

## Provenance

This digital scan *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. This monograph was digitized by the Milton Good Library at Conrad Grebel University College in 2020, with the permission of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and the family of Frank H. Epp.

# MENNONITES IN CANADA

1920~1940

A People's Struggle for Survival



FRANK H. EPP



## Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival

Dr. Frank Epp's 1974 book, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People*, was the first account to examine Canadian Mennonites without regard to geographical, chronological, or denominational limitations. This first volume received much critical acclaim. *The Canadian Historical Review* called it "a scholarly achievement marked by solid documentation, objective interpretation and insight."

The second volume, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, follows the exacting standards of the first in its detailed research and readable style. Subtitled *A People's Struggle for Survival*, it covers the period framed by the two world wars.

This was a critical period when the Mennonites' survival in Canada was under a variety of external threats. It was also an age in which Mennonite history was marked by fragmentation even in their own communities. During this twenty-year timespan the battle for separate schooling led to a significant emigration of Canadian Mennonites to Latin America, while another struggle was waged with our immigration authorities to allow the entry of Russian Mennonites into Canada. The book also covers the impact of the Depression on the Mennonites and their efforts to preserve their cultural and racial identity. The book ends with the response of the Mennonites to the outbreak of the Second World War.

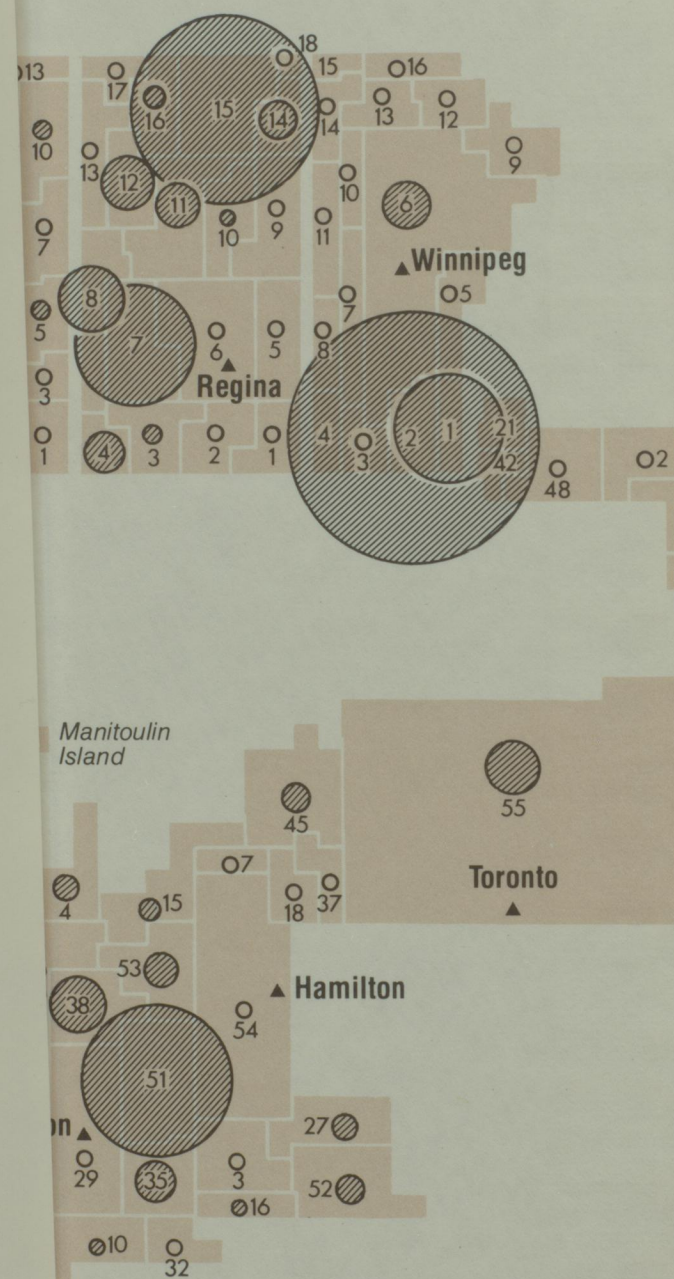
The book focuses on the Mennonite minority but it is far more than a Mennonite history. It contributes greatly to Canadian minorities' history and provides a new perspective on the role of provincial and federal governments and on federal-provincial relations generally. Through the Mennonites' involvement in global events, the book also throws light on the international world in the inter-war period.

The book is written for a general audience and in popular style. However, its bibliographic documentation, numerous tables, maps, and illustrations increase the book's attractiveness for both the general reader and the scholar of Canadian history, religious studies, ethnic minorities studies, and, of course, Mennonite history.

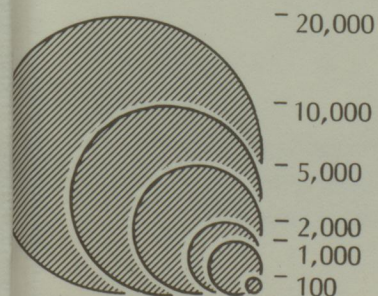
Selected photographs from various Mennonite sources enhance beautifully the lucid prose of Dr. Epp. This eminently readable book is an outstanding account of a unique people during a turbulent time in their history.

## Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940 Population in General, by Census Divisions

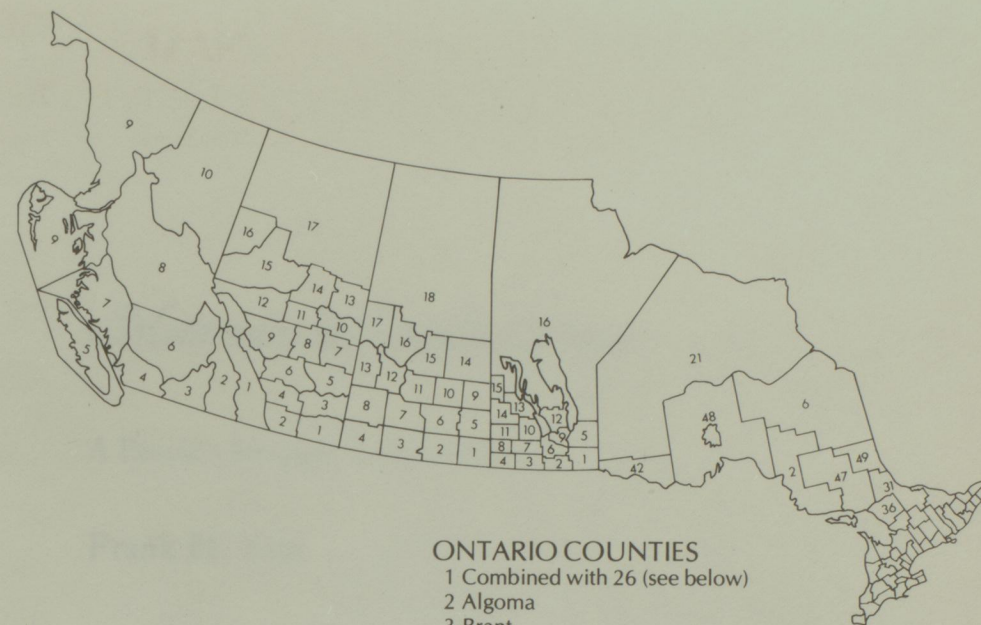
(Numbers in Western Canada and by County names in Ontario)



### Mennonite Population



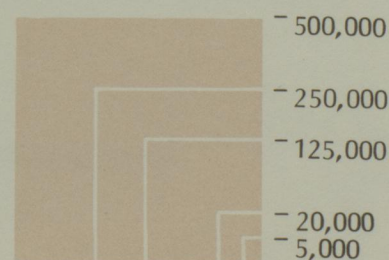
○ Less than 100



### ONTARIO COUNTIES

- |  |                         |                  |
|--|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1 Combined with 26 (see below)             | 26 Lennox and Addington | 38 Perth         |
| 2 Algoma                                   | 27 Lincoln              | 39 Peterborough  |
| 3 Brant                                    | 28 Manitoulin           | 40 Prescott      |
| 4 Bruce                                    | 29 Middlesex            | 41 Prince Edward |
| 5 Carleton                                 | 30 Muskoka              | 42 Rainy River   |
| 6 Cochrane                                 | 31 Nipissing            | 43 Renfrew       |
| 7 Dufferin                                 | 32 Norfolk              | 44 Russell       |
| 8 Dundas                                   | 33 Northumberland       | 45 Simcoe        |
| 9 Durham                                   | 34 Ontario              | 46 Stormont      |
| 10 Elgin                                   | 35 Oxford               | 47 Sudbury       |
| 11 Essex                                   |                         | 48 Thunder Bay   |
| 12 Frontenac                               |                         | 49 Timiskaming   |
| 13 Glengarry                               |                         | 50 Victoria      |
| 14 Grenville                               |                         | 51 Waterloo      |
| 15 Grey                                    |                         | 52 Welland       |
| 16 Haldimand                               |                         | 53 Wellington    |
| 17 Haliburton                              |                         | 54 Wentworth     |
| 18 Halton                                  |                         | 55 York          |
| 19 Hastings                                |                         |                  |
| 20 Huron                                   |                         |                  |
| 21 Kenora (including District of Patricia) |                         |                  |
| 22 Kent                                    |                         |                  |
| 23 Lambton                                 | 36 Parry Sound          |                  |
| 24 Lanark                                  | 37 Peel                 |                  |

### GENERAL POPULATION

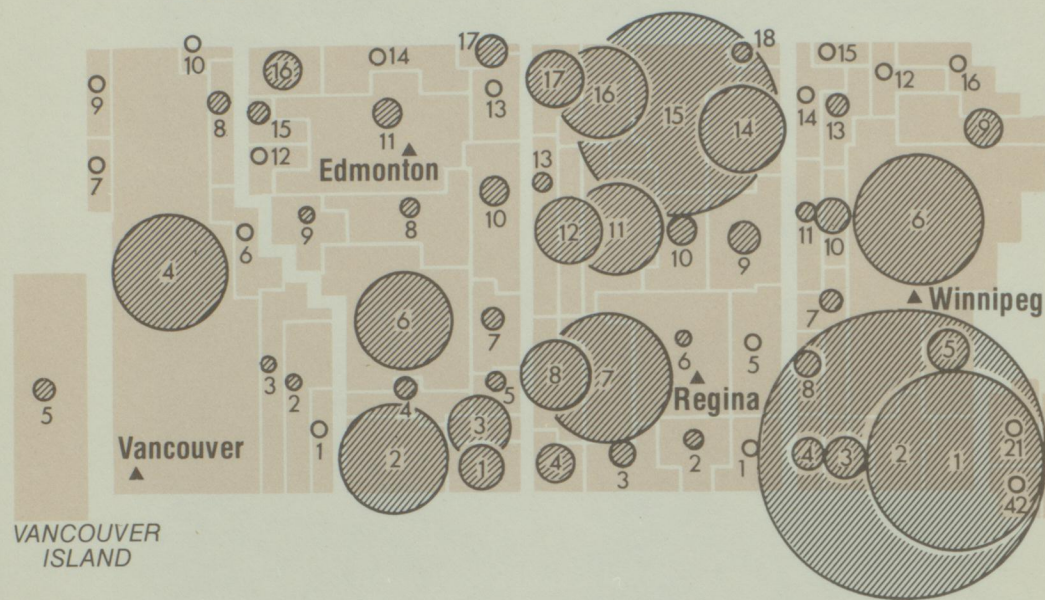




# MENNONITES IN CANADA, 1940

## Compared to Population in General, by Census Divisions

(Census Divisions known by numbers in Western Canada and by County names in Ontario)



VANCOUVER ISLAND

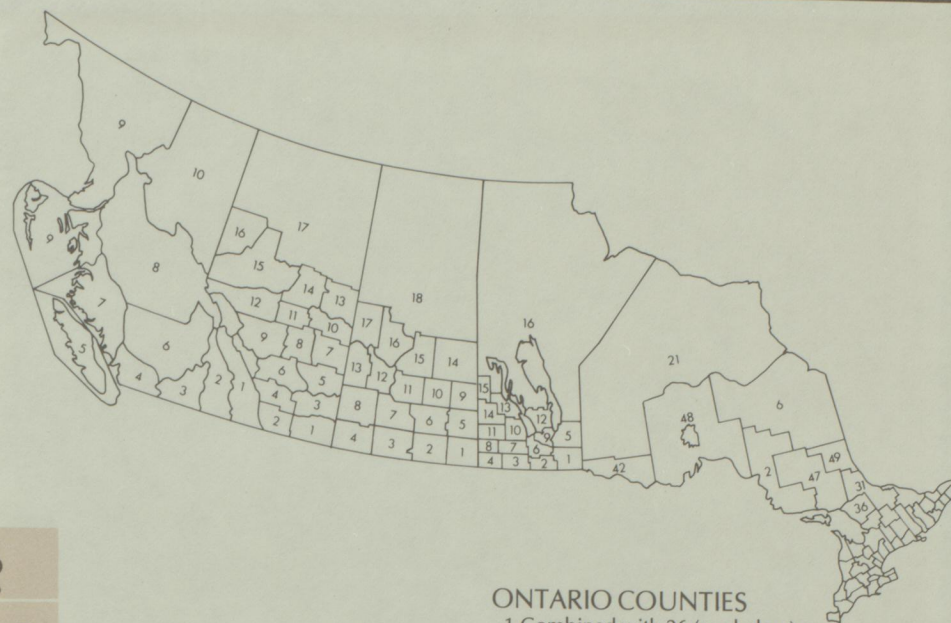
Manitoulin Island

Toronto

Hamilton

London

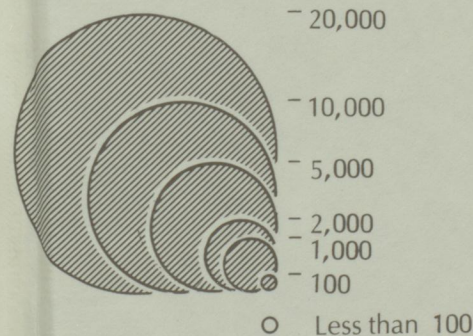
Windsor



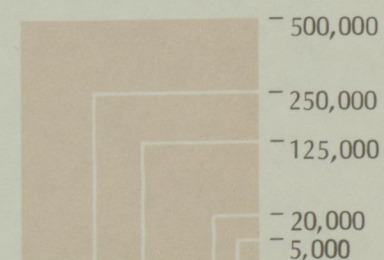
### ONTARIO COUNTIES

- |  |                         |                |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1 Combined with 26 (see below)             | 24 Lanark               | 42 Rainy River |
| 2 Algoma                                   | 25 Leeds                | 43 Renfrew     |
| 3 Brant                                    | 26 Lennox and Addington | 44 Russell     |
| 4 Bruce                                    | 27 Lincoln              | 45 Simcoe      |
| 5 Carleton                                 | 28 Manitoulin           | 46 Stormont    |
| 6 Cochrane                                 | 29 Middlesex            | 47 Sudbury     |
| 7 Dufferin                                 | 30 Muskoka              | 48 Thunder Bay |
| 8 Dundas                                   | 31 Nipissing            | 49 Timiskaming |
| 9 Durham                                   | 32 Norfolk              | 50 Victoria    |
| 10 Elgin                                   | 33 Northumberland       | 51 Waterloo    |
| 11 Essex                                   | 34 Ontario              | 52 Welland     |
| 12 Frontenac                               | 35 Oxford               | 53 Wellington  |
| 13 Glengarry                               | 36 Parry Sound          | 54 Wentworth   |
| 14 Grenville                               | 37 Peel                 | 55 York        |
| 15 Grey                                    | 38 Perth                |                |
| 16 Haldimand                               | 39 Peterborough         |                |
| 17 Haliburton                              | 40 Prescott             |                |
| 18 Halton                                  | 41 Prince Edward        |                |
| 19 Hastings                                |                         |                |
| 20 Huron                                   |                         |                |
| 21 Kenora (including District of Patricia) |                         |                |
| 22 Kent                                    |                         |                |
| 23 Lambton                                 |                         |                |

### MENNONITE POPULATION



### GENERAL POPULATION





# *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*

A People's Struggle for Survival

Frank H. Epp

Macmillan of Canada  
A Division of Gage Publishing Limited  
Toronto, Canada

Copyright © 1982 Frank H. Epp and the Mennonite  
Historical Society of Canada

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this  
publication reproduced, transmitted in any form or by  
any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,  
recording, or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system,  
without the prior consent of the publisher is an  
infringement of copyright law.

---

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Epp, Frank H., date  
Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-7715-9708-8

1. Mennonites—Canada—History. I. Title.

FC106.M45E66 289.7'71 C82-094222-7

BX8118.5.E663

---

Endpaper maps and charts by A. E. Hildebrand

The publishers gratefully acknowledge the assistance of  
the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and the  
Multiculturalism Program, Government of Canada,  
in making the publication possible.

Macmillan of Canada

A Division of Gage Publishing Limited

Printed in Canada

# *Contents*

LIST OF TABLES	<i>vi</i>
LIST OF CHARTS	<i>viii</i>
AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	<i>vii</i>
FOREWORD	<i>x</i>
PROLOGUE	<i>xiii</i>
1. THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE	<i>1</i>
The Need for Land	
The Importance of Tolerance	
The Lack of Solidarity	
Diversity Within a Corporate Personality	
The International Connections	
2. REAFFIRMATION OF THE FUNDAMENTALS	<i>48</i>
Fundamentalism in America	
Fundamentalism Among Old Mennonites	
Fundamentalism in Ontario	
Fundamentalism and Divisiveness	
Fundamentalism and Fundamentals Elsewhere	

3. EMIGRATION TO LATIN AMERICA 94
  - Private vs. Public Schools
  - The Crushing of Mennonite Resistance
  - The Search for a New Country
  - Emigration to Mexico
  - Emigration to Paraguay
4. IMMIGRATION FROM RUSSIA 139
  - Mennonites and Russia
  - Working for Survival
  - A Government and a Railway
  - Preparing the Way in Canada
  - The Immigration Under Way
5. COMMUNITY-BUILDING: SETTLEMENTS 187
  - Settlement Organization and Processes
  - Homesteads and Villages
  - Big Farms and Mennonite Terms
  - Brush Land and Dry Land
  - Peace River and Reesor
  - Gardens, Orchards, and Dairies
6. COMMUNITY-BUILDING: CONGREGATIONS 237
  - The Different Cultural Groups
  - Differences Among the Russlaender
  - Ontario and Manitoba
  - Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia
  - Congregational Life
7. THE INTERNATIONAL CONNECTION 298
  - From Civil War to Collectivization
  - Canada Once Again Closed
  - Popular Images and Public Opinion
  - New Homelands for Some
  - International Mennonite Concern
8. OVERCOMING THE DEPRESSION 347
  - Isolated Fields: Alberta
  - Greener Fields and Co-ops: B.C. and Ontario
  - The Co-op Movement in Manitoba
  - Individualism and Secularization
  - Resistance to Secularized Aid
  - Medical and Other Institutions



9.	FEDERATION AND FRAGMENTATION	395
	Denominationalism and Provincialism	
	Denominationalism: CMs, MBs	
	Denominationalism: Conference Mennonites	
	Co-operation Attempted and Failed	
	Fragmentation in Southern Manitoba	
	Fragmentation in Southern Ontario	
10.	KEEPING THE YOUNG PEOPLE	447
	Children and Sunday Schools	
	Youth Activity and Character Education	
	Music, Choirs, and Choristers	
	Bible Schools and Evangelism	
	Marriage and Vocation	
	Secondary and Post-Secondary Education	
11.	PRESERVING THE CULTURE	498
	Culture Interpreted and Explained	
	Varieties of Separate Culture	
	The Nonconformed Life Style	
	Language and Values	
	Ethnicity and Racial Identity	
	The Dialects and Popular Culture	
12.	FACING THE WORLD	543
	Separation and Involvement	
	For and Against Germanism	
	The Nations and the Kingdom	
	Four Conferences on Peace and War	
	Mennonites, Militarism, and Their Majesties	
	EPILOGUE	593
	APPENDIX 1: Summary of Canadian Mennonite Groups in 1940	602
	APPENDIX 2: Mennonite Population in Canada By Provinces and Census Divisions in the Years 1921, 1931, & 1941	604
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	608
	A. Reference Works	
	B. Books	
	C. Unpublished Theses and Dissertations	
	D. Archival Sources	
	INDEX	630

## *List of Tables*

1. Summary of World Mennonite Membership (By Country *c.* 1920) 2
2. Summary of Mennonite/Amish Migrations to Canada (1786-1920) 5
3. Mennonite Population in Canada, 1901-1921 (According to the Canadian Census) 7
4. Ontario Mennonite Population by Dominion Electoral Districts (Compared to the Total in 1921) 8
5. Manitoba Mennonite Population by Electoral Districts (Compared to the Total in 1921) 9
6. Saskatchewan Mennonite Population by Electoral Districts (Compared to the Total in 1921) 10
7. Alberta Mennonite Population by Electoral Districts (Compared to the Total in 1921) 11
8. British Columbia Mennonite Population by Electoral Districts (Compared to the Total in 1921) 12
9. Mennonite Congregational Families in Canada 20
10. School Attendance Prosecutions of Saskatchewan Mennonites: 1920-1925 103
11. Mennonite School Petitions to the Governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 1916-22 108
12. Reinlaender Land-Seeking Delegations, 1919-21 110
13. Service Record of Four Reinlaender Bishops 116
14. Chortitzer-Sommerfelder-Bergthaler(s) Land-Seeking Delegations 120
15. Manitoba and Saskatchewan Mennonite Immigrants to Latin America, 1922-30 122
16. Summary of Latin American Settlements 124
17. Summary of Immigrants Received in Ontario in 1924 (By Post Office District and Numbers of Immigrants) 176



18. Cash and Credit Passengers (By Year of Immigration) 178
19. Immigrant Settlement Districts in Five Provinces 191
20. Early Purchases of Large Farms in Prairie Provinces 203
21. Immigrant Settlements in Manitoba 208
22. Immigrant Settlements in Saskatchewan 210
23. Immigrant Settlements in Alberta 216
24. Immigrant Settlements in Ontario 224
25. Immigrant Settlements in British Columbia 225
26. A Summary of Congregations, 1920-1940 241
27. Mennonite Congregations in Canada 269
28. Persons Accommodated in German Refugee Camps  
(1930) 321
29. Dispersion of 1929 Moscow Refugees (By 1932) 327
30. Summary of Foreign Mennonite Missions (c. 1930) 334
31. Beginning Dates of Provincial Conferences 405
32. A Chronology of Canadian Mennonite Bible Schools 468
33. Homes for Girls (Established by CM and MB  
Conferences) 475
34. Mennonite Population Increases Compared to Selected  
Membership Increases (In the 1930s) 487
35. Racial Identification of Canadian Mennonites in the Census  
Years 1931, 1941 526

## *List of Charts*

1. Mennonite Groups in Canada in 1920 22
2. Mennonite Groups Started 1920-1940 421

## *Author's Acknowledgements*

THE WRITING of this first general history of all Mennonites in Canada was initiated in 1967, the year of Canada's centennial, with the modest goal of accomplishing the task with a single volume. However, the unfolding of a fascinating, sometimes complex, and occasionally powerful history could not easily be contained, and we now know that even this second volume will not be the last one.

History is the recollection and interpretation of a heritage. It is also a reminder of human indebtedness, in my case not only to those who made history and laid life's foundations for me and my generation but also to those, an ever-growing number, who helped to write this history, and without whom it would not have been possible.

Gratefully I acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and its funding sources (various Mennonite conferences and the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)), the Dr. David Friesen Family Foundation, the P. W. Enns Family



Foundation, and Peter Redekop. The University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel College provided computing grants.

I acknowledge also the special assistance of T. D. Regehr, well-known Canadian historian and, during this project, President of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, and of Lyle Friesen, a congenial research colleague for two years. Others who assisted were research assistants and special contributors, manuscript critics and proofreaders, historical society members, treasurers and fund-raisers, a cartographer and technical advisors, stenographers and computer clerks, and, last but not least, all the members of my immediate family, as well as the truly professional people at Macmillan of Canada. I name them all to thank them all: Miriam Jantzi Bauman, Pauline Bauman, Wesley Berg, Lorna Bergey, Glenn Brubacher, Marianne Coleman, Edward Dahl, Ernie Dick, Arthur Driedger, Leo Driedger, Abe Dueck, Adolf Ens, Helen Epp, Marlene Epp, Esther Epp-Thiessen, David Fransen, Leonard Freeman, J. W. Fretz, Bert Friesen, Louella Friesen, Ted Friesen, Douglas Gibson, Herbert Giesbrecht, Orland Gingerich, George Groening, A. E. Hildebrand, Anne Holloway, Martin Holmberg, William Janzen, Larry Kehler, Lawrence Klippenstein, Fred Lichti, Harry Loewen, Gerhard Lohrenz, Lloyd Mackey, Noah Martin, Vic Neglia, Ruth Peckover, G. I. Peters, Jake Peters, John Pope, Vern Ratzlaff, P. J. B. Reimer, Peter Rempel, Lorraine Roth, Rodney Sawatsky, Nelson Scheifele, Eleanor Sinclair, Sam Steiner, Ingrid Unruh, Paul Voegtlin, Linda Walker, Alson Weber, and Ruby Weber.

As well, there is an ongoing indebtedness to my readers and to future scholars, who, since every historical record has its imperfections, could assist me by sending me the kind of feedback which will help to improve future editions of this work.

Frank H. Epp  
 Conrad Grebel College  
 University of Waterloo  
 Ontario, Canada  
 June 30, 1982

## Foreword

THE DOMINANT THEME of *Mennonites in Canada 1786 – 1920* (published in 1974) was the Mennonite search for a measure of separation from Canadian and other secular societies. In the present volume, the struggle to survive despite the failure to maintain the traditional physical or geographical separation becomes dominant.

In Canada, wartime passions and reforms made it impossible for the Mennonites to maintain the educational and cultural institutions which had enabled them to achieve a degree of physical separation from Canadian society. Consequently, in the 1920s, those Canadian Mennonites who still regarded such separation as essential for the preservation of their faith decided to leave Canada. At very considerable economic and social cost, they moved to Mexico or Paraguay when it became clear that provincial governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were determined to enforce educational “reforms” which were unacceptable to the Mennonites. They, however, were a minority, even among the Mennonites.



The majority of Canadian Mennonites tried to accommodate themselves to the new conditions of post-war Canada, but many had serious doubts about whether the distinctive features of their faith could survive and prosper without the safeguards of physical separation. Certainly, other safeguards and other institutions would have to be created to replace those destroyed by provincial reforms. Thus the Mennonite struggle to preserve some cherished nonconformist values against the onslaught of alien ideas and modes of life could be observed on many fronts. The disasters of the Great Depression of the 1930s further intensified the struggle for survival, adding economic concerns to those of culture and religion.

For other Mennonites, the struggle for survival in the 1920s and 1930s was even more desperate. During the war, Mennonite churches in Germany and Holland made old and venerable religious principles optional for their members, and many quickly flocked to the colours in the military defence of their fatherland. In Russia, where Mennonites had enjoyed exceptional privileges and achieved phenomenal successes, the war, revolution, and civil strife completely destroyed the social and economic viability of the Mennonite colonies. The colonists were faced with the harsh choice of immigration or forcible induction into an alien and hostile new reality under the Soviets. Survival, not separation, became the overriding concern of a people whose desperation rose to incredible intensity in these decades.

These experiences, while in some respects unique, had a great deal in common with the struggles of other peoples in all parts of the world. Certainly in Canada, Mennonites were only one of many minority groups who at times felt the survival of the things dear and precious to them was threatened. Each minority group tended to see itself as being alone, threatened by all the others. French-Canadian Catholics were often inclined to see all other Canadians as English Protestants, and certainly small groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses thought themselves a very small minority opposed by everyone else. In many Mennonite communities the *Englaender* (English) were all non-Mennonites, whether or not they knew any English. This history, therefore, reveals important aspects of Canadian history as well as specific details of Mennonite history.

It is well known that when war broke out again in 1939, the Canadian government was determined to avoid a crisis with the

French Canadians over the question of compulsory military service overseas. The French-Canadian objections to conscription were certainly not the same as those of the Mennonites to active military service, but the willingness of the Canadian government to accommodate both was rooted in a respect for minority groups unmatched by any other wartime government. The Mennonites are only one of many groups which make up the Canadian mosaic. Their struggles in the 1920s and 1930s are therefore relevant for anyone wishing to understand Canada better.

The writing of this volume, like Volume I, was sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. It was supported financially by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, several Mennonite organizations, and private donors. Equally important, but less tangible, support has come from many interested readers and critics of the manuscript. This volume is intended to foster a better understanding not only of Canadian Mennonites, but also of the country in which, after struggling for years to survive, Mennonites have now found opportunities to participate actively and positively in virtually all aspects of community life.

T. D. Regehr  
Professor of History  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

## *Prologue*

THE WORLD had survived the Great War (1914–1918), but peace did not bring with it a feeling of contentment or even a sense of security. On the contrary, in the words of Sir Robert Borden, Canada's wartime Prime Minister, "the world had drifted from its old anchorages and no man could with certainty prophesy what the outcome would be." The post-war international community was confronted by many problems, some of which the war had not solved and some of which the war had created. The war-to-end-all-wars did not end all wars. And before the twentieth century was half spent, the nuclear bombs of a second world-wide conflagration focused the survival question for the whole of humanity as never before.

The impact of the first total war just concluded was felt by the European states, their colonies, and other parts of the world, including the separated Mennonite world, for decades to come. The big revolution in Russia, which the war helped to precipitate, sent shock waves of its own around the globe, shaking old and new nations in

ever-recurring quakes. Revolutions and counter-revolutions threatened the democracies with authoritarian forms of government, both of the left and of the right. Communism and fascism in turn stirred new rivalries, which the crumbling empires, the awakening colonies, and their distant allies could not escape.

Complicating the emergence of a secure international order were the world-wide economic dislocations of the 1930s, which accentuated political instabilities, class conflict, and extremist solutions. Slowly but surely, the world stage was set for more belligerency. And the international instruments created by the Peace of Versailles and the League of Nations were too weak, or their leaders too unwilling, to prevent the ensuing conflict.

The historical period framed by the two world wars was an age of displacement in every way. People by the tens of millions lost their homes and became refugees. The borders of nations and empires were adjusted as changing international realities required a massive redrawing of the maps. Old traditions and cultures were confronted and often swept aside by new political ideologies, social movements, and technologies. The advent of radio heralded the age of mass communication and the further invasion of minority cultures by the majorities.

These developments all had their international dimensions, but each national society mirrored the struggle for continuity in its own way. And within the nation-states themselves, smaller populations of all kinds were caught in the squeeze of contradictory forces at work. No groups, no matter how isolated or separated, could escape the big question of the century: the survival of humankind in general and of minorities and their values in particular. Canadianization, urbanization, and various reform movements were threatening the traditional cultures of ethnic and religious minorities alike.

In Canada, the problems of minority groups were complicated during this time by the country's own dilemmas, resulting partly from her own choices and partly from forces beyond her control. Should Canada be simply a British dominion or should she be a nation in her own right? If nationalism was the most logical direction, should that nationalism move Canada closer to, or further away from, the United States? Was international co-operation and interdependence the call of the hour or did the American idea of isolation hold the key to the Canadian future?



Fundamental questions about basic political and economic directions remained unanswered, as Canada's internal confidence was shaken repeatedly by many dashed hopes. The idea that the twentieth century belonged to Canada was fast losing credibility for several reasons. Canada's capacity to attract and keep immigrants was cast into doubt by the large outflow to the United States and other countries. The promises of the golden West were shattered when the price of wheat fell temporarily from \$2.32 per bushel in 1919 to 76 cents per bushel in 1921 and a low of less than 40 cents per bushel a decade later. Low prices, moreover, were accompanied in the 1930s by severe drought, dust storms, and great numbers of grasshoppers throughout most of the prairie region. An accelerating move to the cities was not only threatening rural values but also ushering in a new class-consciousness, as had become evident in the Winnipeg strike.

Intellectual leadership was not lacking during these critical times, but achieving a popular consensus was quite another matter. There was a turning away from the old political, social, economic, and religious institutions and ideals which seemed unable to meet and solve the problems of post-war Canada. None of the new ideas and new movements, however, gained nation-wide majority support. Clergymen spoke out boldly, but neither the convinced pacifists nor the ardent nationalists were the leaders of majorities. Newspaper editors, like the politicians, succumbed to parochialism in order to survive or, as some believed, to follow the better course. Other writers, as well as artists, commanded too little recognition and were too poorly paid to have a national voice. And radio was preoccupied with establishing itself as an institution, unsure whether to take its cues from Britain or the United States.

In this national and international situation the Mennonites tried to find themselves and their future. Throughout their 400 years they had sought to survive by separating themselves from the main thoroughfares of the world and the power plays in the international community. Yet separation and isolation were never complete or entirely successful. The Mennonites were not spared the tribulations of the wars and of the inter-war years. No place on earth, not in the east and not in the west, not in the north and not in the south, provided a seclusion sufficient to protect them from the storms of the twentieth century, though many sought such a place of refuge with diligence.

Thus, the Mennonites became a part of the struggle for survival in places and ways so diverse that they recorded a chapter quite unique in the history of the twentieth century. Canada was the setting and the focus for much of that history. The Mennonites found this country to be both a friend and an enemy in their struggle, one to which they fled with great eagerness and one which some left with equally great sadness. Perhaps it will surprise no one that a time of many troubles also gave rise to many different responses.