Provenance

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Epilogue

TWENTY YEARS of history is too short a time-span on which to base any great or firm conclusions, and yet this Canadian story of the manifold Mennonite struggle for survival in the interwar period cannot be ended without further summation and analysis. For the Mennonites, this was a time of considerable desperation, of diverse responses to the problems encountered, of strong determination to overcome those problems, and of nagging doubts about the outcome, all of which took on new dimensions when the world once again exploded with the sounds of battle.

The period began with great uncertainties. Some Mennonites doubted whether either Canada or Russia could remain a homeland for them and whether they could survive in those countries. Others wondered whether or not they had already lost or were rapidly losing the fundamental features of their faith and whether or not they could be sustained as a separate people with an alternative life style. During this period, there were major crises which raised the question of survival, but by 1939 it was clear that the Mennonites in Canada had survived. Their numbers had doubled and hundreds of their communities were firmly established (see Appendix 2).

The Second World War brought renewed tension between Mennonites and their national homeland, but at least until that time the Canadian development generally was increasingly congenial to the Mennonite experience. The racial and religious prejudices which had kept the Mennonites out in 1919 and again in 1929 had largely vanished by 1939 and with some exceptions been replaced by more complete information, understanding, and respect.

The Mennonites were no longer alone in questioning the validity of war, its objectives, and its methods. French Canadians also resisted war propaganda, the war effort itself, and conscription in particular. Under Prime Minister King, Canada insisted on its own national destiny and on shaping its own foreign policy, apart from European considerations and British desires. Like Mennonites, King applauded statesmen who took diplomatic risks for peace and, far from nurturing a jingoistic patriotism, he infused Canada with a great reluctance to go to war and to mobilize its young men for battle.

Other emerging features of the Canadian society favoured the Mennonite situation. Dissent, for instance, no longer came only from strange and poorly understood religious minority groups but also from more popular social-protest movements and from a wide range of new political parties. Canadian economic shifts from agriculture to industry and from the country to the city coincided with greater Mennonite readiness to urbanize. The lifting of trade barriers and the wider opening of the borders to the United States were also appropriate for the Mennonites and their numerous continental connections. And the shift of power from the provinces to the federal government, along with the growing sense of a federal responsibility for the welfare of all the people in all the regions, could be appreciated by those Mennonites whose greatest enemy had been not the federal establishment but certain provincial politicians and governments. The occasion of Their Majesties' visit to Canada in 1939 helped the Mennonites to assess their situation, to discover that all or most of the earlier uncertainties had been overcome, and to express renewed appreciation for their homeland in which they had not only survived but in which they were beginning to thrive.

The struggle itself, of course, could not be forgotten, primarily because it had not yet come to an end. An epilogue to this book is not complete without another look at those events and responses which in a few short years made so much momentous and fascinating history,

both for the religious minority group under study and for the national society of which they were a part.

Mennonite migrations during this time were not all like the panicfilled flight to Moscow, and yet, the movements from Canada to Latin America and to Canada from Russia were treks of great urgency. Even the resettling within Canada in places more isolated and culturally more secure or in places more urban and vocationally more promising were conditioned by a deeply felt necessity. The non-physical migrations, such as the reaching for strange ideologies and the broad acceptance of non-traditional institutions, likewise happened because there seemed to be no other way. Having come to the conclusion that Canadian public schools would mislead their children, or that the Soviet system would destroy their religious and economic culture, or that modernism in all its forms would undermine the faith, the Mennonites made desperate moves away from the perceived dangers towards the nearest promises of security.

The multiplicity of Mennonite responses to the problems they faced was due to a number of factors. Desperation was one of them. A sense of emergency is rarely accompanied by the wisdom of forethought or deliberate reflection about the outcome. When on a ship which appears to be sinking, one runs to the nearest lifeboats and worries later about their safety and destination. Mennonite pluralism was another factor. As the foregoing record makes clear, the Mennonite people were actually many peoples, at least twenty in terms of their organizations, more in terms of their viewpoints. Social forces were another factor. When a social tradition or an ideological synthesis no longer holds and needs to be altered and perhaps displaced, suggestions for change are usually not singular but plural. As it was in the Protestant Reformation, so it was in the Mennonite evolution; the separation syndrome knew no end!

In the 1920s and the 1930s, Canadian Mennonites responded in many different ways to the dangers they perceived in the changing national and international situations. Those unhappy with Canada chose either to stay or not to stay. Those who left did so voluntarily or under religious duress. Some left proudly and judgmentally, insisting that they were right and everybody else was wrong. Some left sadly, humbly, and reluctantly, though convinced that the future welfare of their children required that some of the elders act bravely and sacrificially. Those leaving chose not one but two destinations in Latin America, Mexico in the Northern Hemisphere and Paraguay in the Southern Hemisphere. Those who chose Mexico founded not one but three colonies and bought land for a fourth. Those who chose Paraguay established not one but two congregational families in a single colony. Those resettling assumed either that they would interact with their new neighbours or that they would do everything possible to avoid the indigenous populations. Some began their new life where they left off, insisting on the status quo within their system; others tried to inject new dynamism into the old system. Some quickly endeared themselves to the authorities and enlarged the Mennonite welcome, while others disappointed those who had granted them a *Privilegium*, thereby narrowing the entrance for others also in need of that space.

Those who stayed in Canada likewise were of many minds. Some were all in favour of finding a new isolation, but in Canada, not in a foreign country. Some of the geographic isolationists insisted on private schools, while others were ready to accept "public" schools, provided those schools were theirs, run by their trustees. Others were certain that the only reasonable course of action was to fully accept the public schools. Those who did so without reservation were either indifferent or careless or they were deliberately accepting a wider citizenship and identity. Perhaps they were even secularizing. Some accepted the public schools, believing they could meet Mennonite needs if only the Mennonite trustees did their duty and if they hired Mennonite teachers who were adequately trained. A very deliberate injection of Mennonite values into public institutions was the approach of some who believed that complete isolation was not possible and perhaps not even desirable. They believed that special education for their children was the best way to strengthen them as they moved out into the world.

Those who believed that evangelism was the answer to outside danger concentrated their efforts not on non-church institutions but on non-churched individuals. For them, Mennonite problems could be resolved by the winning of Mennonite young people as well as outside converts. Some believed in missions among the neighbours close to home so that ethnic barriers would be crossed and, erroneously, for this period at least, that Mennonite numbers would be thereby increased; others preferred missions overseas, some to maintain vitality in the domestic community through foreign activity,

others to protect the ethnic integrity of the domestic community by having its converts far enough away to avoid facing the problems of Mennonite parochialism at home.

Most Mennonites feared modernism, but modernism meant different things to different people. For some, it meant modern styles, which in turn could mean many things: fancy buggies and harnesses, or flashy cars, or fancy, many-coloured clothing, or jewellery. Modernity could also mean attending public fairs, circuses, and theatres. Or it could mean fancy ideas. Those resisting ideological modernism reached for its opposite, namely fundamentalism, but not all to the same extent or with the same enthusiasm. For some, fundamentalism simply meant getting back to Mennonite fundamentals. For others, it meant the tenets of the fundamentalist movement. For still others, it was a mixture of the two. Some fundamentalists emphasized dispensationalism, some did not; some dispensationalists were pre-millennialists, some were not. Some who embraced fundamentalism lost their social ethic. Some Mennonite fundamentalists continued to believe in the importance of the Sermon on the Mount and, to that extent, in the social gospel.

Those who entered Canada from Russia also were variously motivated. Some were simply escaping an impossible situation. Some really viewed Canada as a land of great promise. Some were poor and completely dependent. Some were able to pay their own way. Some believed the best future in Canada lay in the cities, some on the land. Those who wanted land had different ideas about what land types and areas were most desirable. The greatest differentiation was between those who preferred the isolation of homestead lands even in the wilderness and those who felt best about lands already developed, even if this meant scattering and the loss of compact communities.

In terms of their cultural and religious orientation, those arriving from Russia were likewise not one of a kind. For some, Mennonite ethnicity and culture were all-important, for others less so. Some were eager to learn English, some clung to German with great zeal. Others were fanatic about High German, even to the point of disparaging Low German, on the one hand, and exalting all things German, including the *Reich* and its politics, on the other hand. Some were ready to use every religious institution, including Sunday schools and Bible schools, for the propagation of German; others

were content to let the home and the Saturday school take care of linguistic training. Some didn't care enough to make any efforts to preserve the language.

The religious emphases and styles of the newcomers were many as well. At the one end of the continuum was a great dependence on evangelism and revivalism to achieve cataclysmic emotional conversions followed by an immersionist baptism. At the other end of the continuum was a disparagement of emotional religion and instead a dependence on the chorale instead of the gospel song, on education and a more gradualist approach to the Christian life, and on sprinkling or pouring as a more meaningful and reverent approach to baptism. In between were many variations of, and permutations on, the above themes. At the centre stood those who simply wanted spirituality and true religion without the legalism of rigid ordinances, strict liturgical styles, or inflexible modes of communication.

Nonresistance, the foremost common denominator of all Mennonites, also elicited a spectrum of approaches. At the one end were those who claimed the total traditional exemption from military service based on Mennonite identity certified by the ministry. At the other end were those reaching for some recognized, non-embarrassing, national service, if necessary with a uniform, as long as it did not involve the personal shedding of blood by Mennonite boys. In between were gradations of the non-involvement or involvement approaches. Most Mennonites represented combinations of what being a good Mennonite and also a good citizen were perceived to mean.

The kaleidoscopic response to the problems encountered, and the institutional incarnations of these responses, suggest that the Mennonite religious minority was actually many religious minorities engaged in many struggles. Readers can be excused for coming to that conclusion as a way of making sense of Mennonite confusion. In part, they are right. None the less, the common theological heritage of Anabaptism, common historical experiences especially with reference to land and the state, and a common social orientation or separation of one form or another or of one degree or another, justify the integrated inclusion of all Mennonite groups into this single story. They belong together not only because the Mennonite identity was carried by all but also, and primarily, because the common

nomenclature signified some underlying similarities, no matter how far the Mennonite groups were spread on certain issues. And no matter how great the fragmentation and how prevalent the syndrome of sectarianism, there was some structural federation, however limited, with potential for the increase of co-operation as the war threat increased.

The inclusion and integration of a Mennonite diversity as great as this volume reveals inevitably highlights ambiguities and contradictions. However, these can easily be exaggerated if one forgets that ambiguity and contradiction are human phenomena common to all national, religious, or ethnic groups. During this period, Canada too was full of diversity and full of confusion and paradox. In a more particular sense, ambiguity and contradiction are characteristics of minority groups, partly because of the inner microcosmic reality, which knows of many smaller worlds within the larger worlds, and partly because of the external perceptions or the microscopic reality, which is enamoured of, and which exaggerates, the parts rather than the whole, the eccentricities rather than the normalities.

The relationship of the parts to the Mennonite whole carries an inherent contradiction also from the perspective of survival strategy. At one and the same time, the parts were the greatest threat to Mennonite survival and also the greatest prospect of Mennonite survival. On the face of things, the smaller the islands the more they were endangered by the roaring sea. And yet, precisely because they were islands, the various Mennonite groups knew exactly where the dangers lurked, how to cope with them, for how long and at how great a price.

From this perspective the determination and, in a sense, invincibility of the various Mennonite groups is amazing. They actually believed that they could remove themselves to the dry plateaus of Mexico or to the green hell of Paraguay and survive. They actually believed that they could define alternative life styles and maintain them against all odds. They actually believed that they could leave behind a compact Mennonite system in Russia and scatter in all directions in an expansive Canada and still maintain what was dearest to them. They actually believed that nonresistance could be maintained even though no one else around them shared their faith. And as they believed, they set out to achieve.

All they needed to do was to call on God and to do their share. And

doing their part meant a willingness to make any sacrifice, to exchange better land for worse land, and to pay for new programs and institutions even in the depression. What they demanded of themselves, they also asked of their young people, who, quite possibly, were asked to pay the highest price of all, nonconformity and the resultant social ostracism by their peers, for the sake of the faith of the fathers. Clearly, values were often more important than material and social success.

At the end of the 1930s, the Mennonites had survived and were surviving. The visible continuity of the Mennonite communities, congregations, and conferences was obvious. The loyalty of the young people was impressive, in terms of both the quantity and the quality of their responses. Within and across the five main provinces in which they were now scattered, the Mennonites were tied together by informal networks and formal organizations, which contributed both to identity and to solidarity. The culture was being preserved. The faith was being taught. And every new generation was being challenged.

The doubts about continuity were not so much based on a Mennonite decline, which wasn't evident, as they were occasioned by those forces which threatened to weaken the culture and dilute the faith. The Mennonites knew instinctively that the all-pervasive influences of public education, economic forces largely outside of their control, social attitudes, political policies, and religious influences were inevitably shaping their destiny to the extent that they themselves were too weak to offset these forces. However, there were dangers even beyond those which were perceived at the time.

Historical hindsight, at least, suggests that significant chinks in the theological and cultural armour of the Mennonites were appearing, pointing to a possible disintegration of the historic Anabaptist faith and Mennonite religious culture at the core. In a variety of ways, that core, which envisioned the kingdom of God on earth, was threatened, because Mennonites were limiting, and in the process emasculating or short-circuiting, that kingdom. Such limitations included deliberate geographic and cultural segregation of the kingdom, thus withholding it from any application to the larger world; the identification of the kingdom with, and its circumvention by, religious institutions and Mennonite conferences, thus effectively removing it from the social, economic, and political spheres of life;

the reduction of the kingdom to an individual experience of salvation with its resulting irrelevance to society; the postponement of the kingdom and its ethical imperatives to a future dispensation; and the equating of the kingdom with nationalisms, either domestic or distant.

By limiting the scope and the quality of the kingdom, the Mennonites were really opening wide the floodgates of those worldly kingdoms they dreaded the most and whose waters rushed in to fill the voids that were being created in the theology and culture of their own people. So it seemed. It was too early to assess the situation with any finality. But that the end of traditional separation, with its special life-encompassing value system, and an alternative *Weltanschauung* (world view), was in sight, and that a transition of some kind was under way, there could be no doubt. Only the future could tell how far the Mennonites would go down the roads in the directions they were already choosing.

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF CANADIAN MENNONITE GROUPS IN 1940

NO.	POPULAR NAMES	FORMAL NAMES	RELATED AMERICAN/ NORTH AMERICAN BODY
	3 9 9 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4	A. Swiss Mennonite Groups	
1.	Old Mennonites, OMs	Mennonite Conference of Ontario AltaSask. Mennonite Conference	Mennonite General Conference
2.	Reformed Mennonites, Herrites	Reformed Mennonite Church	Reformed Mennonite Church
3.	New Mennonites	Mennonite Brethren in Christ, Ontario and North-West Districts	Mennonite Brethren in Christ Conference
4.	Old Order Mennonites, Wislerites, Horse-and-Buggy Mennonites	Mennonite Churches	Mennonite Churches
5.	David Martin Old Order Mennonites, Newborns	Mennonite Church	N/A
6.	Markhamer, Cars People, Black Bumper Mennonites	Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference	Weaverland Mennonite Conference
	В.	Swiss Amish Mennonite Gro	oups
7.	Church Amish	Amish Mennonite Conference	Mennonite General Conference
8.	Old Order Amish, House Amish, Holmsers	Amish Mennonite Churches	Amish Churches
9.	Beachy Amish	Nafziger & Cedar Grove Amish Mennonite Churches	Beachy Amish
		C. Dutch Mennonite Group.	S
10.	Conference Mennonites, Kirchengemeinden	Conference of Mennonites in Canada	General Conference Mennonite Church

APPENDIX 1 (continued)

SUMMARY OF CANADIAN MENNONITE GROUPS IN 1940

NO.	POPULAR NAMES	FORMAL NAMES	RELATED AMERICAN/ NORTH AMERICAN BODY
11.	Brethren, Brueder, MBs	Northern and Ontario Districts, Mennonite Brethren Churches	General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches
12.	Kleen-gemeenta (Low German for Kleine Gemeinde)	Kleine Gemeinde	N/A
13.	Chortitzer	Chortitzer Mennonite Church	N/A
14.	Altkolonier, Old Colony	Old Colony Mennonite Churches	N/A
15.	Sommerfelder	Sommerfelder Mennonite Churches	N/A
16.	Bergthaler	Bergthaler Mennonite Churches in Saskatchewan	N/A
17.	Rudnerweider	Rudnerweide Mennonite Church	N/A
18.	Krimmer, KMBs	Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Churches	Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference
19.	Bruderthaler, EMBs	Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Churches	Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference
		D. Dutch-Swiss Mennonite Gr	coups
20.	Holdemaner	Church of God in Christ Mennonite	Church of God in Christ Mennonite

APPENDIX 2

PROVINCES Census Divisions	1921	1931	1941
PRINCE EDWARD		,	
ISLAND	3	2	_
NOVA SCOTIA	2	1	3
NEW			
BRUNSWICK	4	_	5
QUEBEC	6	8	80
YUKON AND	Ū		
NWT	1		4
ONTARIO	13,645	17,661	22,219
	· ·		
Algoma	2 15	1	3 25
Brant Bruce	363	304	360
Carleton	3 3	JUT	14
Cochrane	Formed in	223	110
Coemane	1931		
Dufferin	44	28	44
Dundas	1		
Durham	_	_	
Elgin	107	111	139
Essex	. 2	829	1,157
Frontenac	1	7	4
Glengarry		_	
Grenville	1	248	340
Grey	241 170	212	156
Haldimand Haliburton	1/0	212	3
Halton	13	1	21
Hastings	11		
Huron	223	213	309
Kenora		5	67
Kent	9	43	88
Lambton	71	74	117
Lanark	_		
Leeds	3	7	_
Lennox-Addington	_		

APPENDIX 2 (continued)

Census Divisions ONTARIO (Continued) Lincoln Manitoulin Middlesex Muskoka Nipissing	329 65 18	653 99	2,277 185
Lincoln Manitoulin Middlesex Muskoka	65 18	99	
Manitoulin Middlesex Muskoka	65 18	99	
Middlesex Muskoka	18		
Muskoka		• •	183
	/	20	39
Nipissing	6	3	13
			1
Norfolk	12	140	223
Northumberland	5		30
Ontario	189	238	240
Oxford	699	769	847
Parry Sound	1	11	15
Peel	2	5	19
Perth	1,335	1,691	2,060
Peterborough	5	´ 	
Prescott	_	_	
Prince Edward	1	National Control of the Control of t	
Rainy River		-	9
Renfrew	1	_	1
Russell			
Simcoe	417	449	470
Stormont			
Sudbury	1	2	46
Thunder Bay	3	1	53
Timiskaming	1	Plantings.	5
Victoria	_		17
Waterloo	7,130	8,752	9,398
Welland	422	340	389
Wellington	508	668	894
Wentworth	16	51	97
York	1,199	1,462	1,932
MANITOBA	21,295	30,352	39,336
Division # 1	3,815	5,727	8,798
Division # 2	16,343	17,902	20,927
Division # 3	28	942	844
Division # 4	20	598	457
Division # 5	5	159	744

APPENDIX 2 (continued)

PROVINCES Census Divisions	1921	1931	1941
MANITOBA (Continued))		
Division # 6	940	3,658	5,193
Division # 7	15	124	233
Division # 8	1	366	291
Division # 9	12	290	702
Division #10	1	126	555
Division #11	1	273	166
Division #12	3	21	80
Division #13	14	85	230
Division #14	30	17	30
Division #15			51
Division #16	87	64	35
SASKATCHEWAN	20,544	31,338	32,511
Division # 1	57	208	35
Division # 2	24	208	180
Division # 3	163	258	333
Division # 4	744	721	670
Division # 5	17	111	48
Division # 6	43	138	115
Division # 7	4,564	6,328	5,340
Division # 8	1,616	1,903	1,839
Division # 9	39	86	494
Division #10	126	323	371
Division #11	909	2,974	2,970
Division #12	1,165	1,822	1,782
Division #13	5 1	258	187
Division #14	605	876	2,338
Division #15	10,188	12,708	11,868
Division #16	212	1,992	2,812
Division #17	13	421	964
Division #18	8	3	165
ALBERTA	3,125	8,289	12,097
Division # 1	10	276	894
Division # 2	888	2,713	3,788
Division # 3	59	436	1,080

APPENDIX 2 (continued)

PROVINCES	1921	1931	1941
Census Divisions			
ALBERTA (Continued)			
Division # 4	122	161	256
Division # 5	176	609	203
Division # 6	1,330	2,503	3,155
Division # 7	119	297	225
Division # 8	38	130	191
Division # 9	14	20	133
Division #10	180	203	372
Division #11	89	155	392
Division #12		4	20
Division #13	9	9	4
Division #14		22	22
Division #15	1	113	234
Division #16	90	630	690
Division #17	*****	8	438
BRITISH			
COLUMBIA	172	1,085	5,105
Division # 1	Divisions	3	15
Division # 2	not	87	121
Division # 3	applicable	47	114
Division # 4	in 1921	923	4,321
Division # 5		6	235
Division # 6		1	15
Division # 7		-	6
Division # 8		-	250
Division # 9		1	4
Division #10		17	24
TOTALS	58,797	88,736	111,360

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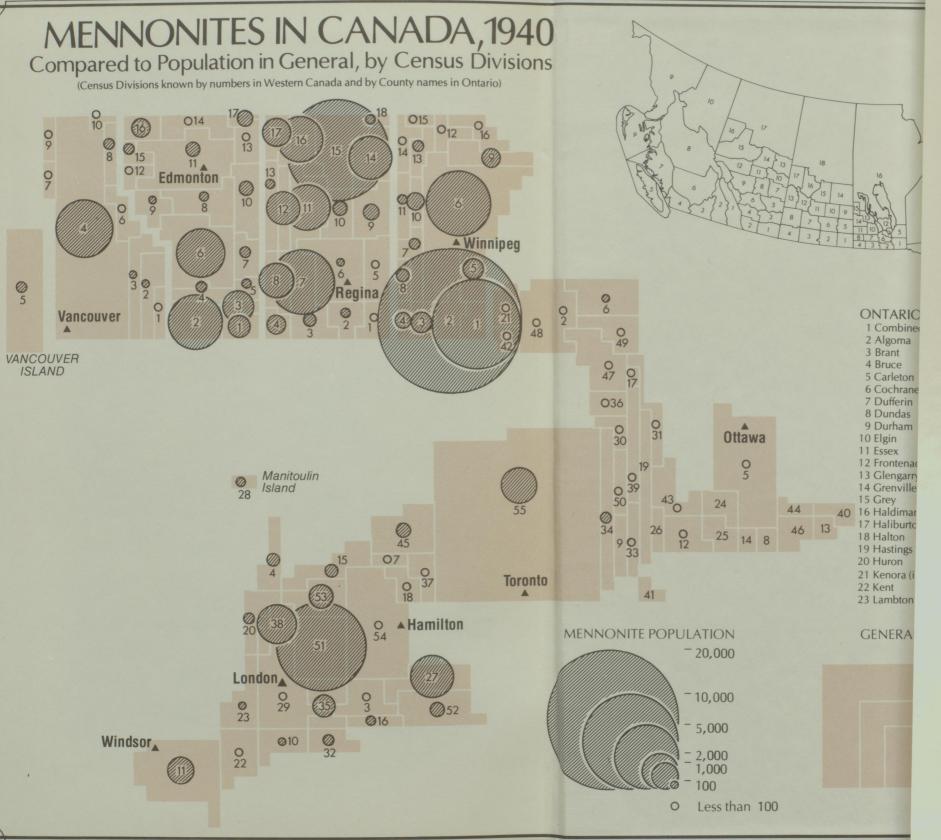
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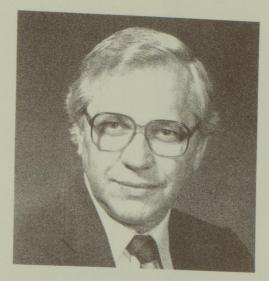
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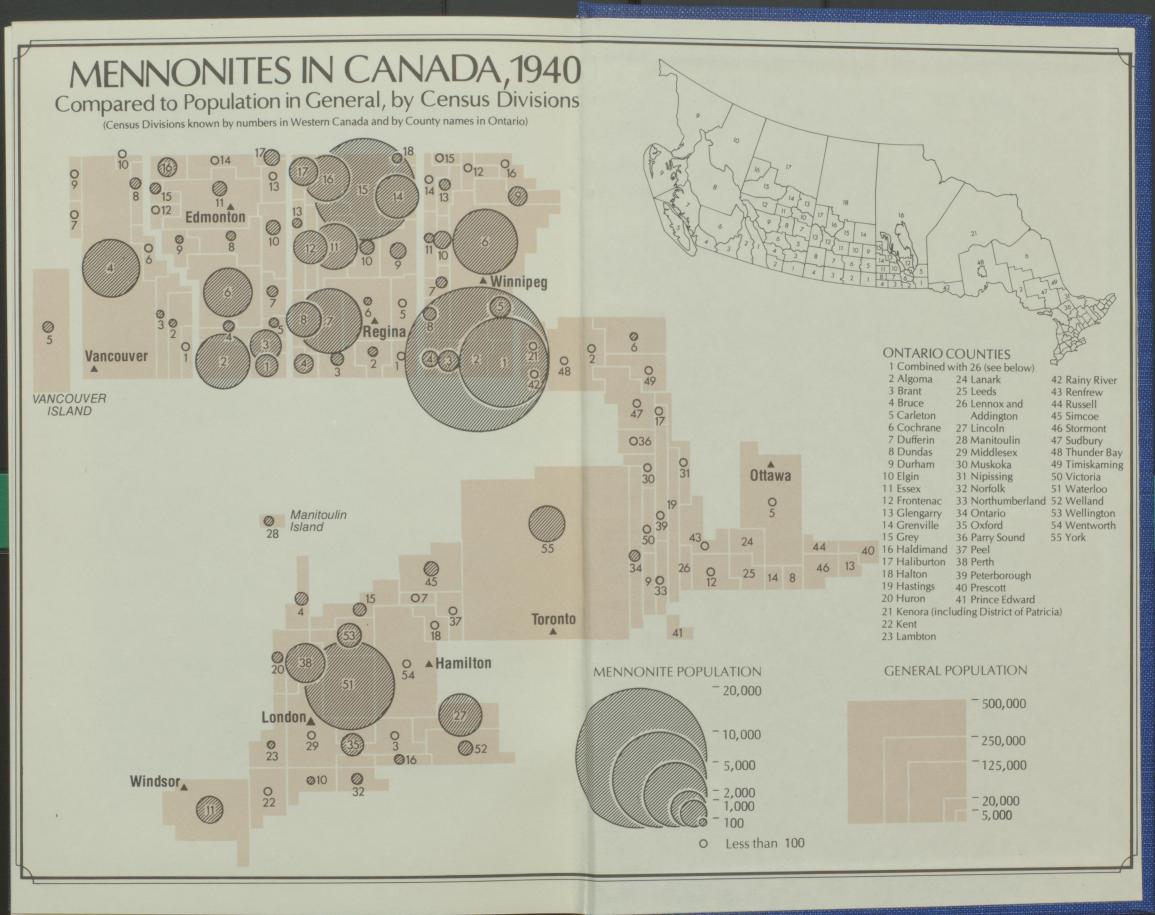


Born in 1929 at Lena, Manitoba, of Mennonite parents who were of Dutch-German stock and recent émigrés of the Russian Revolution, Frank H. Epp is a well-known Mennonite of international stature. He was founding editor of both The Canadian Mennonite and the Mennonite Reporter. Dr. Epp has been a newspaper reporter, radio broadcaster, church pastor, and university professor. His broad range of interest and experience is reflected in his travels and in his writing. His journalistic and research trips have taken him to Vietnam and other Asian countries, Latin America, Indonesia, the Middle East, and most recently, Poland. Dr. Epp's books include Whose Land Is Palestine: The Middle East Problem in Perspective, and The Israelis: Portrait of a People in Conflict. He received an honorary doctor of laws degree in part for writing the first volume of this Mennonite history, Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People. Dr. Epp is Past President and tenured Professor of History at Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo. He is currently a member of the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism and has recently been appointed chairman and chief executive officer of the Mennonite Bicentennial Commission, which is planning observances in 1986 of the two-hundredth anniversary of the Mennonite immigration to Canada.

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