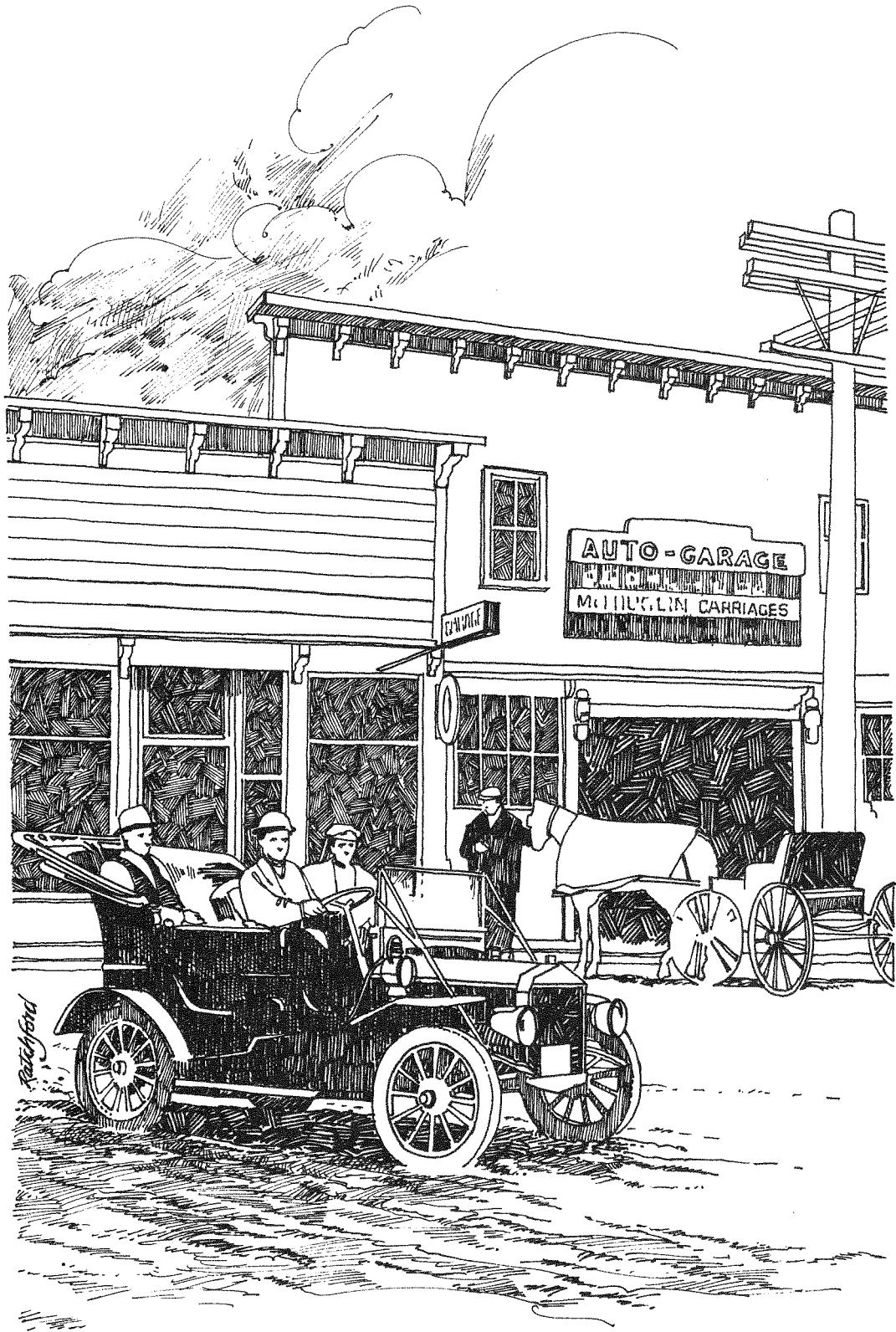


## Provenance

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*The Threat of Progress*

## 12. *The Church Struggle in Manitoba*

*The struggle between the old and the new is perhaps the one principal theme or leitmotif which can be discovered in the history of the Mennonites as a whole. The driving power behind their migrations . . . was always a heroic desire to preserve their sacred traditions . . . against the allurements of a larger society — E. K. FRANCIS.<sup>1</sup>*

ANOTHER parallel exists in Canadian Mennonite history — while the conflict between the old and the new was being staged in Ontario, a similar drama was being enacted in Manitoba. As the Mennonites and Amish in the East opted for progressive or conservative ways, so the Western Mennonites made decisions which stemmed from their varying response to the issues confronting them. There was one important difference, however. In Manitoba, the majority rather than the minority insisted on the old ways. The minority, however, was quite vocal and convinced of the rightness of its position. The developing differences, together with geographic distance, resulted in the separation of the three Manitoba ecclesiastical organizations into no less than eight before the end of the century (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of new organizations, however, was not the only manifestation of the differing points of view. For Mennonites, religion continued to embrace the whole of life, and thus the appearance of variant church symbols reflected variant values and approaches to the issues of life. The Anabaptist idea that

TABLE 1

MEMBERSHIP OF EIGHT MANITOBA MENNONITE CHURCHES IN 1912\*

NAME	LOCATION	MEMBER- SHIP	SOULS†
Kleine Gemeinde	East Reserve	270	825
	and Morris	123	299
Holdemaner	East Reserve	154	389
(outgrowth of Kleine Gemeinde)	and Morris	27	89
Bruderthaler (EMB) (outgrowth of Kleine Gemeinde)	East Reserve	67	150
Chortitzer	East Reserve	835	2,037
Sommerfelder	West Reserve	2,085‡	5,214
Bergthaler	West Reserve	488	1,112
Reinlaender (Old Colony)	West Reserve	1,545	3,808
Mennonite Brethren	West Reserve	277	?§
Total		5,871	13,023

\* First census available.

† "Souls" was term commonly used by Mennonites to designate entire population, including all family members.

‡ Estimate.

§ Unknown because converts to Mennonite Brethren Church did not necessarily transfer as families.

all of life was to be governed by religious principles had in some ways been strengthened by the commonwealth integration of the economic, cultural and religious facets of the Mennonite experience. Thus, differing views on community, land holding, public schools and culture played as great a role, if not greater, in the fragmentation as did creedal and liturgical questions.

The Kleine Gemeinde, smallest of the groups in Manitoba, was located partly in the East Reserve and partly west of the Red River, along the Scratching River, an area also known as the Morris area. The Bergthaler likewise were located on both sides of the Red River (the Red River separated the two reserves). They had begun settling on the East Reserve, but had transferred to the eastern end of the West Reserve as soon as the better land

was discovered. Filling the western end of the West Reserve was the Reinlaender church, whose settlers came from Chortitza, the Old Colony in Russia, and from Fuerstenland, one of the daughter colonies. For this reason they were also known as Fuerstenlaender.<sup>3</sup> The name for this group that most entered into common usage, though it did not become official until the 1930s, was Old Colony. Thus, a designation which formerly carried only a geographic meaning took on an ecclesiastical connotation.

Of the three, the Old Colony was the most conservative church among the Russian Mennonites of the first migration. They strongly resisted the coming of municipal government, public schools, the breaking up of the villages, and the adoption of the English language.<sup>4</sup> On matters such as language, these Dutch-German Mennonites most resembled the Old Order of the Swiss-German tradition. Both manifested a simple and steadfast faith in the provident God who had called on them to be his faithful people. Since they would often have to suffer for their faith, a sombre seriousness typified the spirit of the Old Colony. Joy and satisfaction lay in conforming to the will of God as interpreted by the bishop, in raising large families, keeping a good household, and otherwise exemplifying a well-ordered life in social conformity and agricultural productivity. Social conformity for the most part came easily because socializing itself was a happy occasion, especially on Sunday afternoons when it was customary for relatives and friends to gather for story-telling and otherwise catching up on the events of the past week. In this the Low German language, being the language of social intercourse, served them well.

The weekly Sunday morning services, usually two to three hours in length, were filled with admonition from one major preacher and several minor ones, and hymns with many verses reinforced the mood of obedience and devotion. Exceptions to the weekly service were Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, when people attended church three days in a row. In addition to Epiphany and Ascension Day, these were the only holidays the Old Colony ever knew. Sunday morning highlights were the annual baptism of the eligible young people, who had undergone intense catechetical instruction and memorization; this was followed by communion, which included a foot-washing ceremony. Ordinations, weddings and funerals were the other church events which involved the entire community.

Community and *Gemeinde* (church) were the all-important words. The Old Colony knew themselves to be a people of God who had made a covenant with Him. Salvation was more corporate than individual, hence the great emphasis on conformity and on group separation from the world, on keeping the villages intact, and on keeping faith with the brotherhood. The Old Colony did not practise common ownership of goods but in other ways they were a total social organization similar to that of the Hutterites.

Generally speaking and seen from the outside, the Mennonites of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and the Bergthaler in Manitoba followed many ways similar to those of the Old Colony. All had their bishops and ministers, and, in their villages, elected officials. All were farmers and had large families. For all, religious instruction and baptism of the young people were an essential way of maintaining and perpetuating the way of life. The *Kleine Gemeinde* was perhaps given more to legalistic moralisms affecting the lifestyles of individual members, while the Old Colony took its stand on the economic, educational and national-cultural issues of the day, as it sought to maintain the village, the private school and the German culture.

The Bergthaler were difficult to classify since there were both progressive and conservative factions among them. The progressives accepted urbanization, public schools and the changing styles. They also were the earliest to pick up the English language. In their church life they tended to sing more rapidly and have fewer verses, and occasionally they invited outside speakers.<sup>5</sup> New ideas, however, had to be treated cautiously because the majority of the Bergthaler leaned toward either the firmness of the Old Colony on cultural-educational issues or the rigidity of the *Kleine Gemeinde* on personal ethical issues. Indeed, the religious differences within the Bergthaler were sufficient to threaten ecclesiastical division, as the so-called progressives and conservatives confronted each other inside that group.<sup>6</sup>

In Manitoba, as in Ontario, Mennonites began to be known as progressives or as conservatives, though the sharpest distinction between those two groups was not made until the second major migration from Russia. Progressive and conservative, however, are relative terms, as indicated in the previous chapter. The conservatives in Manitoba themselves resented the use of the term, inasmuch as they believed themselves to be the defence of Mennonite values against an encroaching world and unfaithful

brethren. In the context of the times, however, conservative and progressive appeared to be terms properly descriptive and, though inadequate here, quite unavoidable. The varieties of conservatism in Manitoba, to be described here, had their roots in the Prussian emigration and in the Russian experience. For the most part, the Manitoba Mennonites had been poor and landless in Prussia and, for the longest time, the least educated in Russia. Cornies' reforms had affected the Chortitz elements only indirectly. Besides, many of the Manitoba people had spent all of their energies pioneering in Russia first in Chortitz, then in the daughter colonies of Bergthal and Fuerstenland. The main contingent of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Manitoba had a Molot-schna heritage, to be sure, but in their case too it was a heritage made ultra-conservative by the teachings of Klaas Reimer.

Even the choice of Canada was a conservative act since the progressives tended to choose the United States. The conservative orientation of the Manitoba migration was also exemplified in the expressed conservative intention. Two of the immigrant bishops explicitly insisted that migration meant a clean and pure start, a sure return to the old ways. Indeed, the two cousins, Bishops Gerhard Wiebe of the Bergthaler and Johann Wiebe of the Reinlaender, had vowed to reverse the accommodation to outside influences that had gone too far in Russia. Specific reference was made to *hohe Gelehrsamkeit* (high learning) in the schools, *Notengesang* (singing of notes), and *die grosse Gleichstellung dieser Welt* (the great conformity to the world).<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, not all of the immigrants were ready to return to or confirm such an ultra-conservatism, so that the seeds of dissent and a relative progressivism were present from the beginning. By their rigid recalcitrance, conservatism in the extreme, the bishops ensured the emergence of progressive elements.

Their position on hymnbooks with notes is a case in point. Bishop Johann Wiebe and his ministerial colleagues were determined to go back to the *Kirchengesang nach alter Sitte* (church singing according to the old tradition).<sup>8</sup> This meant not only avoiding hymnbooks with notes but also abolishing the books with *Ziffern* (numbers to indicate pitch) which had become commonplace in Russia.<sup>9</sup> There was consequently much unhappiness and dissension. Although most of the immigrants were ready to preserve a cultural status quo, only a very few were actually ready to turn the clock backward.

The intention of the bishops to hold the line was only intensi-

fied by the influences which became manifest early in the new environment. The reader has already been introduced to the breakdown of the village system in the Manitoba reserves, the coming of railroads and trading centres, the imposition of municipal government and the constant suggestions from official government quarters that the private German-language schools would have to go. Pressures to Anglicize and Canadianize were appearing much sooner in Canada than had those of Russification in Russia.

This development was painful particularly because the church bishops had in the beginning had much more authority in the Manitoba environment than had been the case in Russia. To be sure, a close relationship existed in Russia between the *Aelteste* (church leader) and the *Oberschulze* (civic leader), but the latter was appointed by Russian authorities following his public election. In Manitoba the *Kirchendienst* (bishops, ministers and deacons) nominated the civic leaders, who were then acclaimed by the *Bruderschaft* (church assembly).<sup>10</sup>

In this context, it can be seen why any outside interference affecting the status quo was viewed with great misgivings. Public schools, municipal government, and law enforcement agencies all represented unwanted intrusions, as did any influence or spokesman that opened the door wider to these disruptions of the commonwealth. To head off early disintegration and total disaster for the Manitoba experiment later on, the bishop applied a very strict discipline from the beginning and rather "lavish and indiscriminate use of excommunication not only for serious offences . . . but also for minor infractions of old customs."<sup>11</sup>

Among the many "sins" and "crimes" which were punished in this drastic manner, the following have been mentioned: sending children to a public school, seeking employment with Anglo-Saxons, selling land to outsiders (even to Mennonites of other churches), mortgaging one's property, insuring it with the mutual fire insurance associations established by the Bergthal people, adopting such novelties as bicycles, buggies, musical boxes or sleigh bells.<sup>12</sup>

Among the outside influences so troublesome to the Manitoba conservatives were the constant intrusions from south of the border. As the conservatives saw it, progressives had compromised precious principles by going to the United States, but especially aggravating was their insistence that they had light



and truth to bring to the north. The fragmentation of the Mennonite communities was assisted by the progressive American Mennonites.

Since the major dissenting Manitoba groups were soon tied in varying degrees to similar Mennonites in the United States, the whole Manitoba struggle must be told in the context of North American Mennonites in general. The (Old) Mennonites were among the first American brethren to influence the new immigrants in Manitoba. Although John F. Funk of Elkhart had not encouraged settlement in Canada, he respected the choices that had been made and considered also the needs of these people in his literary program. This meant, above all, an even wider distribution of the *Herold der Wahrheit*, though he soon recognized that a more specialized publication could better serve the Russian Mennonites.

His opportunity came in 1880 when the *Nebraska Ansiedler* (Settler), a railroad-subsidized publication printed in his shop, was about to expire. He made the paper his own, renamed it the *Mennonitische Rundschau* (Mennonite Observer), and two years later converted it into a weekly paper with special appeal for the people from and in Russia. One of his regular features was the Russian correspondence column, which carried communications to and from the Russian Mennonites in both the old and new worlds for nearly a century.

The *Rundschau* also dealt, more than the *Herold*, with everyday life, with crops, animal husbandry, markets and settlement news. It was thus more in keeping with the way the Russian Mennonites viewed their total existence — namely as a single religious cultural expression — especially on the reserves. The *Rundschau's* entry into Manitoba was slow, but sure, and eventually its strength there increased to the point where the transfer of its publishing base to Winnipeg was advised.<sup>13</sup>

Funk and his (Old) Mennonite friends followed their papers with other literature (books, pamphlets, hymnals, catechisms), advertised therein, to Manitoba, but apparently no effort was made to organize (Old) Mennonite congregations. Funk deeply resented the schismatics, the "church accusers" as he called them in his own counter-attack.<sup>14</sup> In Manitoba as elsewhere he was interested in moving the church, but not breaking it, though indirect contribution to tension and disruption must not be overlooked.

An American contemporary of Funk's did not shy away from

open breaks. For Johannes Holdeman of Ohio, the pursuit of the "true church" meant what it had meant for John Herr and Klaas Reimer — a very precise return to some cherished doctrines and ethical norms, if necessary, by separating. His approach appealed to some *Kleine Gemeinde* people in the United States. It also appealed to Bishop Peter Toews in Manitoba who had corresponded with him and also travelled all the way to Kansas to hear him. Apparently, Holdeman's practice of very exactly defining the requirements of the "true church" gave him his opening in Manitoba with Toews and some of his people.

Not only had the insecurities and the uncertainties of pioneer settlement brought doubts about the rightness of their cause, but it also meant the rather wearisome observance of many rules and regulations. Holdeman was able to provide religious assurance while bringing about meaningful, though slight, change. With his dogmatism, Holdeman linked up with the basic conservatism of the *Kleine Gemeinde*. With his revivalism he helped them to get away from sterile forms. Above all, he could once again convince people that if they took a certain course of action they could be right and true again.

Toews welcomed Holdeman to Manitoba and allowed him to define the true church for him. The visiting evangelist advised the bishop that he needed to be rebaptized and reordained, so as to be in the apostolic succession of truth. Otherwise Toews needed to accept Holdeman's synthesis of American revivalism and Anabaptist conservatism.

The Holdeman approach appealed not only to Toews but to at least one-third of the *Kleine Gemeinde* people in the East Reserve and the Morris area. They followed Toews, who decided to follow Holdeman after he conducted evangelistic meetings in the winter of 1881-82. The result was a more emotional and verbally expressive Christianity with unwritten sermons and more public prayers. In some ways it also represented a more specific conservatism, such as mandatory wearing of beards and tie-less shirts by the married men and a new consistency in church discipline.<sup>15</sup> The meaning of the break-up of the smallest of the three immigrant congregations in Manitoba was summarized by the group's historian, as follows:

There was much heartache and bitterness in the division. Families were separated and close relatives and friends estranged from each other. For a good many years it was unthinkable, even at funerals to come to each other's

meetings . . . It was the most progressive-minded and spiritual-minded group that left . . . a very conservative branch of the Mennonite church, at first spiritually bewildered and then firmly resolved to isolate themselves more than ever.<sup>16</sup>

The small *Kleine Gemeinde* group, which had separated from the main group in Toronto and had gone to Nebraska with Jansen, was likewise beset by differences of opinion, thus opening it up to outside influences. John Holdeman won over a few families, and the Reformed Church of John Herr (with the *Kleine Gemeinde* dating back to 1812) also gained a few adherents, though both failed to organize congregations. Other *Kleine Gemeinde* families joined the Mennonite Brethren and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. Much more successful were the Bruderthaler, who established a congregation in their midst after 1879.<sup>17</sup>

What remained of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Nebraska and Manitoba now became reconciled in the mutual reinforcement of their conservatism — the Nebraska elder came to Manitoba to reorganize the group — but the end of their troubles was not in sight. The Nebraska group, fearing further attrition to outside influences, moved as a body to Kansas. There it maintained itself for several decades, but then gave up its *Kleine Gemeinde* identity, one part of the congregation becoming independent and the other part joining the Bruderthaler.

The Bruderthaler also gained a foothold in the East Reserve, more precisely at Steinbach, before the end of the century. The intentional conservatism of the *Kleine Gemeinde* was not acceptable to all the people. Among those not going with Holdeman were other restless people, who in some ways, but not all, could be sympathetic to the Holdeman approach. They included the business types, those people most ready to see one or more of the villages develop into expanding centres, most specifically those who were founding what later became the dynamic commercial community of Steinbach. The conservatism of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, which later excommunicated J. R. Friesen for being the first of their church men to buy a factory-built car (and likely the first Ford dealer in western Canada), did not allow for that kind of commerce and modernity.<sup>18</sup> Among the *Kleine Gemeinde*:

Houses, furniture, and dress was plain and there was a great emphasis on humility. It was wrong to take pride in

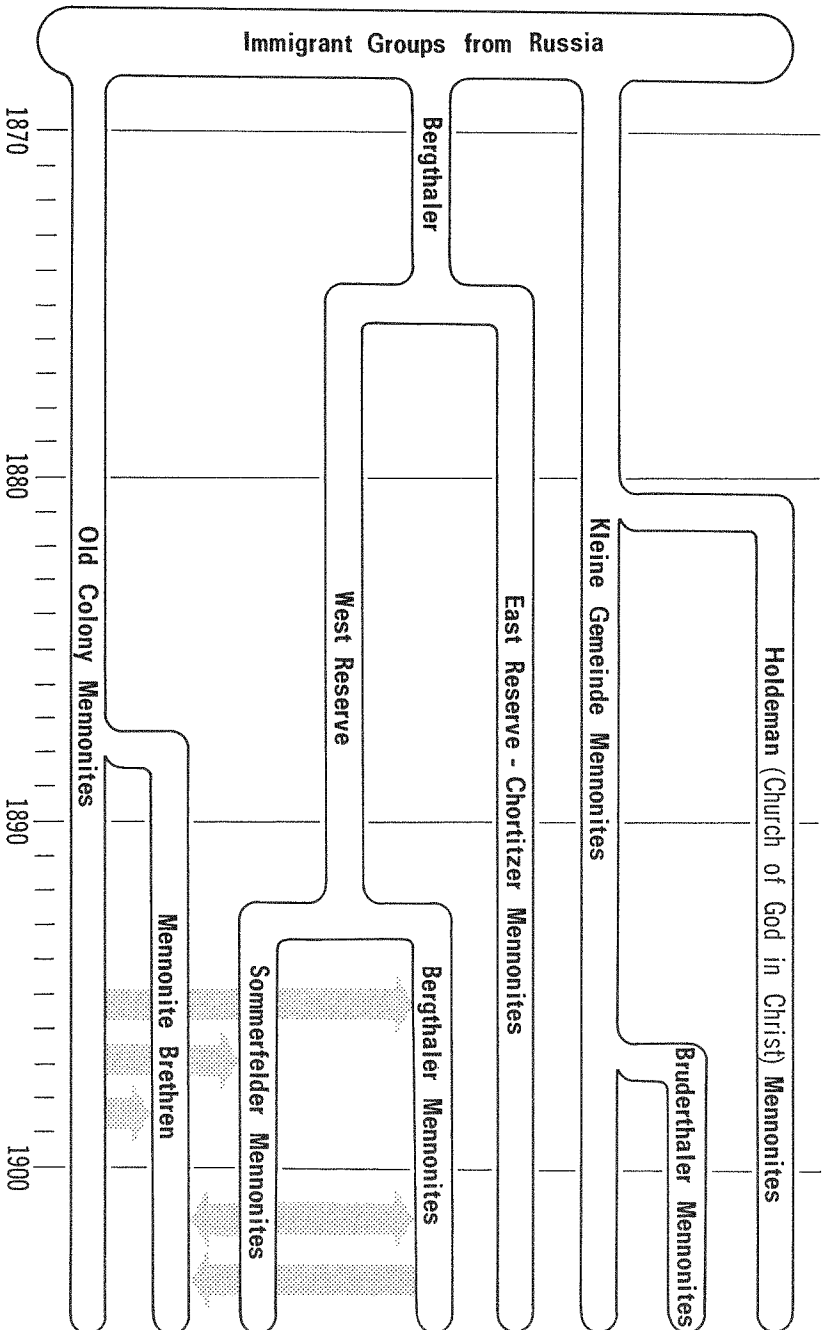
material possessions and consequently the shining brass buckles that came with the horse-harnesses and later even the chrome-plated lamps and radiator caps on the automobiles were painted black, and new inventions like the telephone, top buggies, bicycles, and window curtains were also forbidden at first until they were more commonly in use and no longer status symbols.<sup>19</sup>

The governing principles of the *Kleine Gemeinde* were shaped in a discussion process which began in 1898 and which resulted several years later in the acceptance of a document signed by three bishops (East Reserve, Morris, and Nebraska), nine ministers, and deacons. It was a six-point statement of negatives in the *Klaas Reimer* tradition, which now became a desperate attempt to hold the line. Expressly forbidden were acceptance of government employment and participation in elections, attendance at non-*Kleine Gemeinde* services (unless the minister had been approved and was accompanied by one of their own), and attendance at non-Christian weddings. Also disallowed were funeral sermons, except ordinary ones, and other innovations, including graveside services.<sup>20</sup>

This general mood of negativism and some of the specific rules not surprisingly caused some of the modern villagers of Steinbach to raise questions about the rigid status quo. A group of laymen led by Henry Rempel took the initiative in getting a revival started. For this purpose they invited two ministers from the Minnesota and Nebraska *Bruderthaler* congregations to come to Manitoba. In Steinbach, a *Bruderthaler* congregation began in 1897 with only four couples. There were serious growing pains and reorganization was required a decade later, but then a fresh inflow of young people from the *Kleine Gemeinde* ensured a permanent place in the East Reserve for the *Bruderthaler*.

The fragmentation of the *Kleine Gemeinde* was a matter of considerable concern to Bishop Gerhard Wiebe of the *Bergthaler* in the East Reserve. Actually, his own group had already become known as the *Chortitzer Church* after the village in which he resided. Gerhard Wiebe had been recognized, both by himself and by others, as the leader of the East Reserve in the same way that Bishop Johann Wiebe was from the beginning the leader of the West Reserve. Both looked upon the Mennonite development in Manitoba in commonwealth terms. At least their views in this regard were stronger than those of the *Kleine Gemeinde* or *Bergthaler* independents in the West Reserve, who tended to

# **MENNONITE GROUPS IN MANITOBA** (Nineteenth Century)



separate religion and church affairs from the social-cultural and the economic ones. The atomization of the *Kleine Gemeinde* now made more difficult than ever a unified approach on the school question and on other communal and district-wide matters. Bishop Wiebe remembered Russia and the greater peace that had been maintained there between Mennonites and their Russian neighbours:

Our neighbours; to the west Russians, to the north Catholics, to the east Greeks, and to the south Cossacks; were surrounded by three or four confessions, and it happened occasionally that things were stolen, but we did live with each other in peace and quiet. Oh, if only we could now live likewise with the *Kleine Gemeinde* and the Holdeman people and have spiritual fellowship with them, then the evil enemy could not injure us in so many ways through the district schools as is now the case.<sup>21</sup>

Bishop Wiebe's troubles extended to the West Reserve, where some members of his Bergthal group had ideas of their own. The centre of dissent among the Bergthaler on the West Reserve was Johann Funk, a man whom Gerhard Wiebe had in 1887, for reasons of distance, ordained to be his assistant bishop. This ordination, however, soon resulted in an independent church organization, partly because of distance, partly because of Funk's independent thought. He was not opposed to public district schools and other so-called progressive movements. Indeed, he became a rallying point for all those independent Bergthaler who had from the beginning welcomed the break-up of the villages, the coming of railroads, trading centres, municipal organizations, and, last but not least, the visits of the General Conference "home missionaries" from the United States, who had made their first appearance early in the 1880s.<sup>22</sup>

The home mission work of the General Conference was from the beginning defined as contact with outlying Mennonite congregations. This activity was accelerated by the immigration and the needs of immigrant settlements. In 1881 a plan was adopted which would see eastern ministers travelling west and westerners travelling east for periods of time. Before too long this also meant going north, especially after the first full-time home missionary was appointed in the person of J. B. Baer, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary.

In 1887 Baer spent two months in Manitoba and it was sub-

sequently reported that "having found an open door, [he] was enabled by the Lord's aid to make the beginning for the revival of spiritual life in that extensive Mennonite settlement."<sup>23</sup> His work gave rise to the *Reiseprediger* (itinerant ministry) concept which would be so widely employed in the scattered Canadian communities in years to come. Itinerant ministers would conduct services, Bible studies, and home visitations, and some of them would also dispense medicines. In 1890 Manitoba as a special field was assigned to N. F. Toews, and many others followed Baer and Toews.<sup>24</sup>

The *Reiseprediger* of the General Conference was not able to tie any of the Russian immigrant groups to itself organizationally as had so successfully been done in the United States, but their influence was felt none the less. Among the people who found much support from and for them was Johann Funk of the West Reserve. By 1888 Funk was insisting on the founding of a teacher-training school in Manitoba to provide teachers for the elementary schools. But not all of the Bergthaler people of the West Reserve, not to mention the Old Colony, were ready to go that far. He proceeded to organize a school society which would support him, and in 1889-90 such a school was actually in session at Gretna under the leadership of William Rempel, a trained teacher recently arrived from Russia. The opposition grew, however, and after one year the school closed again. Then the Manitoba government took an interest in the founding of a normal school which would train teachers especially for the Mennonite districts. The result was that a fresh start was made in 1891, with H. H. Ewert, a General Conference educator newly arrived from Kansas, at the helm.

Ewert stayed for over 40 years, in spite of the bitter controversy that ensued immediately after his arrival. Both Funk and Ewert encountered massive opposition. Suffice it to say here that in the spring of 1892 four West Reserve communities once again asked the bishop from the East to come and baptize their young people, a total of 98. A year later these same communities called upon Gerhard Wiebe to ordain a new bishop more to their liking. He was Abraham Doerksen from the village of Sommerfeld, and the majority of the Bergthaler people of the West Reserve left Funk and followed him. Immediately they became known as the Sommerfelder Church after the village in which the bishop resided, to distinguish themselves from the Bergthaler Church led by Funk.<sup>25</sup> Thus the Bergthaler people who had migrated

from Russia in the 1870s came to be divided into three ecclesiastical groups: Bergthaler and Sommerfelder in the West Reserve, and Chortitzer in the East Reserve.

Of the three groups, the Sommerfelder was the largest, more than four times the size of the Bergthaler and more than twice the size of the Chortitzer. In terms of cultural and spiritual affinity the Chortitzer and Sommerfelder were close and, except for their geographic separation by the river and the Reserves, they might have been a single unit. Because of its size and because of the educational strife which focused on the West Reserve, the Sommerfelder, who tended toward the Old Colony in educational matters, became much more prominent than the Chortitzer. The Chortitzer, like the *Kleine Gemeinde*, hardly participated in the cultural conflicts which descended on the West Reserve.

In spite of the large defection, Funk did retain a core of supporters, including some of the people defecting from the Old Colony group who rallied to his support. In the village of Hoffnungsfeld was a progressive-minded schoolteacher by the name of Jacob Hoepfner, who two decades later would succeed Funk as bishop of what had become a minority Bergthaler church. His interest in four-part harmony singing and in Bible study led to the termination of his teaching contract, but he soon found a new opportunity in Schanzenfeld. In the end, the entire village of Hoffnungsfeld was lost to the Old Colony, in part to the Bergthaler and in part to the Mennonite Brethren Church, which found its first opening in Canada there. Begun as a minority movement, the Bergthaler were destined to grow both from their own population and from the influx of progressive-minded Sommerfelder. The progressive-minded Old Colony, on the other hand, might end up either with the Sommerfelder or with the Bergthaler.

There appeared, however, another ecclesiastical option on the West Reserve, similar to that provided by the Bruderthaler on the East Reserve. This option was the Mennonite Brethren Church. There were at that time Mennonite Brethren communities in Dakota, Kansas, Minnesota and Nebraska with 18 places of worship, 1,266 members, seven elders and 52 ministers and deacons.<sup>26</sup> These were all organized together into a Conference. As in Russia the Mennonite Brethren in the United States adopted a policy of seeking converts in other Mennonite groups, as well as in society generally. The Russian development of the



movement had proved the conversion potential among conservative groups. The success of John Holdeman in Manitoba had not gone unnoticed, nor had the movement in Manitoba of Mormon and Swedenborgian evangelists. The southern Manitoba communities had become somewhat of a free-for-all to the extent that access could be gained not only by government officials, settlement agents, inspectors of all kinds, and "tourists," but also by evangelists. The southern Manitoba reserves shared this experience with the colonies in southern Russia earlier in the nineteenth century.

The 1883 Conference of Mennonite Brethren authorized two ministers to visit the communities in Manitoba. They were Heinrich Voth of Minnesota because of his proximity, and David Dyck of Kansas because he had relatives in Manitoba. Their contacts in 1884 led to further Conference authorization, and for the next five years Elder Voth visited Manitoba at least once annually. Voth's first preaching services were in Hoffnungsfeld, where he gained an immediate opposition. On one occasion three "visitors" to his service planned to seize the American, take him to the border, and send him back to Minnesota. Their plans fell through when at least one of the three was converted.<sup>27</sup>

Voth's visits led to conversions and the rebaptism by immersion of eight persons in 1886. Two years later the organization of the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada took place at Burwalde, north of the present site of Winkler and well outside the West Reserve. Voth continued his work, though not without opposition, which came in the form of personal harassment and official Old Colony warnings to the faithful that they should stay away from him. The itinerant minister, however, found many people "who were afraid of being lost and who feared eternal punishment" and these opened their doors to him, not least of all because he was a kindly gentleman, sincere and well versed in the Bible.<sup>28</sup>

The first Mennonite Brethren congregation was organized with 16 members in 1888. By 1895 David Dyck had consented to move to Manitoba. A meeting-house was erected at Burwalde, near Dead Horse Creek, the place of the first baptism. By 1897 the group was ready to move the church to Winkler, though not everybody wanted it right inside the little town for fear that "urban" influence would be corrupting. A compromise was reached and the church brought to the edge of town, but only after its move had been halted a mile away for several days.<sup>29</sup>

Thereafter the Mennonite Brethren became the urbanizers in the Winkler area, the role played by the Bruderthaler in the Steinbach area and the Bergthaler in the Altona area. Indeed, the Brethren would soon establish a Mennonite outpost in Winnipeg, thus anticipating the time a half-century later when Mennonites by the thousands would make the big city their home. For immediate growth, however, the Brethren had to move into the rural areas, where two satellite congregations for Winkler were established on the northern fringes of the West Reserve at Grossweide near Horndean and also at Kronsart.<sup>30</sup>

The Canadian beginnings for the Mennonite Brethren were small, but the prospects and optimism were such that the Mennonite Brethren Conference of North America decided to hold their 1898 session at Winkler. The real advance in Canada, however, would depend on immigration, first from the United States to Saskatchewan and later to all the prairie provinces from Russia. For the time being, only small numbers could be persuaded to leave the Old Colony and Sommerfelder for a church community, which was allegedly more spiritual. In the West as in the East Reserve, the overwhelming majority of Mennonites believed that a greater spirituality lay in resisting revivalism, acculturation and the breakdown of community which inevitably came with it.

Thus, the Brethren as well as the Bruderthaler and the Bergthaler had to be satisfied with minority positions for quite some time. The majority groups, however, were far from secure. The conservative spirituality was being challenged not only by progressive Mennonites but also by the government. The possibility of preserving it elsewhere became evident — both the Old Colony and the Sommerfelder were joining the movement of settlers into the Northwest Territories.

## FOOTNOTES

1. E. K. Francis, "Tradition and Progress Among the Mennonites in Manitoba," *Manitoba Quarterly Review*, XXIV (October 1950), pp. 312-28.
2. First reliable statistics available. See *Der Mitarbeiter*, VII (February 1913), p. 37.
3. Francis, for instance, uses the Fuerstenland name frequently. See

- E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), pp. 87-96.
4. For the best description of the Old Colony way of life see Calvin Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 302 pp.
  5. For the most comprehensive treatment of the Bergthaler, see H. J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), 379 pp.
  6. For the story of the Kleine Gemeinde see P. J. B. Reimer, ed., *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1812-1962* (Steinbach, Man.: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), 180 pp.
  7. Isaac M. Dyck, *Auswanderung der Reinland Mennoniten von Canada nach Mexico* (Cuahatemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico: Imprenta Colonial, 1970), p. 21. See also Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland Nach Amerika* (Winnipeg: Druckerei der Nordwesten, 1900), 58 pp.
  8. An account of the event as experienced by an opponent is "Schriftmaessige Erwaegung ueber den Zustand unserer Gemeinde," an 1878 document of which an Abraham Buhler was the author and Wilhelm Rempel the scribe. Copy at CGC; original with Bishop Abram J. Buhler, Warman, Sask.
  9. *Ibid.*
  10. See Francis, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
  12. *Ibid.*
  13. See H. B. Bender, "Mennonitische Rundschau," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, pp. 647-48; see also Frank H. Epp, "The Making and Unmaking of Inter-Mennonite Periodicals" (unpublished research paper, Bethel College, 1956) (CGC).
  14. John F. Funk, *The Mennonite Church and Her Accusers* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Company, 1878), 210 pp.
  15. Clarence Hiebert, "The Holdeman People: A Study of the Church of God in Christ Mennonite, 1858-1969" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1971), pp. 260-61.
  16. P. J. B. Reimer, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
  17. H. S. Bender, "Kleine Gemeinde," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, pp. 196-99.
  18. A. Warkentin, *Reflections on Our Heritage: A History of Steinbach and the R.M. of Hanover from 1874* (Steinbach, Man.: Derksen Printers, 1971), pp. 106-7.
  19. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
  20. P. J. B. Reimer, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7.
  21. Gerhard Wiebe, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

22. H. J. Gerbrandt, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-91.
23. H. P. Krehbiel, *The History of the General Conference Mennonite Church of the Mennonites of North America* (Canton, Ohio: published by the author, 1898), Vol. I, p. 21.
24. H. J. Gerbrandt, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
26. J. H. Lohrenz, "Mennonite Brethren Church," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, pp. 595-602.
27. See Frank Brown, *Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler, Manitoba, 1888-1963; 75th Anniversary Publication*, p. 4; and J. A. Toews, "History of the Mennonite Brethren Church" (unpublished manuscript, 1973), pp. 232-33.
28. Frank Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 42, and J. A. Toews, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-55.
30. A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinde* (Hillsboro, Kans.: General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1955), 491 ff.

