Provenance

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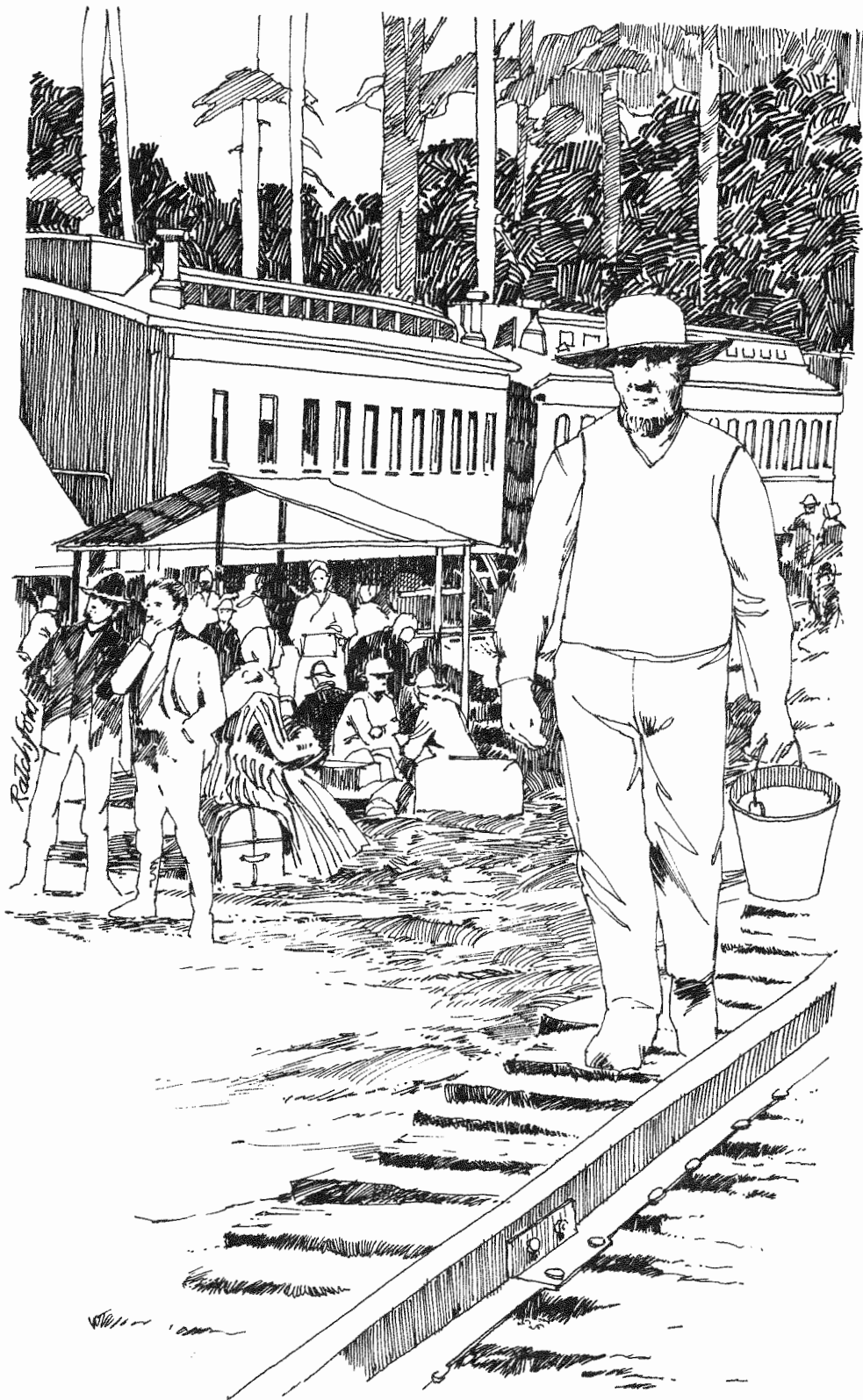
To New Homesteads by Rail

13. Settlement in Alberta and Saskatchewan

*A few conservative leaders thought if they could place a
greater distance between their settlements and Canadian
influences they could still return to the insular life that they
had led in Russia. . . . However, not all were fleeing
"progress." Many land-hungry Mennonites were also
heading West to homestead again —* JOHN H. WARKENTIN.[1]

THE PRESSURES which Mennonites felt in Manitoba and
other parts of the world around the turn of the century
once again coincided with new settlement opportunities. Once
again a new frontier allowed the beginning of a new life, which
for some meant a better preservation of the old life. As new rail-
road lines were built and the northwest territories were organized
into two new Canadian provinces (1905), thousands of Men-
nonites from Manitoba, Ontario, and various American states, as
well as Prussia and Russia, once more undertook the hardships
of homesteading in order to enjoy the freedoms of the frontier.

These new migrations were characterized, however, not so
much by mass movement and block settlement as by individual
effort and the action of small family or congregational units who
selected widely scattered lands and regions as they deemed best.
The result was that over a period of two decades numerous new
Mennonite settlements dotted the western Canadian map, with
one as far away as the interior of British Columbia (see Table
1).[2] While the Mennonite population in Ontario and Manitoba

remained relatively stable from 1901 to 1911, the regions farther west enjoyed manifold increases.

TABLE 1

MENNONITES IN CANADA IN 1901, 1911, 1921*

PROVINCE	1901	1911	1921
British Columbia	11	191	173
Alberta	546	1,555	3,131
Saskatchewan	3,787	14,586	20,568
Manitoba	15,289	15,709	21,321
Ontario	15,257	12,861	13,655
Quebec	50	51	6
Nova Scotia	9	18	2
New Brunswick	–	1	4
Prince Edward Island	–	–	3
Yukon and Northwest Territories	–	–	1
Total	31,949	44,972	58,874

* Total population according to Dominion Census.

This distant scattering was of some concern to those leaders who still felt that Mennonites could and should survive as a group. The extraordinary spreading out of their people prompted some leaders to make a great effort to tie them all together. The result was the formation of new conferences, notably the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, which would some day be the largest of the Canadian conference families. Since no single conference, however well-intentioned, could embrace all the diverse congregations and their members, any comprehensive Mennonite unity was at best a dream of a very distant reality.

Some activity, predicting the westward move, had already been evident in the West Reserve of Manitoba, during its second decade as a settlement. By the end of 1888, a deputation from Gretna had inspected lands in California, Oregon, and Washington, as well as in British Columbia, but none of the ten families who subsequently ventured to the west coast stayed there.[3] However, if the far west held no attraction at this point, the mid-west did, especially after the Dominion government and the

land agents decided that the northwest territories, newly opened by the Trans-Canada Railroad, were a good place to live.

In the Northwest Territories, as in Manitoba, settlement began slowly but surely after the lands of the Hudson's Bay Company were incorporated into the Dominion in 1870. The Indians, and the Métis who completely identified with them, were placed on reserves. Other Métis followed a settlement pattern similar to that of the new immigrants although dissatisfaction with their new lot reached rebellion proportions on several occasions. The most famous of these rebellions happened in 1885 in the Saskatchewan Valley, which the Mennonites were about to select as another homeland. The defeat of Louis Riel at Batoche and his trial and hanging in Regina finally pacified the 2,500 Indians, Métis and French people in the Valley at the time.[4]

Important agents of the national policy of pacification and occupation were the Northwest Mounted Police. A peaceful, non-violent West was essential to the building of railroads and to the permanent attraction of settlers, which were, in turn, necessary for the establishment and maintenance of a separate Canadian nation on the North American continent.[5] This was not an easy task because the nation to the south, partly caught up in the international imperialist mood of the times, had expansionist designs of its own.[6]

The permanent peace and protection sought by the Canadian authorities against native uprisings and American intrusions depended on permanent settlement. In some ways Canada faced a problem similar, albeit not quite as acute, to that of Catherine of Russia a century earlier. Unless permanent agricultural settlers were brought in, the nomadic natives indigenous to the area and troublesome Turks from the south would make nation-building difficult if not impossible. The part which Mennonites played in the Canadian domestication program, first in Manitoba and later in Saskatchewan, led one sociologist to conclude that "the Mennonite farming invasion" was essential to the national policy:

> Each time when the hunters and trappers had been cleared
> away, the Mennonites moved in . . . It was a struggle
> between the food gatherers and the food growers — the
> hunters and the farmers. The Mennonites were part of the
> farming invasion.[7]

A key factor in opening the new Mennonite areas was the

advent of the east-west and north-south railroads, the latter being connected to the trans-Canada line at such new sites as Regina and Calgary. The line from Regina through Saskatoon to Prince Albert opened up the Saskatchewan Valley in 1890, and in the same year a similar line reached from Calgary to Red Deer and later all the way to Edmonton. Within a few years 13 German settlements were established along this line, a few of them Mennonite.[8]

As part of this settlement promotion the Canadian Pacific Railway had in 1889 sponsored a "homeseekers' excursion" for prospective settlers. Among the prospectors were Elias W. Bricker of Woolwich Township in Ontario[9] and, in all likelihood, some Mennonites from Manitoba. Within a year, West Reserve Mennonites were applying to the Dominion government for exclusive reserve lands north of Calgary and some Ontario Amish and Mennonites were inquiring about homesteading in the Peace River district.[10] A Mennonite petition for homesteading rights in the Peace River district of Alberta was denied.[11] Since similar bids with respect to Saskatchewan proved successful, one can only speculate that there may have been some regional opposition in Alberta. The *Edmonton Bulletin*, for instance, seriously questioned the establishment of reserves:

> This is a favor that is not extended to ordinary Canadian or British settlers, and the question naturally arises, is a Mennonite so much more desirable a settler than any other man that he should be accorded privileges not accorded to others? If Canadian-born Mennonites are so prejudiced against their fellow citizens that to induce them to remain in the country it is necessary to give them a reservation by themselves, it is evidence that there are disadvantages as well as advantages connected with a Mennonite population.[12]

The Mennonites, however, were not barred from the region altogether. On the contrary, they were given some informal concessions which allowed them to settle more or less by themselves, particularly in the Gleichen area, where a number of families arrived from southern Manitoba in 1891 and temporarily made their home.[13] Others, mostly Bergthaler, moved to Didsbury which became the most permanent settlement of Mennonites in Alberta. At the same time Elias Bricker moved his family to High River, south of Calgary, to be followed by a dozen others

within the decade, enough to form an (Old) Mennonite congrega-
tion.[14] Another (Old) Mennonite settlement including settlers
from Ontario emerged at Carstairs near Didsbury in 1893.[15]

The Didsbury-Carstairs area represented a merger not only of
Bergthaler Mennonites from Manitoba and the (Old) Mennonites
from Ontario, but also of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ from
Ontario. Although Jacob Y. Shantz, the already-famous colonizer,
had preceded the (Old) Mennonites by one year when, in 1893,
he made his twenty-sixth trip to the west, he did not actually
bring settlers in until 1894 when 34 persons, including some of his
relatives, left Waterloo by train. Seven carloads were necessary
to transport the group and their equipment for what must have
been one of the best settlement starts in the west.[16] Nevertheless,
the group did not escape the rigours of pioneering as reported
then:

> We started to look for the iron stakes that indicated our
> homesteads. These stakes were surrounded by four square
> holes about a foot deep. In many instances these holes
> were grown over with grass and brush. We had no compass.
> We were supposed to take 900 steps to the quarter section
> in length but we did not always hold to the right direction
> . . . The tent was burned a day later in the prairie fire . . .
> Everybody went out to assist in back firing from the
> plowed furrow, but very often the wind picked up a bunch
> of burning grass and threw it over our heads behind us . . .
> We used to walk nearly two miles to the railway track to
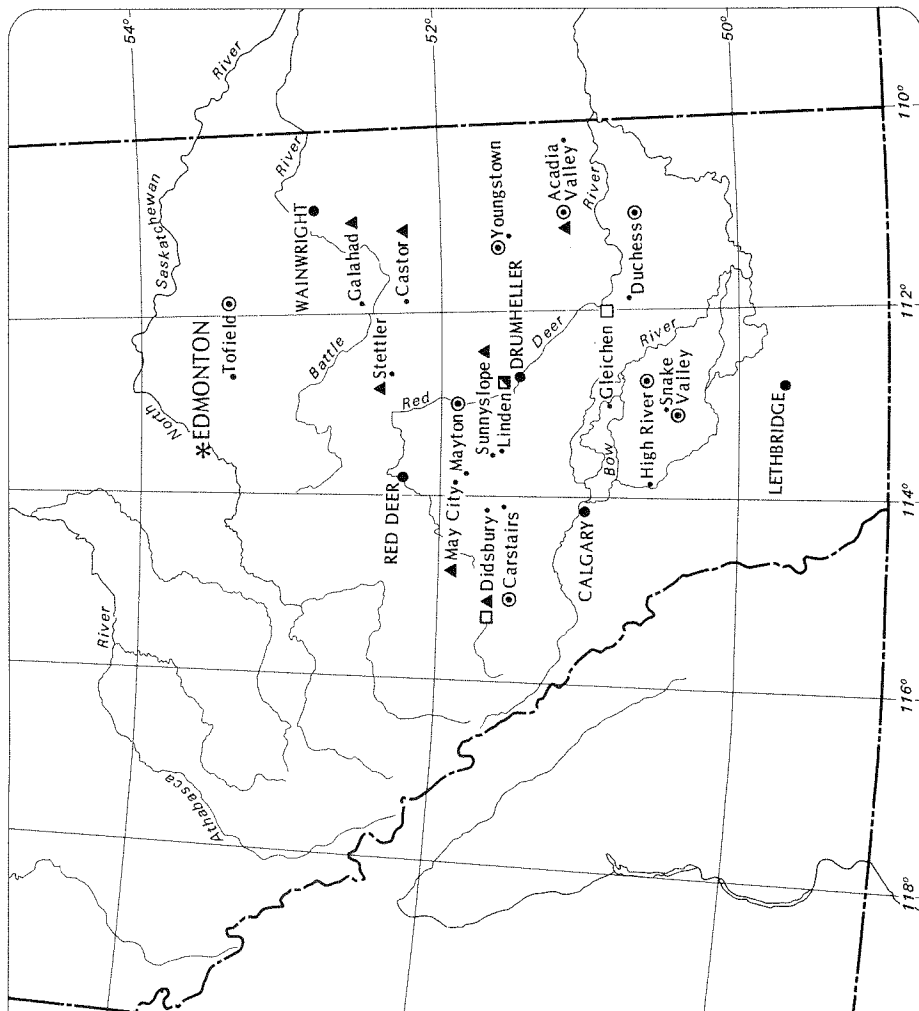> pound out our steel plowshares cold . . .[17]

The first group of Mennonite Brethren in Christ settlers was
followed by others. But the denomination's most rapid expansion
was due to vigorous missionary activity from the outset; six con-
gregations were founded in the first two decades, including a
mission in Edmonton (see Table 2).[18]

The (Old) Mennonites, who lost some converts to the Mennon-
ite Brethren in Christ, gained some of their own, mainly through
immigration from the States. Not only did the Iowa and Ne-
braska Amish who settled at Tofield become an (Old) Mennonite
congregation, but so did the people at Mayton whose Old Order
background was with the Stauffer people who migrated from
Waterloo to Iowa in the 1880s. The conservative Mennonites
who came to Duchess from Pennsylvania likewise became part
of the (Old) Mennonite fold – largely due to the work of Ontario
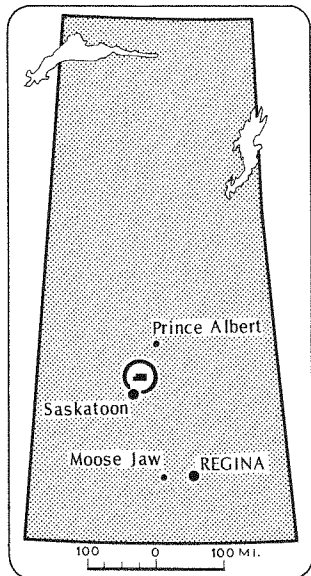
EARLY ALBERTA
MENNONITE COMMUNITIES
c. 1900

○ Mennonite Brethren
□ General Conference Mennonites
◉ (Old) Mennonites
▲ Mennonite Brethren in Christ
◩ Church of God in Christ
   Mennonites

20   0   100
          Miles

THE HAGUE-OSLER RESERVE IN SASKATCHEWAN
(Established in 1895)

5   0   5

Miles

Prince Albert

Saskatoon

Moose Jaw   REGINA

100   0   100 MI.

CNR

T41

Rosengart

Reinfeld

Hochfeld

CNR

Hague

Chortitza

Hochstadt

Blumenthal

Grünthal

Schönwiese   Neuanlage

Rosenbach

T40

Grünfeld

Rosenfeld

Reinland

RIVER

Neuhorst

Blumenheim

Olgafeld

T39

Osler

Kronsthal

SASKATCHEWAN

Edenberg

Warman

Osterwick

TABLE 2

NEW SETTLEMENTS IN ALBERTA AROUND THE TURN OF THE CENTURY*

PLACE	DENOMINATIONAL FAMILY†	DATE	ORIGIN
Acadia Valley	OM	1908	Ontario
	MBC	1913	Ontario
Carstairs	OM	1893	Ontario
Castor	MBC	1906	Ontario
Didsbury	MBC	1894	Ontario
	GC	1901	Manitoba
Duchess	OM	1915	USA
Galahad	MBC	1915	Alberta
Gleichen	GC	1891	Manitoba
High River	OM	1891	Ontario
Linden	CGCM	1902	USA
May City	MBC	1906	Didsbury
Mayton§	OM	1901	USA
Snake Valley	OM	1910	Ontario
Stettler	MBC	1909	Ontario
Sunnyslope	MBC	1909	Didsbury
Tofield‡	OM	1910	USA
Youngstown	OM	1910	USA

* The Alberta region was founded as a province in 1905.
† OM — (Old) Mennonites; MBC — Mennonite Brethren in Christ; GC — General Conference; CGCM — Church of God in Christ Mennonite.
‡ Of Old Order origin, including some who moved to Iowa from Ontario; most moved to Tofield by 1918.
§ Original settlers of Amish origin, including some who had moved to Iowa-Nebraska from Ontario.

bishops such as S. F. Coffman and Elias Weber who were sent to minister to the distant and scattered frontier flock.

The settlement of both American and Canadian families also took place at Linden where some Holdeman people from Oregon and other American states arrived by 1902, soon to be joined by their counterparts from Manitoba. The result was a more intimate gathering of Swiss and Russian Mennonites of Holdeman persuasion than had happened anywhere before.[19]

Settlements emerging simultaneously in Saskatchewan and

Alberta were similar in that they represented a wide scattering of small and diverse communities. However, the Saskatchewan Mennonite population turned out to be predominantly Dutch-German while the Alberta people were mostly of Swiss-German background. Alberta had one Dutch congregation at Didsbury, while Saskatchewan had one Swiss congregation at Guernsey and another small one at Alsack.

In Saskatchewan the earliest centre of activity was the Saskatchewan Valley north of Saskatoon. There, Abram Buhr of Gretna, who had already staked a claim at Gleichen in Alberta, claimed the first Mennonite homestead just north of a railroad landing called Rosthern.[20] He was not allowed to retain it since he did not settle on it, so it passed into the hands of Gerhard Ens, a young and energetic immigrant from Russia who became a most vigorous immigration agent himself.[21]

Born in Russia in 1863, Ens had migrated to Canada in 1891 and had been among the first in a new wave of about 900 to arrive in the 1890s.[22] After spending the winter in southern Manitoba, he joined five Bergthaler families who were ready to homestead in the new area. Ens not only took up a homestead, but he also opened a store and the town's first post office — both in a boxcar loaned to him by the Canadian Pacific Railway. Soon he was vigorously promoting settlement on the frontier, becoming an agent for Clifford Sifton who, as a member of Wilfrid Laurier's cabinet after 1896, was the most vigorous promoter of immigration that Canada had yet seen. Ens travelled in the United States as well as back to Russia, where he predicted absorption into Russia for those Mennonites who would not emigrate.[23] He anticipated that the assimilation would be so complete that even "the finest microscope will not be able to spot them."[24]

Ens found a partner in settlement promotion in Peter Jansen of Nebraska, who joined him in the formation of the Saskatchewan-Manitoba Land Company. Like Jansen, who became a Nebraska senator, Gerhard Ens entered politics and became an elected member of the first Saskatchewan legislature in 1905.[25] His wide-ranging interests, however, centred around Rosthern, which he felt could become the wheat capital of the world. By 1905, when the population of the incorporated town was still less than 1,000, there were no fewer than eight grain elevators, making the town one of the largest grain shipping centres in the new provinces. Most of that grain was grown by Mennonites.

A variety of Mennonites had settled in the Rosthern region by

then and the majority of them found a common community in what became known as the Rosenorter Mennonite Church. At the head of the community stood Peter Regier, a bishop of the Rosenort congregation in Prussia, which he had left in 1893 because of his uncompromising desire to avoid the pressures of militarism. (Apparently many others in Prussia had felt otherwise and re-accepted into the congregation those young men who had returned from active military service.)[26]

Like Ens, Regier spent the winter in southern Manitoba before taking up a homestead at Tiefengrund, near Rosthern. On July 2, 1894, a few months after his arrival, he conducted the first brotherhood meeting, which led to the organization of the Rosenort church. This, in turn, helped to bring together the diverse elements among the immigrants, that is, those coming directly from Russia and Prussia, and those arriving from Manitoba and later from the United States. Three weeks later, the first election of preachers took place at Eigenheim, six miles west of Rosthern. The first church was built in 1896 on a 20-acre plot donated for that purpose by the railway company. However, Eigenheim was only one of the worship centres that arose as immigrants rapidly filled up the regions around Rosthern.

Meanwhile, a mass movement of Old Colony people from Manitoba's West Reserve had been partially accomplished. Petitioned by the Mennonites, the Dominion government had, on January 23, 1895, reserved for their exclusive settlement the even-numbered sections of four townships in the Hague-Osler area which lay along the railway line between Saskatoon and Rosthern (odd-numbered sections had to be obtained from the railway).[27] The government justified the reservation on the basis of precedents set in Manitoba and on the grounds that this was the way of reaching the goal of filling Canada with expert agriculturalists:

> These people had prospered to a remarkable degree since their arrival in Manitoba, and have fulfilled with singular good faith all the obligations undertaken by them in that relation, repaying the advance of money made to them, with interest, to the last cent, and fully colonizing their reservations with the choicest settlers . . . it is important, in the public interest, that the efforts of the Mennonites to induce the immigration of their friends in Europe and elsewhere to the Northwest should be encouraged, and to do this it is necessary to give the intending settlers an assurance that they will be enabled to carry out the

principles of their social system, and to settle together in
hamlets (for which provision is made by Section 37 of the
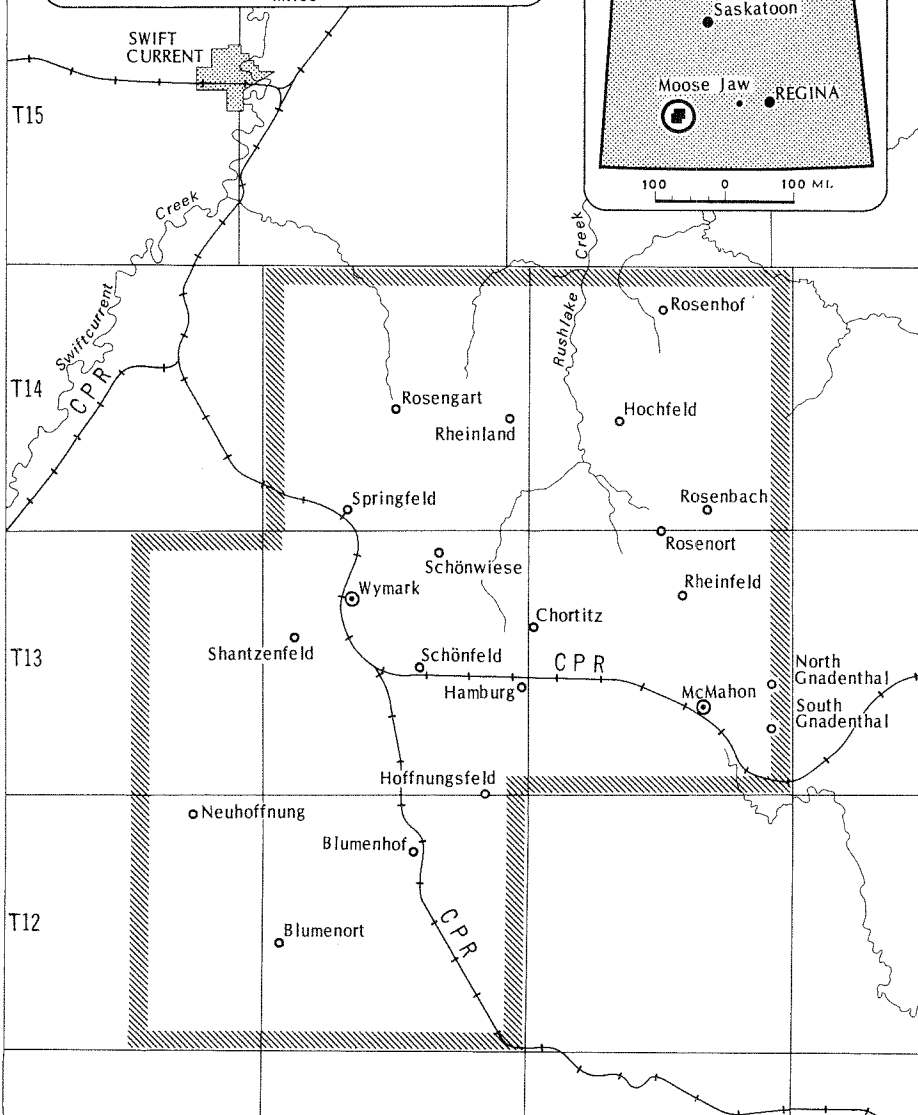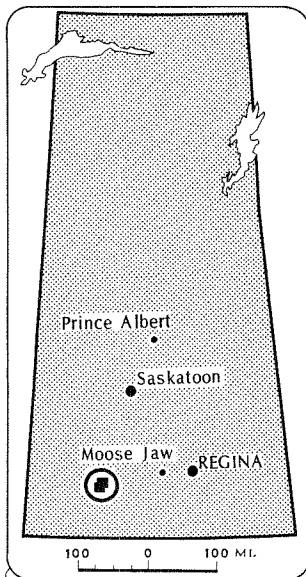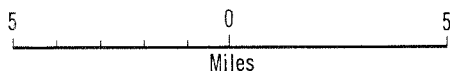Dominion Lands Act) by obtaining entries for contiguous
lands.[28]

In May of 1895 the first trainload of Old Colony Mennonites
from the West Reserve arrived at the Hague siding, where they
lived in railroad cars for two weeks until the first homes could be
erected.[29] Others followed and within three years the Mennonites
were requesting reservation of another adjoining township which
was granted to them for similar reasons and on similar terms.[30]

Population pressures within the Manitoba reserves continued,
however, in spite of the fact that numerous farmers were buying
land just outside the Manitoba Reserves and moving to Saskat-
chewan. In the East Reserve the pressure was relieved by move-
ment into the empty French-Canadian municipalities to the
north and east of the Reserve. In the West Reserve in 1897
farmers were buying land as far north as Lowe Farm.[31] Others,
however, looked farther afield for reasons stated by John War-
kentin:

> Many of the conservative Mennonites wanted to leave the
> reserve because they felt that they and their children were
> exposed too directly to outside influences. Others were not
> satisfied with the climate, and wanted to move to the West
> Coast. But the strictly economic reasons were the most
> important. Some Mennonites were so poor that they
> couldn't start farming in the reserve where farm prices were
> high, so they were anxious to homestead in the West.
> Many found it to their advantage to sell their farms at a
> good price (often to outsiders), move west and homestead
> again, thus making a handsome profit by the move.[32]

The Old Colony leaders hoped for as much collective move-
ment and settlement as possible and thus, in 1904, they were
once more appealing to the Dominion government for a reserva-
tion — this time for vacant lands south of Swift Current. These
lands were vacant because they were believed to be of poor
quality. The Mennonites, however, claimed that they would be
able to work the lands successfully.[33] The Crown believed them
from the beginning and granted them, for exclusive use, both
the even-numbered and the available odd-numbered sections in

THE SWIFT CURRENT RESERVE
IN SASKATCHEWAN
(Established in 1904)

5   0   5
Miles

SWIFT
CURRENT

T15

Creek

Swiftcurrent
C P R

T14

Creek

Rushlake

Rosenhof

Rosengart
Rheinland

Hochfeld

Springfeld

Rosenbach

Rosenort

Schönwiese

Rheinfeld

Wymark

Chortitz

T13

Shantzenfeld

Schönfeld   C P R

Hamburg

McMahon

North
Gnadenthal

South
Gnadenthal

Hoffnungsfeld

Neuhoffnung

Blumenhof

T12

Blumenort

C P R

Prince Albert

Saskatoon

Moose Jaw   REGINA

100   0   100 MI.

six townships. The odd ones were to be purchased at $3 per acre in ten annual instalments with interest at five per cent.[34]

In both areas, Hague-Osler and Swift Current, the Old Colony people sought to reconstruct the intimate and closed Mennonite communities as they remembered them from Russia and as they hoped to keep them in Manitoba. In the two reservations, 29 villages were founded,[35] and the old style of community and religious life was restored.[36] The Old Colony Mennonites who settled on reserves were followed by the Sommerfelder, whose individual homestead settlements were near the reserves in the Aberdeen area east of the Hague-Osler reserve, as well as near Rosthern and in the Herbert area north of the Swift Current reserve. By 1906 there was movement also toward a large area of land east of Prince Albert, known as the Carrot River Valley Mennonite Reserve.

The government concessions made to the Mennonites at this time had several parallels which had arisen from the government's satisfactory agricultural experience with the Mennonites. In 1898 and 1899, respectively, special concessions were made to 7,000 Russian Doukhobors who were about to arrive in Saskatchewan, and to the Hutterites who had already begun to arrive in Manitoba from South Dakota.[37] Since these were religious pacifist groups, they both required assurances that they would be granted military exemption. Both groups were exempted by separate Orders-in-Council on the basis of the statutes which had given similar privileges to Quakers, Mennonites and Tunkers.[38] Since the three groups — Doukhobors, Hutterites and Mennonites — shared a pacifistic doctrine as well as a Russian origin, a strange language, and communal organization of some degree, it was not surprising that, in the public mind, they should attain a common identity. In Canadian law, the nineteenth-century "pacifist trinity" (Quakers, Tunkers and Mennonites) was, in the twentieth century, replaced by a strange new grouping (Mennonites, Doukhobors and Hutterites), which will be seen more clearly in the context of the Great War. This latter trio, however, associated less with each other in western Canada than did the former three groups in eastern Canada.

The migration of the Doukhobors began in 1899, assisted by Leo Tolstoy and the British Quakers. Nearly six thousand detrained at Yorkton and formed three colonies with 47 villages. Two other settlements were founded in the Saskatchewan Valley with 10 villages. Of these new settlers it was said that they were

excellent gardeners and craftsmen. Their settlements were more largely self-contained than those of any other people. They made good farmers, though their lives too were disrupted by pressures against the communities.[39]

The Hutterites, who numbered about 100 families or 700 individuals at the time of their immigration in the 1870s from Russia to the Dakotas, had doubled their population by this time, in spite of some defections to the Mennonites. About a dozen colonies had been established in South Dakota and plans were underway for moves to Montana. They were, therefore, experiencing population pressures of their own, but in 1898 they turned their sights on Manitoba due to the threat of the Spanish-American War. They sought and obtained from Canada the right to establish colonies and the right to military exemption. In 1899 they established themselves on the Roseau River east of Dominion City in Manitoba. However, after five years they returned to South Dakota. The war between Spain and the United States had been of short duration, while the land in Manitoba was poor and floods were frequent.[40]

Canada, which one day soon would think negatively about the Hutterites, was sorry to see them go since the departure to the United States of good agriculturalists was entirely contrary to the Sifton plan. At that time of drought in Kansas, Sifton was wooing the Mennonites not only from the United States but also from Russia. In 1898 Peter Krahn and Peter Braun, a delegation from Russia, had arrived to tour the Northwest and there was optimism that another great flow from Russia would result. Said Sifton's German immigration agent in Winnipeg:

> This will, no doubt, have a very great effect upon
> immigration from that quarter, as until now, the people of
> Russia have only had the letters of friends in this country
> to depend on.[41]

The immigration from Russia had, however, nearly run its course for the time being, probably because the times were good for the Mennonites in Russia and most did not see the dark clouds on the horizon, in spite of the war with the Japanese and revolutionary ferment everywhere.[42] Immigration from the United States, however, was a different story, and though the groups that came were not large there were numerous Russian Mennonite contingents from various states that made their homes in Saskatchewan during these years (see Table 3).[43]

TABLE 3

MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS ESTABLISHED IN SASKATCHEWAN AROUND 1900

PLACE	CONGREGATION	DENOMINA-TION†	DATE*	ORIGIN
Aberdeen	Aberdeen	MB	1906	USA
	Bergthaler	SM	1902	Manitoba
	Rosenorter	GC	1910	Prussia
Alsack	Alsack	MBC	1910	Alberta
Borden	Hoffnungsfeld	MB	1904	USA, Russia
Carrot River	Bergthaler	SM	1908	Saskatchewan, Manitoba
Dalmeny	Ebenezer	MB	1901	USA
Drake	Nordstern	GC	1906	USA
	Drake	GC	1913	USA
Eigenheim	Rosenorter	GC	1894	Russia, USA
Flowing Well	Gnadenau	MB	1907	USA
Fox Valley	Fox Valley	MB	1914	USA
Great Deer	Bethel	GC		
Greenfarm	Greenfarm	MB	1912	Russia
Guernsey	Sharon	OM	1905	Ontario, USA
Hague-Osler	Rosenort	GC	1911	Manitoba
	Old Colony (14 villages)	OC	1895	Manitoba
Hepburn	Hepburn	MB	1910	USA
	Brotherfield	MB	1898	Russia, USA
Herbert	Herbert	GC	1904	Manitoba
	Herbert	MB	1905	Russia, USA
Herbert Area‡	Sommerfelder	SM	1900	Manitoba
Kelstern	Elim	MB	1907	Russia, USA
Laird	Laird	MB	1898	Manitoba
	Rosenort	GC	1894	Russia
Langham	Bruderthaler	EMB	1912	USA
	Emmanuel	KMB	1901	USA
	Zoar	GC	1912	USA
Main Centre	Main Centre	MB	1904	Russia
Rosthern	Rosenorter	GC	1891	Russia, Manitoba
Swift Current	Old Colony (15 villages)	OC	1905	Manitoba
	Emmaus	GC	1914	Manitoba
Tiefengrund	Rosenorter	GC	1910	Prussia
Turnhill	Bethania	MB	1913	
	Bruderfeld	MB	1901	USA
Waldheim	Salem	KMB	1899	USA
	Waldheim	MB	1918	USA
	Zoar	GC		USA
Woodrow	Woodrow	MB	1909	USA

* Date of founding may refer to beginnings of settlement, congregational organization, ordination, or first church building.

† MB — Mennonite Brethren; MBC — Mennonite Brethren in Christ; SM — Sommerfelder Mennonites; GC — General Conference Mennonites; OM — (Old) Mennonites; OC — Old Colony Mennonites; EMB — Evangelical Mennonite Brethren; KMB — Krimmer Mennonite Brethren.

‡ Including Main Centre and Gouldtown.

General Conference Mennonites from Kansas, Oklahoma, and Minnesota established congregations (settlements) at Drake, Waldheim, and Langham, while others joined Manitoba Mennonites moving to Herbert and Swift Current and the Rosenort groups around Rosthern. Mennonite Brethren from Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma settled at Aberdeen, Borden, Dalmeny, Hepburn, Herbert, Laird, and Waldheim. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren from Nebraska and Kansas found a home at Langham and Waldheim, while the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren or Bruderthaler (as they were still known in Minnesota) founded one congregation at Langham.

Some (Old) Mennonites from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, joined their friends from Ontario in establishing a congregation of about 50 members at Guernsey in the first decade of the century.[44] The letters which American immigrants sent to their friends had the effect of confirming what the land and immigration agents were saying — that it was possible to survive in Canada. The following is a sample of such correspondence:
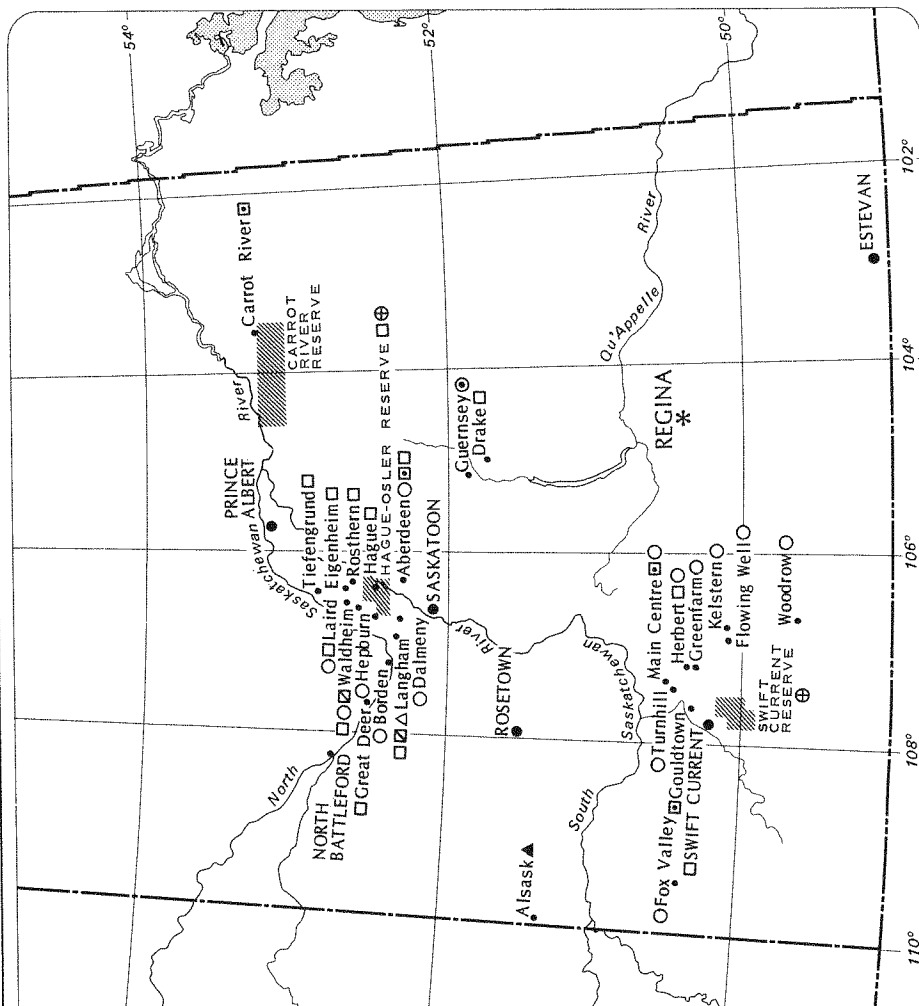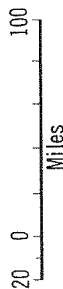
> The Giver of all good is showering blessings, both naturally and spiritually upon us . . . When some of our eastern friends hear of the grain grown in this land of snow, as some term it, they think it hardly possible to mature grain in so short a season . . . We had little work done on the land before May 1 and wheat that was sown at that time started to head from 60 to 70 days from time of sowing; and wheat sown as late as May 20 started heading in from 50 to 55 days from time of sowing. We expect wheat harvest to be here about August 20.[45]

With the start of the First World War in 1914, migration to Canada from Europe was terminated, but the Mennonites continued to trickle in from the United States. The movement nearly reached flood proportions when American harassment of conscientious objectors turned Canada into a place of political refuge.

The implications of the Mennonite scattering into scores of new little communities across the prairies were not lost in the minds of certain Mennonite leaders. They realized increasingly that unless special efforts were made to hold the Mennonite family together, its separate parts would be assimilated and disappear into the rest of the Canadian society. The general answer which Mennonitism had given to such drifting was a

EARLY SASKATCHEWAN MENNONITE COMMUNITIES
c. 1900

○   Mennonite Brethren

▫   General Conference Mennonites

▣   Sommerfelder Mennonites
(INCLUDING SASKATCHEWAN BERGTHALER)

▲   Mennonite Brethren in Christ

⊕   Old Colony Mennonites

▨   Krimmer Mennonite Brethren

△   Bruderthaler Mennonites

◉   (Old) Mennonites

20   0   100
Miles

Carrot River ▣

CARROT
RIVER
RESERVE

HAGUE-OSLER RESERVE ▫⊕

Guernsey ◉
Drake ▫

PRINCE
ALBERT

Tiefengrund ▫
○▫ Laird Eigenheim ▫
○ Waldheim • Rosthern ▫
○ Hepburn
Borden • Hague ▫
□▲ Langham ○ Aberdeen ▫▣▫
○ Dalmeny

Great Deer
▫▨ ○
NORTH
BATTLEFORD

SASKATOON ◉

REGINA
*

ESTEVAN •

Qu'Appelle River

ROSETOWN •

Turnhill Main Centre ▣○
○ Fox Valley ▫ Gouldtown
• Herbert ▣○
▫ SWIFT CURRENT • Greenfarm ○
Kelstern ○
Flowing Well ○
Woodrow ○

SWIFT
CURRENT
RESERVE
⊕

Alsask ▲

North River

South Saskatchewan River

closer community of the people and their congregations by form-
ing conferences.

As yet, there was little hope of forming a single conference,
though the idea was current in some areas and among some
people. In North America the first of a series of unofficial All-
Mennonite Conventions had been planned; it was held in 1913
at Berne, Indiana.[46] Generally speaking, however, the Mennonite
world was not ready for any serious ecumenicity in the early
twentieth century, even though in the wider Christian universe
there were ecumenical stirrings. The historic 1911 international
and ecumenical Missionary Conference in Edinburgh was then
in preparation and Canadian newspapers publicized the partici-
pation of Canadian churchmen in such events.[47] For Mennonites,
the divisions resulting from the awakenings and denominational
competitions were still too fresh and, besides, the whole idea of
"conference" was still being questioned almost everywhere it was
promoted.

The organizational character of Canadian Mennonitism around
1912 may be described in two different ways. On the one hand,
there were the independent congregations led by bishops, and on
the other hand, the conferences which tied like-minded congrega-
tions together, regionally and/or continentally. The conservative
groups retained the strong emphasis on the congregation that was
led by one bishop and several ministers and deacons, all of them
elected for life. In Ontario these included all the Amish groups,
the Reformed Mennonites, and the Old Order Mennonites. In
Manitoba and Saskatchewan, they were the Old Colony and the
Sommerfelder as well as the Kleine Gemeinde and the Chortitzer,
shown in Table 4.[48]

It should be indicated here that the Bergthaler of northern
Saskatchewan were most closely aligned with the Sommerfelder
family, which had been constituted in the West Reserve of
Manitoba in 1892-93 by Bishop Abraham Doerksen of the village
of Sommerfeld. However, in 1893, when the first Sommerfelder
began moving into the Northwest Territories, the name was still
new in Manitoba and thus the immigrants carried the old name
Bergthaler with them. The Saskatchewan Bergthaler (or Som-
merfelder), therefore, must not be confused with the Bergthaler
who stayed in Manitoba or with those who moved to Didsbury,
Alberta. The Saskatchewan Bergthaler appear to have had an
element of liberality about them, and thus were able to absorb
at least some of the immigrants coming to the Saskatchewan

TABLE 4

MENNONITE CONGREGATIONAL GROUPS
ORGANIZED AROUND BISHOPS (1912)

NAME	PLACE	BISHOP	MEMBERSHIP*
	Ontario		
Old Order	Waterloo North	Paul Martin	
	Markham	Christian Reesor	408
	Cayuga	Freeman Rittenhouse	
Amish	Wilmot	Daniel H. Steinman	
	East Zorra	Jacob M. Bender	
	Blake (Hay)	Jacob M. Bender	1,362
	Wellesley	Jacob Wagler	
	Mornington	Elias Frey (Ohio)	
Old Order Amish	Wellesley	Peter Jantzi	
	Mornington	Christian L. Kuepfer	
			200
Beachy Amish	Mornington	Nicholas Nafziger	
	Wellesley	Jacob F. Lichti	
Reformed Mennonites	Stevensville,	Wilmer Steele (1917)	300
	Port Colborne,		
	Rainham, Wilmot,		
	Arkona.		
	Manitoba		
Kleine Gemeinde	East Reserve	Peter R. Dueck	
	Morris Area	Jacob M. Kroeker	393
Chortitzer	East Reserve	Peter Toews	835
Sommerfelder	West Reserve	David Stoesz	2,085
Old Colony	West Reserve	Peter Wiebe	1,545
	Saskatchewan		
Old Colony	Hague-Osler	Jacob Wiens	
	Reserve		1,668
	Swift Current Reserve	Abram Wiebe	
Bergthaler	Aberdeen-Rosthern Area	Aron Zacharias	80†
	Carrot River Area	Cornelius Epp	30†
Sommerfelder	Herbert Area	David F. Doerksen	70†

* Includes baptized membership only. To obtain approximate total number of "souls" multiply by 2.4.
† Estimate.

Valley from other regions. One Johann J. Friesen, who had been born in Nebraska, became one of the leading Bergthaler ministers in 1914, serving them well for 30 years.

Among all these bishop-centred congregations, it was common in new settlements to elect new bishops and thereby to form independent congregations which were not linked to others by conferences. Only very rarely did all the bishops (and sometimes the ministers and deacons) come together to discuss common problems. Minutes were rarely kept. Thus, to give one example, the different Old Colony congregations in Manitoba and Saskatchewan could, even in their conservatism, develop different styles and outlooks, the particular congregational character being for the most part determined by the bishop. Only major questions, such as public school, militarism, and immigration, or the death of a bishop, might bring them together. The times when they met with leaders of other Mennonite groups were even rarer; not even the First World War brought them all together for consultation on its implications for them.

All the other Mennonite groups adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, the conference or denominational system. This system was characterized by the linking together of congregations through elected representatives who would meet annually, eventually under the guidance of a constitution, to discuss matters of common concern. The progressive development of the conference system saw ministers and deacons added to the bishops as representatives. Later, unordained lay delegates were added, and women and young people were involved in some instances.

All the conference systems had a North American context (see Chapter 10). Several of the congregational families in Canada remained small enough not to consider any regionalism. They were: the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman), the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (Bruderthaler), and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. Their American counterparts, however, quickly agreed to conduct their North American conferences at Canadian locations as soon as possible and as often as a proper rotation made it feasible (see Table 5).[49]

The larger Canadian groups, however, saw the need to establish regional conferences, such as those that had existed in Ontario for some time (see Table 6).[50] Four such conferences came into being in the West as a direct result of the new settlements in Saskatchewan and Alberta (see Table 7).[51] For the (Old) Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren in Christ this simply meant repeating in Alberta and Saskatchewan what they already had in

TABLE 5

EARLY CANADIAN GATHERINGS OF SMALLER NORTH AMERICAN GROUPS

NAME	FIRST CONFERENCE IN CANADA	CANADIAN MEMBERSHIP (1912)
Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman)	1921	247
Bruderthaler (EMB)	1911	242
Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB)	1912	72

TABLE 6

ONTARIO MENNONITE CONFERENCES*

NAME	DATE OF FOUNDING	MEMBERSHIP (1913)
Mennonite Conference of Ontario	1820	1,543
Canada District, Ontario Mennonite Brethren in Christ	1874	1,589

* Note that the Amish Mennonites, named in Table 4, did not organize a Conference until 1923.

TABLE 7

CONFERENCES ORGANIZED AS A RESULT OF MIGRATION
INTO NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

NAME	NORTH AMERICAN AFFILIATION*	DATE	MEMBERSHIP (c. 1912)
Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada	GC	1903	1,936
Alberta-Saskatchewan Conference	OM	1907	217
Canadian Northwest District	MBC	1908	349
Northern District Conference	MB	1910	1,200†

* GC — General Conference Mennonite Church; OM — (Old) Mennonites; MBC — Mennonite Brethren in Christ; MB — Mennonite Brethren.
† Estimate.

Ontario. For the members of the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren this meant forming completely new regional entities. The Mennonite Brethren formed a Canadian (it was at first called Northern) district of their North American denomination.

The congregations with a General Conference identity founded a completely autonomous Canadian entity, of which not all congregations would relate to the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America. It must be remembered that the General Conference, from its beginnings in 1860, was a most flexible and diverse organization, allowing maximum autonomy and heterogeneity at the lowest level. This was quite unlike the Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite Brethren in Christ who insisted on tight organization and discipline throughout.

In the larger General Conference context, the Conference formation in Canada must, therefore, be seen as working at three levels, at least in the early 1900s. There was, first of all, the activity of the General Conference "home missionaries" who had visited Manitoba in the 1890s and Saskatchewan as soon as American settlers arrived at Waldheim, Langham, Herbert and Drake. Seen at first as mission outposts, the congregations became independent and self-sustaining in a decade or two. They also became members of the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Some other congregations who easily fell into the General Conference orbit and who were readily placed on the circuit of General Conference home missionaries were, however, much slower in affiliating because, at their core, they were not constituted by settlers from the United States. This was especially true of the Bergthaler congregations in Manitoba and Alberta and of the Rosenorter congregation in Saskatchewan.

The Bergthaler of Manitoba were the most progressive of the Russian Mennonites of the 1870s. Although a minority, they were constantly attracting new individuals and families from the Sommerfelder and Old Colony, especially on the frontiers of Manitoba settlement. Eventually there would be more than 20 local congregations under one bishop — in other words, a Bergthaler conference by itself.

Bergthaler leaders in Manitoba encouraged their settlers in Saskatchewan to join the Rosenorter congregation led by Bishop Peter Regier of Prussia; many of them did. In the Saskatchewan Valley the Rosenorter congregation served the same function as

the Bergthaler in the Red River Valley, a community to which the progressives could migrate. As a great synthesizer, therefore, the Rosenorter congregation soon included people recently migrated from Prussia and Russia and others from both the United States and Manitoba.

Like the Bergthaler in Manitoba, the Rosenorter in Saskatchewan were developing many local congregations under one bishop; both shared their pattern of congregational organization with the conservatives (see Table 4). Soon there were too many units for one bishop and so the Rosenort church was divided into districts as follows: (1) Rosthern with Bergthal and district; (2) Hague with Osler and district; (3) Aberdeen and district; (4) the school districts Eigenheim, Danzig, Silberfeld, Friedensfeld, and Ebenfeld; (5) Laird and district, Carman, Springfield and Snowbird; (6) Tiefengrund with Johannesthal and Hamburg. The rules of the reorganization were: ministers worked within their own districts; each district was in charge of its own baptismal candidates; the elder served at baptism and communion; and each district had its own church, its own administration, and its own church book.[52]

Both Rosenorter and Bergthaler leaders felt, however, that an even greater fellowship was needed and so they entered into conversations leading to the organization, in 1903 at Hochstadt near Altona, Manitoba, of the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada. In the years immediately following, it met alternately in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Congregations, including the one at Didsbury, Alberta, began to relate to it one at a time, even as they likewise related, if they so chose, to the General Conference. The earliest sessions of the Central Canada Conference were not very concerned with program, except for the founding of the monthly periodical known as *Mitarbeiter* (Co-Worker). Rather, the goal seemed to be to reach a common understanding on such matters as the purpose of the Canadian and General Conferences, the ministry to the widely dispersed settlers, involvement in civic, legal, and political affairs, participation in worldly amusements, and keeping the young people.[53]

The (Old) Mennonite congregations in Alberta-Saskatchewan were organized into a conference in stages, with the earliest initiative coming from Ontario. In 1903 Bishop S. F. Coffman of Vineland, who had already been to Alberta on his own in 1901, was commissioned to visit the remote and scattered settlements, to ordain ministers, and to organize congregations. A year later

the Alberta conference was organized and when, in 1907, Eli S. Hallman of Guernsey joined it, the name Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference was adopted.[54]

It must have been wise statesmanship, the greater tolerance of the frontier, or the diminished need to strictly maintain old positions that brought the various (Old) Mennonite groups together. Though they were few, they were quite diverse. On the one hand, there were the conservative groups derived from the Old Order and the Amish at Mayton and Tofield, respectively. On the other hand, there were the more liberal groups at Carstairs and Guernsey. The Pennsylvania group at Duchess was relatively moderate.

At Didsbury-Carstairs all three groups — Mennonite Brethren in Christ, (Old) Mennonites, and Bergthaler — appear to have been unusually community-minded, perhaps since, as Mennonites, they were the dominant groups in the area and they themselves became involved in friendly competition. Not only did they assume leadership in business, education, and civic affairs, but some members of each of the three groups joined secret orders, a sin almost unforgivable elsewhere among the Mennonites. Since Dordrecht, such membership was expressly forbidden on the ground that secret societies were oath-bound fraternities and thus compromised exclusive loyalty to the church.[55] Several Bergthaler people were members of the King Hiram Lodge and J. E. Stauffer of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ was its secretary. Some (Old) Mennonites were members of the Masonic Lodge. This deviation has been explained as follows:

> No doubt the pioneer environment which accentuated the spirit of liberty and individualism, as well as the desire to retain a position of leadership and acceptance in an evolving community, led to such a deviation from one of the principles of the Mennonite faith.[56]

The Didsbury-Carstairs people, comprising the Rosebud constituency, elected two Mennonites as their first two representatives in the provincial legislature, both having distinguished themselves in farm organizations. Cornelius Hiebert was elected as a Conservative in 1905, the year Alberta became a province. During his term of office he fought, among other things, for prohibition and for the flag to be flown over every school. His choice of the Independent label to fight for his second election was to free himself to criticize government measures if, in his

opinion, they were unfavourable. Hiebert, however, was not returned. In the 1909 election, J. E. Stauffer, of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, running as a Liberal, won the Rosebud seat. In time Stauffer became deputy speaker of the Legislative Assembly but, while still legislator, was killed overseas as an enlistee in the First World War forces.[57]

The Mennonite Brethren in Christ likewise organized their Northwest District with the help of Ontario. In 1906, Henry Goudie, a veteran organizer and district superintendent in Ontario for five years, designated Alberta as a mission district for Ontario; a year later it became a district conference in its own right.[58] Immediate attention was given to mission activities in Alberta, as in Ontario. Also in 1906, a mission was opened in Edmonton; in 1909 it became the Beulah Home for unmarried mothers, and other "appointments" or mission stations were begun. Very soon the Mennonite name was believed to be a handicap to overcome, but efforts of the Northwest Conference to get the denomination to drop the name would not succeed until 1947. Yet the "progressive spirit" of the Canadian Northwest District experienced some early triumphs. Soon the District founded its own training school for ministers, later known as Mountain View Bible College. It would also host the first young people's convention of the denomination and be the first to organize women's missionary societies on a district-wide basis.[59]

The Mennonite Brethren Churches in Canada were organized into the Northern District Conference at Herbert, Saskatchewan, in 1910; at the same time four other district conferences within the North American General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches also came into being.[60] At that time, the 50th anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren Church's founding, the church had a total of 6,000 members in Russia, India, the United States and Canada. About one sixth of them were in Canada.[61] When the Northern District was organized there were 13 churches in Saskatchewan with nearly 1,000 members. The two Manitoba congregations, Winkler and Winnipeg (the latter recently founded as a city mission), joined in 1913, at which time the membership exceeded 1,200.[62]

The first conference at Herbert was held in a 50-by-90-foot tent to accommodate the many visitors, 85 of whom had come by train on reduced fares. The language was German except on the evening of the *Festsonntag* when one English sermon was given. Most of the concerns of the conference could be sum-

marized by the word "mission" — foreign, home and city. Collections were assigned equally to these causes. The home mission work was carried on mainly through colporteur-evangelists, one in the Rosthern and one in the Herbert area. At that first meeting the monthly salary for missionaries was raised from $30 to $40 because "the wages for farm labour had gone up and because in the north (Canada) everything cost more."[63]

Thus, the new settlements and conferences that profoundly helped to shape the Canadian Mennonite destiny were formed. It was a destiny which saw the Mennonites not fully united precisely at a time when the larger Canadian society was beginning consciously to absorb and mould them. As attempts were made to assimilate the aliens, especially for reasons of patriotism, the Mennonites became sorely pressed on every side. Some accepted the assimilation as good; most resisted it as being very bad. Whatever the stance, the impending war forced Mennonites to reconsider their relationship to the world outside, as well as to the state.

FOOTNOTES

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5. R. C. Brown, *Canada's National Policy, 1883–1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: University Press, 1964), p. 12.
6. See David Healy, *US Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).
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12. *Edmonton Bulletin*, October 24, 1898, p. 2. The *Bulletin*, edited by Frank Oliver, Member of Parliament, editorialized on the establishment of reserves in Saskatchewan.
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21. *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, XLV (January 2, 1947), p. 3.
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30. *Order-in-Council*, Record Group 2, 1, 1627 (June 24, 1898).
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49. "Statistik der Mennoniten-Gemeinde," *Der Mitarbeiter*, VII (February 1913), p. 37.

50. *Mennonite Yearbook*, 1913.

51. "Statistik der Mennoniten-Gemeinde," *Der Mitarbeiter*, VII (February 1913), p. 37; also *Mennonite Yearbook*, 1913.

52. J. G. Rempel, *Die Rosenorter Gemeinde in Saskatchewan, op. cit.*, p. 25.

53. Minutes of Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, July 20–21, 1903. See also J. G. Rempel, *Fuenfzig Jahre Konferenz-bestrebungen, 1902–1952*, Part I.

54. Melvin Gingerich, "Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I, p. 34; Ezra Stauffer, "The Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference," Ryley, Alberta, 107 pp.

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56. Sawatzky, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 51a–56.

58. Everek Richard Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church* (Elkhart, Ind.: Bethel Publishing Company, 1958), p. 158.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 157–64; S. F. Pannabecker, "Canadian Northwest Conference," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I, p. 509. The school was founded in 1921 and the youth convention was held in 1925.

60. A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde* (Hillsboro, Kans.: General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1955), pp. 547–54.

61. J. H. Lohrenz, "Mennonite Brethren Church," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, pp. 595–602.

62. J. H. Lohrenz, "Canadian Conference of the MB Church of North America," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, I, pp. 505–6.

63. *Yearbook of the Northern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church for the Year 1911*, p. 9.