 1947.

<sup>42</sup> M.P.H., April 23, 1952.

Most of the loans were rapidly repaid and the fund is considered a success in every sense of the term. Since the immigration movement has almost come to a stop the fund is to be utilized in other ways not yet defined.

The Mennonite Provincial Relief Committee undertook not only to supply money for immigration but accepted the responsibility of finding jobs and land for the immigrants as well. The attempts to keep the immigrants near Mennonite settlements was, of course, one of its major concerns. Contact was maintained with immigrants who had work outside of Mennonite circles and if visits were not possible then letters were written to them. The churches in all areas were urged to contact all Mennonite newcomers and draw them into the Mennonite spiritual orbit.<sup>43</sup>

The Committee regretted the rapid urbanization of the new immigrants. Warnings were sent out time and time again urging the "New Canadians" to live up to the terms of their contracts by remaining on the farms for at least twelve months.<sup>44</sup> Due to the high price of land and the scarcity of good land, no large settlement scheme could be undertaken. Applicants were accepted for the land in the newly opened irrigation area near Vauxhall. The high salaries in towns and cities have been an added incentive to seek employment outside of agriculture.

Due to this new immigration the Mennonites themselves faced the problems of assimilating and absorbing the

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<sup>43</sup> M.P.H., Aug. 10, 1948.

<sup>44</sup> Loc. cit.

newcomers. This is proving to be a difficult task, for the new immigrants are still Europeans and it is in the contrast between these two groups that one can see the extent to which the old immigrants have become "Canadianized." Twenty five years under a Communist regime has given many of the newcomers startling economic and social ideas. The result often is misunderstanding and in most Mennonite centres today a clear line of demarcation can be discerned between the old and the new. These varying ideologies will again demand a period of time before assimilation of the two groups will be completed. As it is, the convulsions of social and economic dislocation and adjustment must be endured.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

In the eyes of the Canadian people, the Mennonites have always presented a problem in assimilation. The observant reader is constantly under a bombardment of words which ask, or even demand, the assimilation of all minority groups in Canada. It must be admitted that a degree of assimilation is necessary for the good of the country; complete assimilation would be a catastrophe of no mean proportions. Each minority group, no matter of what physical extraction or geographic origin, has some contribution to make to the general culture; each group enriches, and enlarges the life of the nation. It would be an irreparable loss if the many ethnic groups in Canada should lose their racial genius and peculiarities, even for the sake of creating a common Canadian individual. The richness and beauty of a nation's culture does not depend upon similarity but upon the diversity and variety which only divergent groups and races can give it. All great cultures have arisen because of the contribution made to them by other cultures.

The Mennonites in Canada have their contributions to make to the general Canadian culture. In Alberta this contribution has, until the present, been on agricultural lines. Although the Mennonite society in Alberta to the present has been predominantly agricultural, the young people today are being forced from the land into other occupational fields

There is now a trend to the city which promises to develop into an obstinate problem for the Mennonite leaders. If this trend is negative in one sense, it is positive in another, for it will open vast areas in which Mennonite genius may find ample room for development.

The assimilation of the Mennonites has not yet taken place. To become assimilated the Mennonite must not only change his dress and language, but his philosophy of life. This change is not likely to occur in a free society where a minority group is at liberty to look after its own spiritual and educational needs. As soon as the society is no longer free in this respect, the Mennonites will once more migrate to a country offering better opportunities. Of course there will always be a certain crumbling at the edges of Mennonite society, but the centre remains firm and will attempt to change the world rather than let the world change it. As long as Mennonitism remains sincere, honest and industrious, it will never, in any way, threaten the welfare of the country in which it exists. The conservative Mennonite elements have a definite contribution to make to political stability in an unstable world. May Canada never regret the open doors with which it welcomed them.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX "A"<sup>1</sup>The Mennonite Agreement of 1873

The following is a copy in full of the Order-in-Council of 1873, giving the Mennonites certain rights in Canada.

Department of Agriculture,  
Immigration Branch,  
Ottawa, 23rd July, 1873.

Gentlemen,-

I have the honour, under instruction of the Hon. the Minister of Agriculture, to state to you, in reply to your letter of this days date, the following facts relating to advantage offered to settlers, and to the immunities afforded to Mennonites, which are established by the Statute Law of Canada, and by order of His Excellence, Governor-General in Council, for the information of German Mennonites, having intention to emigrate to Canada via Hamburg:

1. An entire exemption from Military Service is, by law and Order-in-Council, granted to the denomination of Christians called "Mennonites".
2. An Order-in-Council was passed on the 3rd of March last, to reserve eight Townships in the Province of Manitoba, for free grants on the condition of settlement as provided in the Dominion Lands Act, that is to say: "Any person who is the head of a family, or has attained the age of twenty-one years, shall be entitled to be entered for one quarter-section or a less quantity of unappropriated Dominion Lands for the purpose of securing a homestead right in respect thereof."
3. The said reserve of eight Townships is for the exclusive use of the Mennonites, and the said free grants of one quarter-section to consist of 160 acres each, as defined by the Act.
4. Should the Mennonite Settlement extend beyond the eight Townships set aside by the Order-in-Council of March 3rd, last, other Townships will be, in the same way, reserved to meet the full requirements of Mennonite immigration.
5. If, next Spring, the Mennonite settlers, on receiving the eight Townships set aside for use, should prefer to exchange them for any other eight, unoccupied Townships, such exchange will be allowed.
6. In addition to the free grant of a quarter-section of 160 acres to every person over twenty-one years of age, on the condition of settlement, the right to purchase the remaining three-quarters of the section at \$1.00 per acre, which is the largest quantity of land the Government will grant a Patent for one person.
7. The settler will receive a Patent for free grant after three years' residence in accordance with the terms of the Dominion Lands Act.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, J.T.M., THE EDUCATION OF THE NEW-CANADIAN, J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., London and Toronto, 1918, pp. 247-249.

8. In the event of the death of the settler, the lawful heir can claim the Patent for the free grant, upon proof that settlement duties for three years have been preformed.

9. From the moment of occupation, the settler acquires a homestead right in the land.

10. The fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Mennonites, without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools.

11. The privilege of affirming, instead of making affidavits, is afforded by law.

12. The Government of Canada undertakes to furnish passenger warrants from Hamburg to Fort Garry, for Mennonite families of good character, for the sum of \$30.00 per adult person; under eight years, half price, or \$15.00, and for infants under one year, \$3.00.

13. The Minister specially authorized me to state that this arrangement as to price shall not be changed for the seasons of 1874 and 1876.

14. I am further to state that if it is changed, thereafter, the price shall not, up to the year 1882, exceed \$40.00 per adult, and children in proportion, subject to the approval of Parliament.

15. The immigrants shall be provided with provisions on the portion of the journey between Liverpool and Collingwood, but during other portions of the journey they are to find their own provisions.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,  
Your obedient servant,

P.M. LOWE,  
Secretary of Department of Agriculture.

Messrs. DAVID KLASSEN  
JACOB PETERS  
HEINRICH WIEBE  
CORNELIUS TOEWS  
Delegates from Southern Russia.

APPENDIX "B"1Regarding Mennonite Settlement in Canada

The agency in western Canada which was to see the Mennonite immigrant through the winter and aid them in finding their place in the economic life of the Dominion was the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. While this organization was entirely capable of providing temporary care for the newcomers, its potentialities for settling them on the land were distinctly limited by the slender means of the Mennonite communities in the West. Although a thrifty and industrious farming folk, these people lacked the large resources, the prestige, and the machinery necessary for the successful colonization of the new arrivals in the prairie provinces. What was really needed was the union of the Mennonite Board of Colonization with some agency of the Canadian Pacific, the company which had made possible the coming of the immigrants into Canada. The railway was maintaining the Canada Colonization Association as a medium for the settlement of privately owned land. In recognition of Canadian Pacific assistance, the board was desirous, as far as possible, of placing them on lands in Canadian Pacific territory. This situation indicated the importance of a working arrangement between the Mennonite organization and the Canada Colonization Association.

During the winter and spring of 1924 the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, in co-operation with the Colonization Association, busied itself with the settlement on the land of the Mennonites brought forward during the preceding year. The importance of locating them promptly was apparent. Consent of the Dominion authorities to a further movement of Mennonites would naturally be contingent upon the satisfactory disposition of the first comers. Yet midsummer found many of them unplaced. The lack of progress seemed to result from an insufficient liaison between the two organizations. To bring them into closer harmony and more active co-operation, a Mennonite Land Settlement Board was formed, with three representatives from the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, three from the Canada Colonization Association, and three from the Mennonite newcomers. (Dennis to Rev. David Toews, July 19, 1924, File No. 218, Section 6, M.)

These steps, of course, were taken upon the initiative of Dennis in behalf of the Canadian Pacific. The company, through its Department of Colonization and Development, had assumed the responsibility for the movement of the Mennonites to Canada and for their placement on the land. In effecting this close co-operation between the Mennonite organization and the Canadian Colonization Association, Dennis sought to secure for the company a degree of control and oversight commensurate with the responsibility it had assumed. The Canadian Pacific would be the guiding spirit in a partnership which existed for the mu-

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1 Hedges, J.B., Building the Canadian West, The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1939, pp. 370-377.

tual benefit of the railway and the Mennonite people. But while keeping his hand on the throttle, Dennis was careful to make his control as unobtrusive as possible. To this end, one of the three representatives of the Canada Colonization Association on the Land Settlement Board was himself a Mennonite.

Under the new arrangement, substantial progress was made during the latter part of 1924 in the settlement of Mennonite families. The primary functions of the Land Settlement Board were to find owners of improved land who were disposed to sell their holdings, to bring such owners together with the Mennonite immigrants, to see that contracts for the sale of such lands were fair to all concerned, and to provide after-care and supervision for the new settlers. The day was gone when the settler was placed on the land and promptly forgotten, while he shifted for himself as best he could. The aim and purpose of immigration promotion now was to build the settler into the economic life of the country. Every precaution must be taken, therefore, to guard against failure of the newcomer; care must be taken to prevent the immigrant from becoming a public charge. With a strong public opinion which was at best merely tolerant of Continental immigration, Mennonite colonization must be a success.

Since the Mennonites were meagerly provided with funds, and since they were being settled on lands which sold at a substantial price, particular care was necessary in evolving a practical plan by which they could acquire title to land. There were in western Canada many large farms, survival of the bonanza days when wheat farms of great proportions were a common sight. With the passing of the prosperous conditions which had prevailed in agriculture during the pre-war and war periods, many of these farms had lost their attractiveness to their owners. The depressed prices of farm products after 1921 made these men receptive to proposals that they dispose of their holdings. But the meagre willingness of them to sell offered no solution of the problem. There remained the question of the buyer; and in the face of the prevailing farm situation there was no demand for the large farms. The obvious solution was either to divide these large holdings into small units for sale to individual families or to sell them intact to groups of families who would operate them on a community basis.

By virtue of their traditional devotion to the community form of settlement, the Mennonite immigrants whom the Canadian Pacific was bringing to Canada were clearly indicated as the ones who would make a success of group settlement on large farms. But while the Mennonites were good human material, they were so largely without means as to preclude the possibility of their purchasing the land in the ordinary way. In working out special arrangements for purchase by the Mennonites there was needed some responsible organization commanding the confidence of both the vendor and the buyers. As the chief sponsor of the Mennonite immigration, and as the agency which had made it possible for them to come forward, the Canadian Pacific was the logical intermediary: and in its Canada Colonization Association it had an instrument at hand for such

work. Not only could the latter co-operate with the Mennonite Land Settlement Board in locating the lands available for purchase, but, what was more important, through its agents it could guarantee a just appraisal of the land and devise contracts for sale which would safeguard the interests of all parties concerned.

The particular form of contract evolved to meet this situation was one calling for purchase on a crop-payment basis. Where groups of Mennonite families were settled on the large farms, additional buildings and equipment must be provided by the vendors and added to the price of the land. The total cost was then to be liquidated by the annual delivery to the vendor of one-half of all crops and live stock produced on the land. In this way every incentive was given to settlers to achieve maximum production as a means of effecting the most rapid payment for the land. Once a community of Mennonites had been settled on a large farm the inspectors of the Mennonite Land Settlement Board and of the Canada Colonization Association provided supervision and after-care in order to reduce the possibility of failure to a minimum.

In this way the Canadian Pacific effected not merely a solution of the problem of establishing the Mennonites on the land, with reasonable assurance of their success, but it also inaugurated something in the nature of a revolution in land holding in portions of the Canadian West. Extensive cultivation, a marked feature of the early development throughout the wheat belt on the American and Canadian prairies, was to be replaced in a measure by a more intensive cultivation by the hands of a thrifty and industrious people long accustomed to unremitting toil. And intensive agriculture meant balanced farming in which diversified production would supplant the exclusive grain production which had attended the operation of the large farms. The new system was a recognition, too, of the fact that the Mennonites were more likely to succeed through community effort than when each family was left to work out its own salvation....

As a result of the adoption of this plan for Mennonite settlement, the Canadian Pacific was soon able to show gratifying results from its efforts, which warranted it in seeking authorization from Dominion authorities for a further movement of these people from Russia. The encouraging prospects for Mennonite success on the land in the West had the effect, too, of predisposing President Beatty of the Canadian Pacific toward a continued movement of the Mennonites on a credit basis, care being taken at all times, however, to guard against the granting of excessive credits to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization at any given time. Through the decade of the twenties the immigration of the Mennonites and the work of the Canada Colonization Association went hand in hand. The Canadian Pacific continued to move Mennonites on both a cash and credit basis.... To March, 1927, the Canadian Colonization Association had settled on privately owned land a total of 1,138 Mennonite families, not to mention some 203 families of other nationalities. (Herzer to Macalister, March 11, 1927, File No. 294,

Section 11, M.). By the close of the 1928 season it had placed more than 3,000 Mennonite families, representing over 16,000 souls. (Report of the Canada Colonization Association for 1928). The area of land thus colonized was in excess of 700,000 acres, with a contract price of almost \$3,000,000.

Through experience the Canada Colonization Association gradually evolved certain definite principles governing its procedure with respect to this type of land settlement. It refused to accept for assisted settlement any families which could not be personally interviewed and inspected by the prospective vendors. In order to interest the seller, particularly financial corporations, assurance must be given that some organization would provide oversight and direction of the immigrants purchasing the land. For the performance of this function among the Mennonite settlements there were, of course, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the Mennonite Land Settlement Board, both of which functioned in close harmony with the Canada Colonization Association....

The primary concern of the Canadian Pacific in this work was, of course, the increased settlement of the country tributary to its own lines in the West. On occasion, however, the lands thus settled were tributary to both the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National Railways. As a protection to its interests in such cases, the company, through the Canada Colonization Association, insisted that there be inserted in the contract a clause requiring the parties purchasing the land to deliver their crops to Canadian Pacific stations.

Until 1927 the activities of the Canada Colonization Association were confined almost wholly to the three prairie provinces. In the earlier years Manitoba had been the scene of greatest activity, but in 1928 both Saskatchewan and Alberta were far ahead of Manitoba in number of families as well as area of land settled. By the time most of the farms in Manitoba had been colonized on a community basis, and now the same process was being extended to the other provinces.... The relative importance of Mennonites, as compared with other nationalities, in the settlement work of the Canada Colonization Association is illustrated by the figures for the year 1928. Of a total of 667 families, representing 3,668 souls established on the land in that year, 393 were Mennonites. German families numbered 178, of whom 135 had been settled through the aid of the Lutheran Immigration Board, while the remaining 43 families were Catholics in whose settlement the V.D.C.K. had played an important part. Of 13 other nationalities included in the year's total, 47 British families were the largest group.

APPENDIX "C"<sup>1</sup>

Text of the Mennonite petition to the Canadian Government, regarding the prospects of alternative service in case of a future war. The audience with the Prime Minister occurred on February 22, 1951, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Ottawa, den 22 Febr., 1951.

Rt. Hon. Louis St. Laurent,  
Prime Minister of Canada.

Honourable Sir:

The Historic Peace Churches of Canada, namely: Mennonites, Brethern in Christ (Tunker), Society of Friends (Quaker), and the Church of the Brethern have enjoyed residence in this Dominion for over one hundred and fifty years. We sincerely appreciate our country, the tolerant attitude of her Government, and her strong efforts to promote peace among all nations.

We especially wish to pay respectful tribute to the late Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. W.L. MacKenzie King. At the same time we wish to take this opportunity to assure you, our present Prime Minister, of our prayers that the blessing of God may rest upon you and the Government of Canada.

Historically, as Peace Churches whose number exceeds fifty thousand members, we have a Biblical background and deep-rooted, sacred conviction against participating in war in any form. We are indeed grateful to our Government for granting to us freedom of conscience and religious liberty which enables us to worship Almighty God according to our understanding of His Word.

We have enjoyed this privilege ever since our church fathers came to this country in 1790. Since that time legislation in Canada has consistently respected the peace convictions of all our groups including those which have come during the intervening years.

During World War I the Government granted to all our drafted young men postponement from military service. Again, in World War II exemptions were provided for conscientious objectors by allowing them to serve in projects of national importance under civilian supervision.

We as Peace Churches, believe that war is out of harmony with the teaching of the Gospel and the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ; consequently we are restrained from engaging in war or violence of any kind.

We are not asking for safety that avoids danger and sacrifice but we cannot have any part in the taking of human life. We are willing to serve our country and fellowmen in relief

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<sup>1</sup> Mennonite Brethern Church of Canada, Yearbook of the Forty-first Canadian Conference, The Columbia Press, Yarrow, B.C., 1951, pp. 41-44.

work at home or abroad or to engage in work of national importance such as service in hospitals, mental institutions, in industry or agriculture under civilian administration. In the unfortunate event of national emergency which in the view of the Canadian Government demands the mobilization of manpower, it would be appreciated if an opportunity could be given for consultation with Government officials as to ways in which we might serve in accord with our peace testimony.

We trust our religious convictions will continue to be understood in the future as they have been in the past. We hope our Government will continue to respect the conscience of minority groups and individuals.

May the blessing of God be upon the Parliament of Canada and may He grant you, our Honourable Prime Minister, wisdom in the discharging of your many duties as chief executive of our Dominion.

Respectfully submitted,

Fred Haslam,

B.B. Janz,  
Coaldale, Alta.

J.B. Martin,

David Reimer,  
Giroux, Man.

C.J. Rempel,  
10 Union Str.

J.G. Rempel,  
Rosthern, Sask.

David Schulz,  
Altona, Manitoba.  
Elven Shantz.

E.J. Swalm,  
Duntrun, Ont.



APPENDIX "D"

"Am I a National Socialist", by B.B. Janz, as it appeared in the Lethbridge Herald, June, 1940.

This article was written by B.B. Janz, Coaldale, Alberta in December 1938 and published in January 1939 in four Mennonite weekly newspapers in the German language in Canada and U.S.A. - At that time there was no immediate danger of war with Germany, and it is obvious that the purpose was not to protect his own skin, but to thoroughly warn his people against the subversive propaganda. The expressed views are generally the attitude of the Mennonites in Canada. Many of the church-leaders have expressed their appreciation, but the German Consul in Winnipeg wrote him an angry letter demanding to revoke his declaration publicly in the press, and some agents of the propaganda from overseas threatened the time would come to settle with him. They tried to make it hard to take a firm stand of allegiance to the British throne and this home country and to give definite declarations. But the author felt no remorse having done so.

The 21,000 Immigrants will have to use their mother tongue for the time being, as the older generation does not master any other language, in which to enjoy the church service. But this will change in the course of time, as history in Ontario has proven. - We are deeply grateful to the Government and the country, that they understand us in this respect. And we sincerely hope there will be no difficulties in this direction and that we may enjoy the same privilege unmolested as the other 50 or so languages in Canada do.

And it is to be remembered, that a couple of centuries ago the forefathers of most of these people spoke the Dutch language and further, that these people are born and raised in Russia for a century and a half as citizens of that country and they themselves have never been in Germany.

AM I A NATIONAL SOCIALIST ? - GOD FORBID !

Am I (here in Canada) a Conservative? - God forbid! - Am I (here in Canada) a Liberal? - God forbid! - Am I (here in Canada) a Social Crediter? - God forbid! - Am I (here in Canada) a National Socialist? - God forbid!

And yet in all seriousness it seems I am expected by the people overseas to answer the last with 'yes' or 'of course', to confess myself a member of a foreign specific political party; while over there no one, even in his dreams, would think of calling himself a Canadian Liberal, since the Liberals are in power here today, their policies seeming the most popular at the present. For anyone over there to deny his adherence to the National Socialist party and to confess adherence to a Canadian party would be considered nonsense or treason by all.

In Germany the people are National Socialists, and they expect that I, a Canadian Citizen, who does not belong to any

political party, will, in spite of that, confess myself either secretly or openly a National Socialist according to the article which appeared in the "B o t e" No. 49, 1938. Whoever speaks German here in Canada (in the U.S.A., Brazil, Paraguay) is to confess himself a member of the National Socialist party. That is treason.

There may be German citizens here (that is people who are not Canadian citizens) whose calling has temporarily brought them here from Germany and who are definitely expecting to return to Germany, who may cling to the political faith of their fatherland without being accused of treason for that reason. They may. But as soon as it should come to a new conflict between peoples, the Canadian Government will know how to act, and the German Government will act in the same way with Canadian citizens over there: concentration camps etc. When therefore foreigners as guests of this country confess themselves adherents to the principles of their fatherland, that is, they favour these principles for their fatherland and for themselves, others may shrug their shoulders, but they have that privilege. But that does not mean that these principles must without question be introduced here, or that these people should try to win converts. They may after all be sincerely fond of their fatherland without belonging to its political party. And all of us can on occasion describe communism truthfully, without belonging to this or that political party. We may speak as human beings from inner conviction without membership in a party or without party discipline.

But to-day National Socialism as been presented to us here in Canada, is, in fact, almost forced upon us, --- so the question is: **w e a n d N a t i o n S o c i a l i s m .**

Now, all of us have come here from Russia. No country in the world wished to give us a home. Canada opened her doors wide for us: to admit 21,000 the doors had to be opened wide. A credit of two million dollars is an indication how wide the doors were opened. The homeless have found a home. Those who were hungry at one time are now eating good bread, some are living in plenty. It is true that in the beginning, i.e. in the first ten years, we had to work hard and fight against destitution, for we had nothing. Our American brethren devoted some \$250,000 to provide us with clothing, they devoted a similar sum to the sick and other sufferers, and another like sum to help us acquire land. We have become citizens. During these years some 74 churches have been erected. We have in fact found food and shelter, peace and rest in this country, complete freedom and the practice of our faith. We are all adherents of the Mennonite faith founded on the Bible.

Until now these people have, historically speaking, been without politics; in simple language, for those who cannot understand, let us say: these Mennonites (including the aforesaid 21,000) have in former times never adhered to any political party, not in Russia nor here in Canada. And our native brothers here have not done so. For that reason the Canadian Government considered itself sufficiently well acquainted with the Mennonites. An Order-in-Council, in 1921, made it impos-

ible for Mennonites to come to Canada. Premier W.L. Mackenzie King was requested by representatives of native born Mennonites to set aside this Order-in-Council. He was willing to do so, cost what it may. He himself had been a schoolmate of Mennonite boys in Kitchener, Ont., had learned to know and value the Mennonites personally. They were people who lived according to their confession of faith, a blessing to their community and good citizens of the State; originally most of them were Germans, but with the passing of time all had become English speaking. A new Order-in-Council removed the difficulty, and the door was opened once more.

Now we are here. Our brethren in Russia are still suffering. We here in Canada, when the question of membership in a political party is raised, can quietly say: "God forbid!" And even if it concerns the party of the head of our Government. No one is concerned about that, and we are in no political danger on that account, as would be the case if we pursued a similar policy over there, i.e. in Russia (or in Germany).

And now consider these points:

1/ You have experienced all these things and have taken advantage of them. That puts you under some obligation, or does it not?

2/ Becoming a citizen of this fatherland also has a meaning; did you not become a citizen? It means that you are satisfied with this land as your fatherland and this excludes any possibility of preferring any other country. That means another obligation. Or do you think that it is quite in order to become a citizen, to take relief from a kind Government, and to cry or write "Heil Hitler", as is supposed to have happened in...

3/ The religious basis of the Mennonites teaches us to be submissive to existing authorities (adherence to this or that political faith is not included in this statement), but not to play politics.

4/ Now, you are asked to identify yourself with a foreign political party which is absolute, i.e., which permits no other political party to exist, and in consequence destroys all other parties as soon as it (the absolute party) comes into power. Adherence to the principle of National Socialism is at the same time the negation of all political or other parties or societies over here.

5/ Hitherto we as a congregation have been historically without politics and now to enter politics, particularly to accept adherence to a party which is in contrast to that of our chosen fatherland at any rate, would be an historical mistake, and historical catastrophe. That is breach of faith against the state and against our own confession.

6/ The Mennonites in Canada and the United States have helped us to come to this country on account of their faith in us and on account of their kindness toward the Mennonites from Russia, their suffering brothers and sisters, and the many many innocent children. They have borne with us and helped us again and again. Should the unheard of thing now happen that these newcomers should go an entirely different

way, to become involved politically, and that particularly with a foreign political ideal seasoned with militarism (because its propaganda lays emphasis on defence)? In that case not only the newcomers are finished here, but the heavy and deep shadow of guilt, of faithlessness, of unreliability, would settle on all the Mennonites in Canada and the United States, at least upon those who speak German. Then their kindness will bring much sorrow. It will strike the German speaking congregation with particular force. At the present time we are instructing our children in Sabbath schools and even in some public schools in German (the upper grades and before and after school hours for instance). In the case of politics or treason you may expect that, as soon as a crisis occurs, a natural consequence will be that strict measures will be taken not only against our language, but even against our people. These measures will be taken by the Government, while the public will let us feel their displeasure in other ways. And not without cause then in case of foreign politics. We have already seen how in certain cases the ill will of English speaking citizens has been aroused by the ill considered actions of national socialistically minded persons. During the days of the Munich crisis it was already evident that some persons were objects of suspicion.

However, hitherto the English speaking citizens have had no real cause to be alarmed. The Mennonite Churches, inclusive of the newcomers have throughout remained faithful to their religion and to the State. For that reason the Mennonites have not hesitated to become citizens after the probationary period of five years.

The above mentioned suggestions in the "B o t e" did not come from here, they came from outside. It was the first attempt at propaganda. But when we examine the numerous articles which have appeared in our papers and which came from our side, we see that it is not the first not even the tenth attempt to draw us into the stream of ideological viewpoints which exist on the other side of the Rhine. All this extravagant emphasis on language, which includes a certain contempt for other languages, this emphasis on German blood, Aryanism, defence, German books, book-clubs, stamp collections, etc., have only one object: to tie us geographically to Germany.

The Mennonites do not associate themselves to any extent with the celebration of German National Bund - days, otherwise such practice would have to be condemned. So we will let it pass. - It is well known that I personally have done my share in working for the preservation of the German language for church purposes, but that does not mean that I have included in the German language adherence to German politics.

We have, figuratively speaking, signed a marriage contract with the Canadian Government: we were destitute, homeless, ragged as to clothing but not as to character and mind. We have joined ourselves for better or worse with this State; we believed at that time, and we still believe, that it was Gods will to bring us here; we would gladly have all our brethern here from Paraguay and Brazil as well. We live, if not in the

richest and the most beautiful part of the world, at least in the most peaceful. This is the answer to our struggles, our prayers and entreaties while in Russia before the doors both here and over there were opened. We are satisfied, and more - we are happy, still more - we are sincerely grateful. If now in our political attitude we were to prefer some other State as our partner in marriage, that would mean adultery, in our case treason to the State. To the best of my knowledge, our reputation as Mennonites has never been tarnished, and we have never been guilty of unfaithfulness to the State. It must not happen now. If the aforementioned propaganda were to be successful, it would be the cause of endless misery and conflict in the hearts of individual persons and in whole families. The physical impossibility on this side of the ocean according to the political dogma which prevails overseas leads to awkward situations. If this attitude were to spread it would be a calamity for all our people. Be warned, my people, and put an end to this propaganda from over yonder.

It is not to be understood from what I have said that I consider everything over here to be good and everything found in Germany to be evil. Not at all. On the other hand the opposite is not the case either. Our allegiance to our chosen fatherland is not affected by the conditions under which we live. The fact that there is much good over there has never been questioned. All those achievements in Germany in the field of Christian Faith, and Christian Life, in the field of culture and science, of good literature, in Art, in Medicine, in technical Education have earned the respect of everyone, and particularly of ourselves. We are glad of all those things, and we should make as much of them our own as possible. But anything that concerns political attitude and political faith is not our business.

We need not forget that Germany's firm stand against communism was also the means of saving the whole of Europe from communism and this should have our particular approbation, since we ourselves suffered so terribly in Russia from this movement. And we must not forget that adherence to communistic principles in Canada and the United States is to be criminally negligent. From our experience we know what a terrible, bloody harvest this awful seed will bring forth, unless God works a special miracle.

In the Bible we read of people who were weighed in the balance and found wanting. They perished! - We as Mennonites, and the Newcomers particularly are in the Balance with reference to three points:

- 1/ Whether we shall pay our financial debts, i.e., if we are honest in business;
- 2/ Whether we adhere to our confession of faith as nonresistants;
- 3/ Whether we shall be drawn into political action, particularly in connection with a foreign movement, or whether we shall remain faithful to our Government.

Through Faith we shall conquer.

B.B. Janz.

Coaldale, Alberta.

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In writing a thesis of this nature much information has to be gathered verbally from those persons who have helped to make the history therein presented. That has also been the case here. Much valuable information has been obtained by means of a questionnaire sent out to the leaders of the various churches of all Mennonite denominations in Alberta. Such information has been acknowledged throughout the thesis as Questionnaire. I have drawn most heavily upon the information thus obtained and upon that presented in the various minutes and reports put at my disposal by individuals interested in the work.

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4. Protokolle der Jahressitzungen der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde von Alberta, for the years 1929, 1941, and 1944 to 1952.
5. Protokolle und Berichte der Vertreter-Versammlungen der Mennonitischen Gemeinden von Alberta, for the years 1935 to 1951.  
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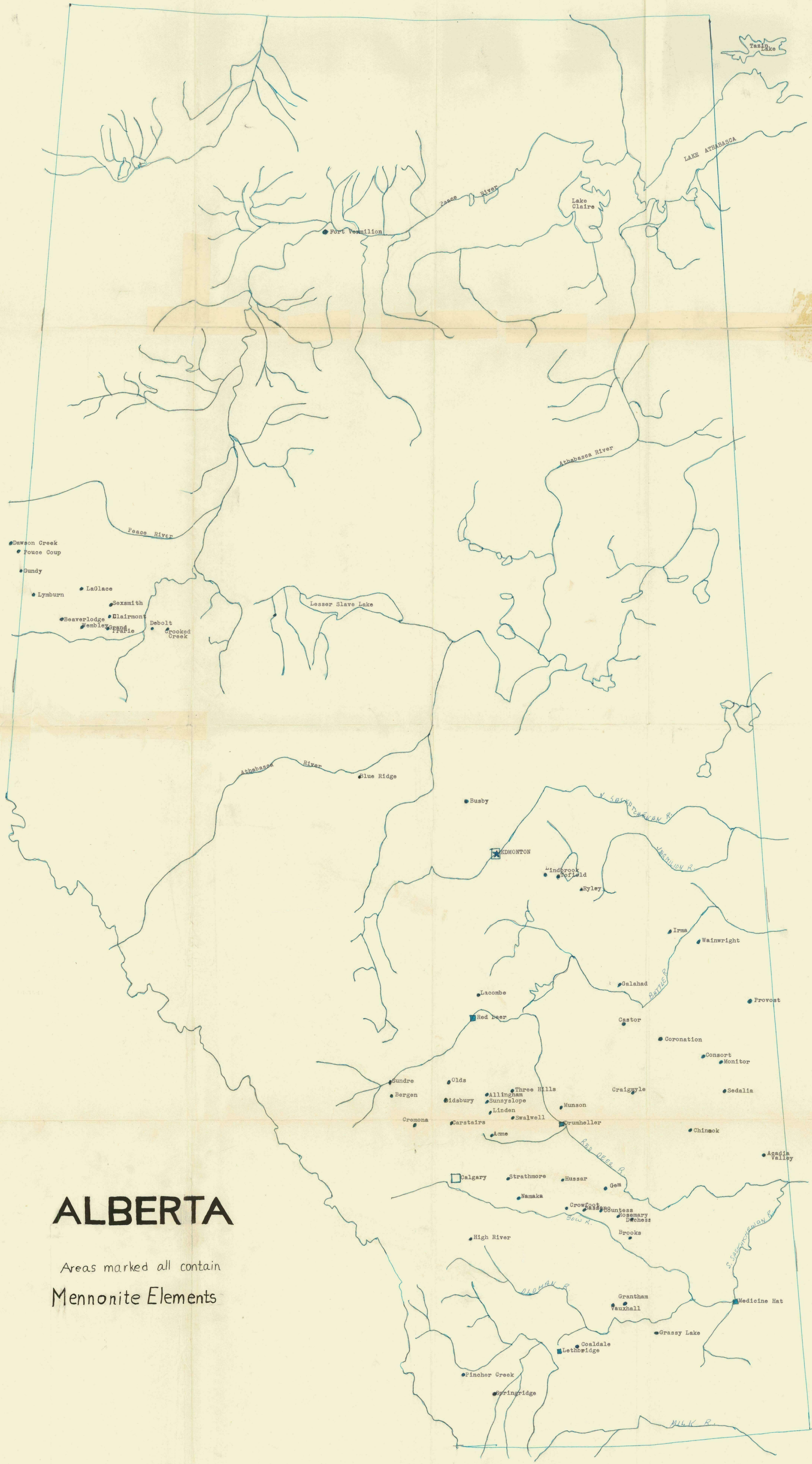
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# ALBERTA

Areas marked all contain  
Mennonite Elements