

Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the context of Entrepreneurship:
The Loewen Lumber Businessmen of Steinbach, Manitoba,
1877-1985

By

Rachel Joanne Mills

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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Departments of History
University of Manitoba
University of Winnipeg
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**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
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Abstract

In his survey of Canadian business, Michael Bliss sets out a study of the “interplay of enterprise and opportunity,” the story of “people risking capital in the hope of profit.”¹ Historian Joy Parr contends that the history of business “is not comprehensible through the accumulation of capital and the recruitment of labour alone,” and thus she attempts to “locate and understand the relationships among industry, domesticity and community.”² On the one hand my work is a traditional business history, a narration of a southeastern Manitoba Mennonite lumber enterprise in terms of capital investment, and the impact of new technologies and government policies. However, it is Parr’s work, that considers the complexities, severalties, and simultaneity of identities, which provides the model for this study of the gender, ethnic, and religious identities of four generations of Loewen entrepreneurs within their workplace, home and community.

Four generations of Cornelius Loewens lived in the Mennonite community of Steinbach, Manitoba: Cornelius Wiens Loewen (C. W.), 1827-1893; Cornelius Bartel Loewen (C. B.), 1863-1928; Cornelius Toews Loewen (C. T.), 1883-1960; and Cornelius Paul Loewen (C. P.), 1926-1985. Each of the Corneliuses lived there with their families, and they participated in Steinbach’s growth, from C. W. Loewen’s second marriage in 1877 which brought him to Steinbach, to the death of his great-grandson C. P. Loewen in 1985. From the time that C. W. Loewen was a farmer, and C. B. Loewen was a seasonal sawmill owner, to the time when C. T. Loewen developed a commercial lumberyard and C. P. Loewen established a large, nationally-focused window manufacturing company, the Loewen lumbermen typified

¹ Michael Bliss, *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 8.

² Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 3, 6.

Steinbach's development from Mennonite village to significant business centre. This thesis argues that concomitant with these developments were new, negotiated, and reinvented gender, ethnic, and religious identities and social roles. This study narrates the business developments of the Loewen lumber enterprise, suggesting that as the Loewens moved from an agrarian existence to a large commercial venture, their cultural identities and social roles came to reflect their changing economic activity and the increasing interaction which the Loewens had with middle-class Manitoban, and Canadian, society.

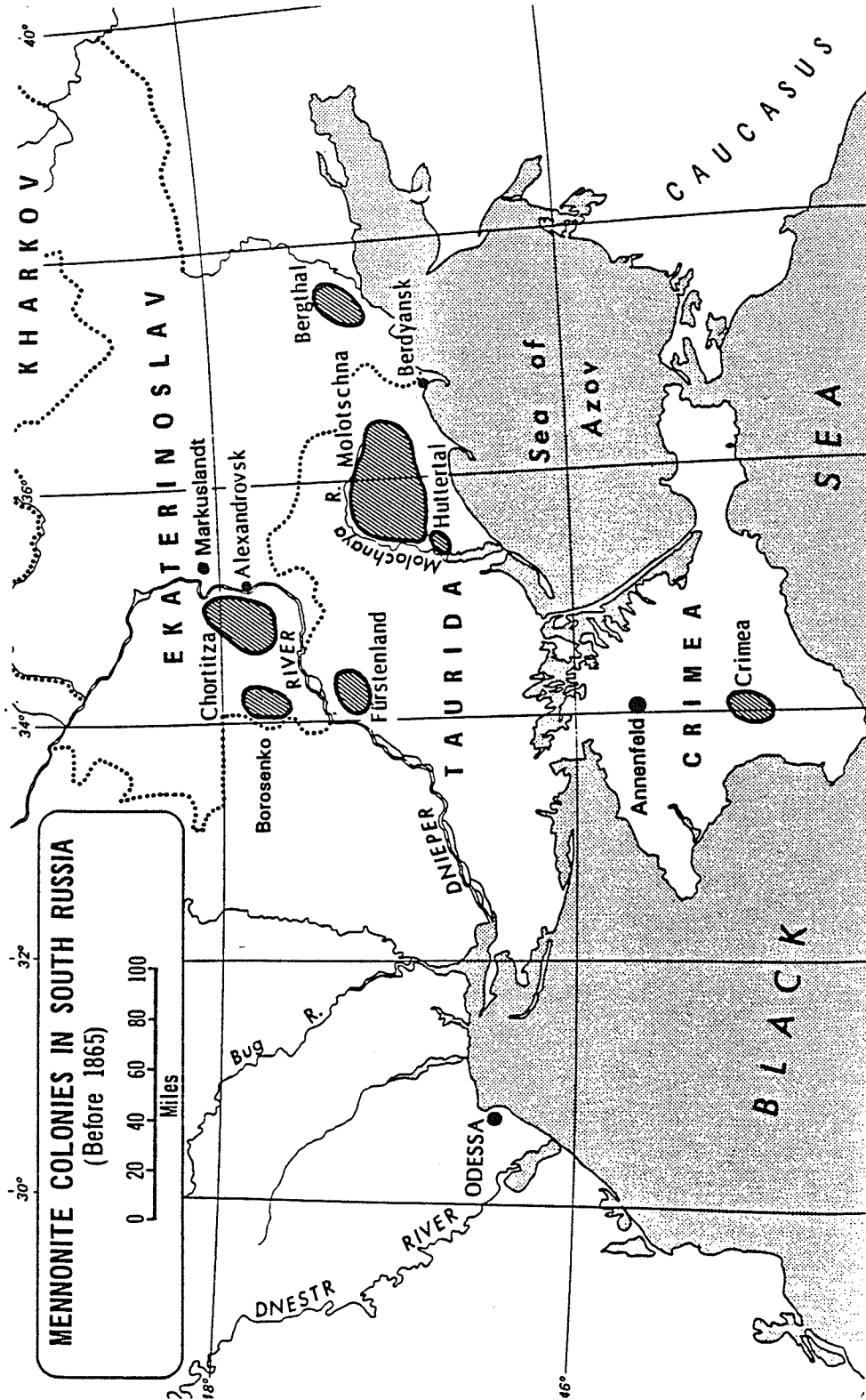
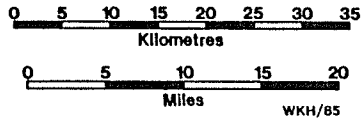


Fig. 1 The Mennonite Colonies in South Russia

CREDIT: Harvey Plett, *Seeking To Be Faithful: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference*, (Steinbach: Board of Church Ministries, Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1996), 66.

MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS IN MANITOBA (1874-76)

By William Schroeder



(Scratching River is now the Morris River)

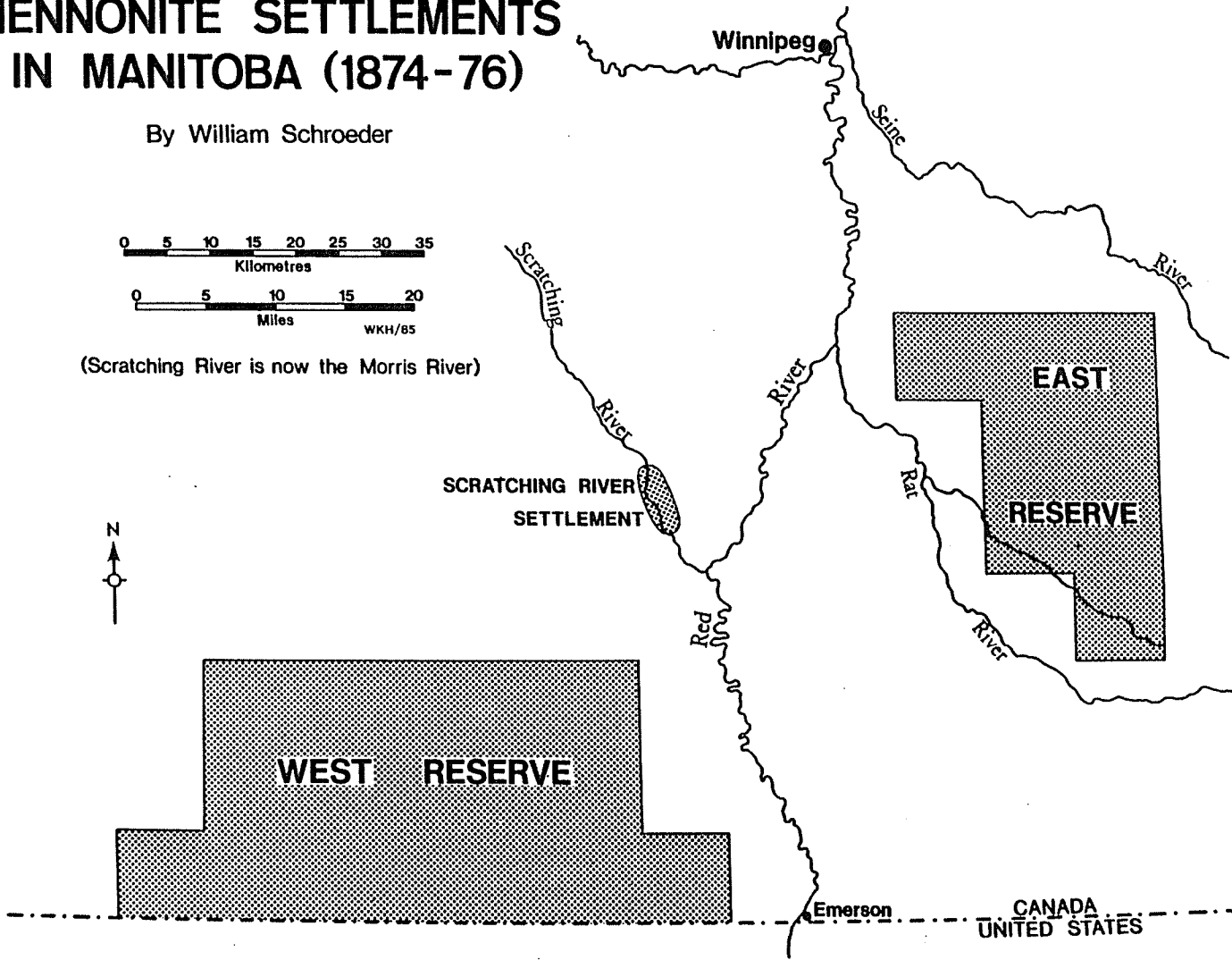
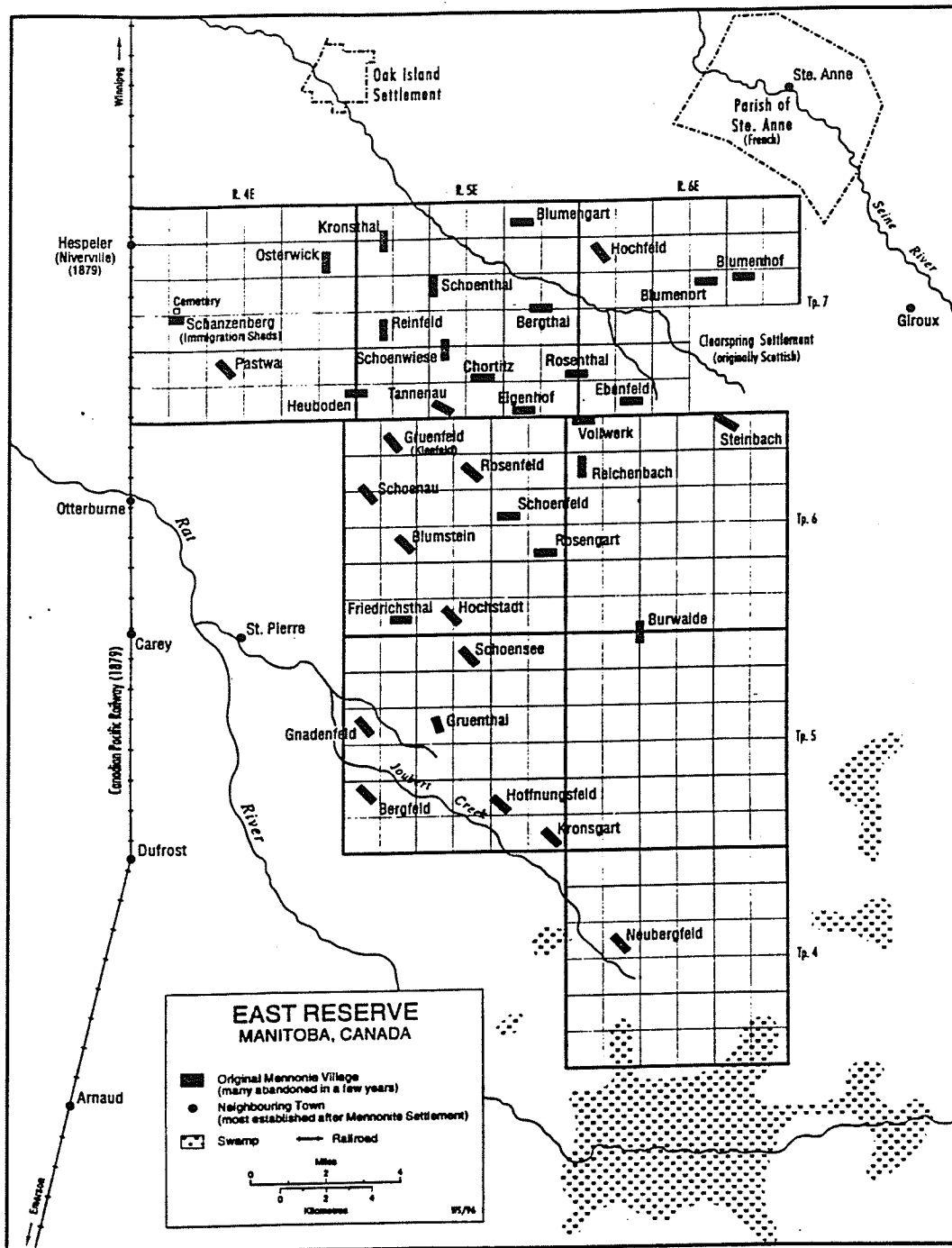


Fig. 2 Mennonite Reserves in Southern Manitoba

CREDIT: William Schroeder and Helmut T. Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1990), 63.



The East Reserve circa 1890. Map courtesy of Hildebert and Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (2d), page 73.

Fig. 3 The Mennonite East Reserve

CREDIT: Delbert Plett, *East Reserve 125: Hanover Steinbach 1874-1999, "Celebrating Our Heritage,"* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 1999), 12.

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The staff at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba; the Legislative Library of Manitoba; the Court of Queen's Bench, Winnipeg; the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg; the Steinbach Jake Epp Library; the Steinbach Bible College Library; the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives, Steinbach; and the Rural Municipality of Hanover were all very helpful.

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Introduction

Mennonites are a Christian, sectarian, pacifist people who trace their spiritual and ethnic roots to the radical wing of the European Reformation. The Dutch/North German branch of Mennonites settled successively in Prussia, South Russia and then moved to Western Canada in the 1870s. Cornelius Wiens (C. W.) Loewen was part of this nineteenth century transatlantic migration and in 1874 he settled in Gruenfeld (now Kleefeld), Manitoba, the first Mennonite village in Western Canada.¹ Loewen, a forty-seven year old man at the time of migration, came with his wife, Helena Bartel, and their two sons, Cornelius, 11, and Isaak, 9. In October 1876, after giving birth to a third son only a few months earlier, Helena died. Less than six months later C. W. Loewen married a widow, Katherina Thiessen Barkman, and moved to her property in the nearby Mennonite village of Steinbach.²

Steinbach had been settled in 1874 by eighteen *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonite families. Literally meaning “small congregation,” the *Kleine Gemeinde* were a conservative break-away group from the larger Mennonite church in Russia.³ In Steinbach settlers established their village according to the traditional Mennonite *Strassendorf* (“street village”) plan. The villagers pooled and then redivided their quarter sections and each family was given a lot on either side of the village street (six acres to north, and ten to the south of the street).⁴ This open field system ensured the

¹ It should be noted here that though “Loewen” and “Gruenfeld” are German words originally spelt with umlauts (“Löwen” and “Grünfeld”), they were anglicized in the twentieth century in Canada. I have used the anglicized spelling of proper names throughout for clarity and consistency.

² Melvin J. Loewen, *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen and Helena Bartel*, (Goshen, IN and Steinbach, MB: Heritage Classics, 1994), 18.

³ A discussion of the emergence of the *Kleine Gemeinde* can be found in Adolf Ens, “The Founding of the Molotschna Mennonite Church and Its Development up to the Formation of the *Kleine Gemeinde*,” in *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde*, ed. Delbert Plett, (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 1993), 31-39.

⁴ This main thoroughfare was established parallel to a creek, giving special meaning to the name Steinbach (‘stony creek’). On the six-acre lots the settlers built houses and barns, and the ten acre plots

fair distribution of good and poorer land, and the *Strassendorf* plan provided for the establishment of a village of pioneers rather than individual families isolated on their quarter sections.⁵ This communal system was replaced in 1911 when the village was officially surveyed and landowners acquired title to their own land. Businesses were established in Steinbach prior to the break-up of the village system; by 1900 Steinbach had more than a dozen business establishments.⁶ However, it was after 1911 that Steinbach, despite its conservative religious ethos, distance from the railway, and proximity to Winnipeg, developed into the uncontested service centre for southeastern Manitoba.

Four generations of Cornelius Loewens lived in Steinbach: Cornelius Wiens Loewen (C. W.), 1827-1893; Cornelius Bartel Loewen (C. B.), 1863-1928; Cornelius Toews Loewen (C. T.), 1883-1960; and Cornelius Paul Loewen (C. P.), 1926-1985. Each of the Corneliuses lived there with their families, and they participated in, challenged, and observed Steinbach's growth and changing identity during the century from C. W. Loewen's second marriage in 1877 to the death of his great-grandson C. P. Loewen in 1985. From the time that C. W. Loewen was a farmer, and C. B. Loewen farmed with a sawmill and threshing interest on the side, to the time when C. T. Loewen developed a commercial lumberyard and C. P. Loewen owned a large window and door manufacturing company with warehouses and sales offices throughout Western Canada, the Loewen lumbermen typified Steinbach's development from Mennonite village to significant business centre. This thesis argues that concomitant with these developments were new, negotiated, and

were farmed. The rest of the land was divided into several large fields to serve as arable land and meadows and these fields were then divided into strips for the individual use of each of the villagers.

⁵ John H. Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, 1960 (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 2000), 37, 69-70.

⁶ Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 150.

reinvented cultural identities and social roles. This study narrates the business developments of the Loewen lumber enterprise and investigates the evolving ethnic, religious, and gender identities and roles that accompanied these developments.

Several different approaches to history can be useful in interpreting the history of business families such as the Loewens. Business history, a field of specific inquiry since the early 1970s, represent an attempt to understand the concept and creation of capital, the importance of competition, and of developments such as the introduction of new technologies, broadening markets, and an increasingly intrusive public policy.⁷ As editor of the collection of essays, *The Development of Canadian Capitalism*, business historian Douglas McCalla stresses the importance of studying together what he views as the symbiotic and parallel growth of modern business and the modern state.⁸ In his significant survey of five centuries of Canadian business, *Northern Enterprise*, Michael Bliss describes business history as the “interplay of enterprise and opportunity,” the story of “people risking capital in the hope of profit.”⁹ Bliss, like McCalla, also emphasizes the centrality to business history of the relationship between capitalism and the state.¹⁰

Writing in the same year as McCalla, historian Joy Parr contends that “the history of the rise of industry is not comprehensible though the accumulation of capital and the recruitment of labour alone.”¹¹ In her *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950*, Parr seeks to “locate and understand the relationships among industry, domesticity and community.”¹² In

⁷ Douglas McCalla, ed. *The Development of Canadian Capitalism: Essays in Business History* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1990), 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ Bliss, 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

examining two Ontario family businesses – the Penman family knitting mill business in Paris and the Knechtel family furniture makers situated in Hanover – and discussing gender roles and ethnic identity, Parr provides a picture of business, entrepreneurs, and employees which displays great subtlety and complexity. She suggests that descriptions of work have divided “domestic from market relations, capitalist from patriarchal domains,”¹³ and that the language of the dualisms of public and private life, waged and non-waged labour, masculine and feminine roles, have set class and gender apart. Yet, Parr asserts, they are one.¹⁴ Men, like women, are gendered subjects, “formed and constrained in class relations,” and “understandings and obligations were also framed in religious faith, ethnicity, and nationality.”¹⁵

In a more recent article, Parr has called on historians to leave behind the views of academics such as J. R. Miller, a former editor of the *Canadian Historical Review*, who want to “cleave close to the roots of history in the humanities, to the belief that there is a human condition, absolute, enduring, and universal.”¹⁶ Instead, she asserts, we should “agree that the ‘definitive’ must be elusive,...that single truths and solid substance are illusory.”¹⁷ More specifically, Parr senses an “inherent instability in identities – that being simultaneously a worker, a Baptist, and a father, one is never solely or systematically any of these” and historians must “battle ‘between the impulse and desire to impose order and a tolerance for ambiguity’” in order to attempt to understand “the man in the ordinariness of his multiplicity.”¹⁸

On the one hand my work comprises aspects of the more traditional approach to business history represented by McCalla and Bliss, narrating the development of

¹³ Ibid., 243.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 245.

¹⁶ Joy Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” *Canadian Historical Review* 76 (September 1995), 358.

¹⁷ Ibid., 360.

¹⁸ Ibid., 361.

the Loewen lumber enterprise within the Canadian context and in terms of capital investment, and the impact of new technologies and government policies. However, it is Parr's work, that considers the complexities, severalties, and simultaneity of identities, which provides the model for this complementary study of the gender, ethnic, and religious identities of the Loewen entrepreneurs within their workplace, home and community. In this study I consider how four generations of Mennonite men integrated, invented and redefined their gender, ethnic, and religious identities while pursuing success and participating in the broader economic sphere.

A study of a Manitoba Mennonite business family demands analysis of religious identity. The Loewen lumber entrepreneurs were active members of their Mennonite congregations and were involved in inter-Mennonite and broader based Christian mission and service organizations. Marguerite Van Die and Calvin Redekop outline two different approaches to this problem. Van Die seeks to understand the extent to which religion intersected and influenced the family life and business affairs of Canadian businessman Charles Colby. Her work challenges historians' understanding of nineteenth century women's 'cult of domesticity' and men's juxtaposed 'myth of the self-made man' which assumes that for men "participation in religious activity was a remnant of the old order."¹⁹ Van Die asserts that Colby drew on his "religious and family identity to provide some form of meaning to the individualistic lifestyle of a businessman in pursuit of reward"²⁰ and that "in an economic system where land and even material possessions were no longer sources of stability, religion and the family took on a new value as points of hope and

¹⁹ Marguerite Van Die, "A 'Christian Businessman' in the Eastern Townships: The Convergence of Precept and Practice in Nineteenth Century Evangelical Gender Construction," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 10 (1999), 103.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

continuity.”²¹ Religion was, Van Die states, “not something experienced in isolation, but intimately interwoven with economic, social and political concerns, which in turn bound families to larger networks of kinship and community.”²²

Mennonite scholars such as Calvin Redekop, a sociologist with a focus on work, entrepreneurship and economics, have similarly noted the important relationships between religion, business, family, and community. In *Mennonite Entrepreneurs*, Redekop asks whether “religion [is] determinative of the economic forces,” or “the victim and creator of socio-economic forces?” and he attempts to understand “how a religious movement integrates and rationalizes its faith as it participates in the broad economic structures and processes of the host society.”²³ In a collection of essays edited by Redekop, with Victor Krahn and Sam Steiner, Anabaptist-Mennonite historians explore the various ways in which religious beliefs have informed the economic behaviour of Mennonite communities, and the extent to which economic practices have changed the Mennonite faith through time and over space. Arnold Snyder argues that in the sixteenth century Anabaptists all agreed that economic relations “within the church, the Body of Christ, were to be governed according to the distributive principle of sufficiency for all.”²⁴ Mary Sprunger, in her article on early Dutch Anabaptist communities, asserts that “making money was sanctioned so long as profits served the community faithful, rather than individual greed.”²⁵ In his essay on twentieth century Mennonite entrepreneurship in Canada, T. D. Regehr outlines Mennonite economic assimilation which, he argues, “preceded,

²¹ Ibid., 125.

²² Ibid.

²³ Calvin Redekop, Stephen C. Ainlay, and Robert Siemens, *Mennonite Entrepreneurs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 82.

²⁴ Arnold Snyder, “Anabaptist Spirituality and Economics,” in *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics*, eds. Calvin Redekop, Victor A. Krahn, and Samuel J. Steiner, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America and the Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1994), 7.

²⁵ Mary S. Sprunger, “Dutch Mennonites and the Golden Age Economy: The Problem of Social Disparity in the Church,” in *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics*, 30.

and in turn facilitated, the integration and assimilation of Mennonites into other aspects of Canadian life.”²⁶ Mennonite economic practices and religious beliefs have intersected with one another, changing both, over time and space.

The worlds of the Loewen lumbermen were shaped not only by religious identities but also by the construction of gender. Joy Parr asserts that gender history engages the interpretive possibility that “manliness and womanliness are socially constituted and continually reconstrued in specific historical conjectures.”²⁷

McPherson, Morgan, and Forestell, editors of *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*, argue that gender is a social construction and that masculinity, like femininity, requires investigation. Early women’s history “purposefully ignored chronicling the overstudied half of humanity” but as a result made men’s behaviour appear ‘natural’ rather than constructed.²⁸ In an article on * homosocial culture in nineteenth century “up-country” British Columbia, Adele Perry identifies the importance in writing men’s history, asserting that “exposing the engendered character of men’s history gives the lie to the notion that women are the ‘other’ to the universal, ungendered, unproblematic, and usually unspoken norm of men.”²⁹ Men, like women, gender history asserts, must be studied as gendered historical actors; masculinity, like femininity, is socially constructed.

Masculinity is constructed, and as Parr notes, “continually reconstrued in specific historical conjectures,”³⁰ that is, it changes over time. In *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, E.

²⁶ T. D. Regehr, “Mennonites and Entrepreneurship in Canada,” in *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics*, 124.

²⁷ Parr, “Gender History,” 355.

²⁸ Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, eds., *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

²⁹ Adele Perry, “Bachelors in the Backwoods: White Men and Homosocial Culture in Upcountry British Columbia, 1858-1871,” in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R. W. Sandwell, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 180.

³⁰ Parr, “Gender History,” 355.

Anthony Rotundo examines the ways in which masculinity was constructed over three centuries in the Northern United States. Identifying three distinct phases of masculine identity, Rotundo employs the terms *communal manhood*, *self-made manhood*, and *passionate manhood* to describe middle-class male identity in eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century New England. The first phase is focused on the importance of the household, with the man as its head, in eighteenth century colonial society. A man's status was determined by that of his family and, Rotundo asserts, he "fulfilled himself through public usefulness more than his economic success."³¹ Developments in the nineteenth century which emphasized individualism deeply affected masculine identity. Rotundo describes the self-made man as having found his identity in his work, rather than his household. He was also able to secure his status and identity through his achievements, since this was no longer pre-determined at his birth.³² The third phase, *passionate manhood*, developed in the late nineteenth century and while it retained the self-made man's emphasis on work, it supplemented this with a new focus on "modes of enjoyment and self-fulfillment outside of it."³³ This model of three phases of manhood may describe nineteenth century middle-class masculinity, but it has broader applications, as it describes more generally the transition from the centrality of household and community to the importance of work itself, and then a focus on life outside of work, a focus on leisure time and consumerism.

Further to this discussion, masculinity differs from place to place, from one class to another, and from one ethnic group to another. Robert Harney discusses the "earthly camaraderie typical of a peasant work force" which developed among Italian migrant men in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century, and the accompanying

³¹E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

inferiority which these men felt as they compared themselves to Anglo-Celtic Canadians.³⁴ Jeffrey Taylor identifies the changing masculine identities among Manitoba farm men in the early twentieth century as “the farmer acquired a sense of himself as an agricultural businessman,” a leader in the community, a professional, and a man whose wife was partner in the business, not to be bossed around, but left to do her own jobs.³⁵ Steven Reschly describes the “ideal of housefather leadership” which was promoted in the 1860s by Amish leaders in Iowa as the community sought self-preservation in the midst of a “powerful market revolution” which “presented a difficult environment for the survival of patriarchal rural producer communities.”³⁶ Steven Maynard, in his critique of works by Craig Heron and Ian Radforth, suggests that “men workers mix[ed] their evolving class consciousness with a strong sense of their gender identity...as industrial capitalism unfolded” altering not only class relations, but “also shift[ing] gender relations precipitating a crisis in masculinity.”³⁷ Daniel Coleman investigates, through the reading of “New Canadian” narratives, the “process of re-evaluation and adjustment” which the migrant male undergoes as his “movement between cultures places him in a troubled relationship to conflicting codes for masculine behaviour.”³⁸ Marlene Epp provides a discussion of Mennonite young men during the Second World War, who, living in a wider society in which

³⁴ Robert F. Harney, “Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 11 (1979): 29-47.

³⁵ Jeffrey M. Taylor, “Theoretical and Practical Ideologies in the Making of Early Twentieth-Century Manitoba Farm Men,” *Prairie Forum* 17 (Spring 1992): 13-32.

³⁶ Steven D. Reschly, “‘The Parents Shall Not Go Unpunished’: Preservationist Patriarchy and Community,” in *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History*, eds. Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 160-181.

³⁷ Steven Maynard, “Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-Class History,” *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989), 166.

³⁸ Daniel Coleman, *Masculine Migrations: Reading the Postcolonial Male in ‘New Canadian’ Narratives*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), xii, 6.

masculinity and militarism were intrinsically linked, had to work out the contradiction between the ideal Mennonite pacifist and the ideal man.³⁹

Then, as time and place affected the construction of masculinity, they also affected the very construction of sexuality. My study of the Loewen lumbermen recognizes the specific construction of their masculine, and heterosexual, identities, in both time and place. Steven Maynard notes that while Heron and Radforth are correct in highlighting the “rough and rugged nature” of steel and bushworkers’ masculinity, they need to recognize the social construction of this masculinity, and that “rather than tossing around a very narrow and essentialist notion of masculinity, both Heron and Radforth need to recognize that what in fact they are talking about is a particular form of heterosexual masculinity.”⁴⁰ In his work, *Gay New York*, George Chauncey argues that “in important respects the hetero-homosexual binarism, the sexual regime now hegemonic in American culture, is a stunningly recent creation,” and that “heterosexuality, no less than homosexuality, is a historically specific social category and identity.”⁴¹ My study of four generations of Mennonite lumbermen discusses their specific, constructed, and changing, heterosexual, masculine identities.

In addition to works addressing the meanings of religion and gender, other works concentrating on the complex and varied nature of ethnicity are useful for my study. In a seminal article Kathleen Neils Conzen, David Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George Pozzetta, and Rudolph Vecoli, advance the concept of the invention of ethnicity.⁴² They argue that different notions of ethnicity over time are in part

³⁹ Marlene Epp, “Heroes or Yellow-bellies? Masculinity and the Conscientious Objector,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 17 (1999): 107-117.

⁴⁰ Maynard, 166.

⁴¹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 13, 26.

⁴² Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli. “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29(1992): 3-41.

negotiated identities, negotiated between the host society or dominant culture and an ethnic group, and among ethnic groups. Groups might invent, adapt, reject or emphasize aspects of their ethnicity in order to unify the ethnic group despite other differences or to defuse hostility of the dominant culture. The process of construction which Conzen and others propound admits the role of human agency in this invention while noting the influence of specific historical contexts in accelerating, decelerating, directing or redirecting the process.

In a recent Canadian ethnic history, Mark McGowan integrates a discussion of ethnicity with religion. He discusses the process of integration, invention, and negotiation in the Irish Catholic population of Toronto from the late 1880s to 1922. Over this period he contends that the Catholic community became increasingly Canadian. He notes, however, that “classical sociological definitions of acculturation and assimilation are not easily applied” to their experience and that while some behaviours resemble types of assimilation, the Catholic community defies any one categorization.⁴³ Examples of acculturation such as inter-faith marriages, increased political participation, and adoption of Canadian nation-building ideals are countered by McGowan’s claim that Canadian Catholics “still retained their distinctive creed, although they found ways to adapt it and shape it according to their needs.”⁴⁴ He asserts that they created for themselves a unique Canadian identity that combined “elements from both Canadian ‘majorities’ without fully succumbing to either.”⁴⁵

The concept of the invention of ethnicity and its application to ethnic groups that practiced a specific religion provides a framework for my discussion of the ethnic identities of the Loewen entrepreneurs, their families and their communities.

⁴³ Mark McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, The Irish, and Identity in Canada, 1887-1922*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

Originally a Low German-speaking, sectarian, pacifist people, who sought to maintain their separation from the world through a communal, agrarian lifestyle, Mennonites changed dramatically through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the 1970s C. P. Loewen attended the same Mennonite church as his great-grandfather, C. W. Loewen, attended in the 1880s. But it was no longer the *Kleine Gemeinde*. The congregation renamed, and reinvented, itself as the Evangelical Mennonite Church in the 1950s to reflect its changing ideology; it was now an English language church that practiced a more individualistic, evangelical theology. Nevertheless, four generations of Loewen entrepreneurs understood themselves to be Mennonite. The process of shaping, adapting, negotiating and reinventing identities was wide-ranging. This story is part of my narrative of the Loewen lumbermen of Steinbach, Manitoba.

Finally, works which address the geographical and cultural context of the Loewens' prairie ethnic landscape also help to frame my study. Scholars of some considerable renown, sociologist E. K. Francis and geographer John Warkentin, have observed the specific social and physical traits of southeastern Mennonite Manitoba, and documented change and continuity in the region. E. K. Francis, at the cutting edge of 1940s sociology and in response to the 1930s findings of C. A. Dawson, a sociologist from McGill who detailed what he saw as an inevitable assimilation of Mennonites into the wider Manitoba society, argued that the Mennonites of southern Manitoba had not assimilated but had actually employed acculturation, "a device by which a minority adjusts itself to the large society as a group."⁴⁶ Mennonites had, in Francis' mind, accepted traits from the host society and had consequently not lost any significant number of group members to the wider society.⁴⁷ Francis provided a linguistic example, noting that while the English language had been adopted, or co-

⁴⁶ E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba*, 2nd edition, (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2001), 217.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

opted, Low German and/or High German remained the vernacular, spoken and understood even by the few Mennonite university students.⁴⁸

Warkentin's 1960 doctoral thesis, recently published as *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, investigates the relationship between the geography of southern Manitoba, and the changing agricultural and business practices of the Mennonite East and West Reserve communities. Warkentin argues that the East Reserve, within which Steinbach is situated, commercialized slowly because of the conservatism of the Mennonites, the poor quality of the land, the lack of transportation and communication, and inefficient farming methods.⁴⁹ Only when Winnipeg became a significant market, Warkentin argues, did the East Reserve achieve commercial success.⁵⁰ However, by 1960 Warkentin could describe the Manitoba Mennonites as a "more self-assured, confident" group who, "instead of habitually retreating into themselves, . . . are becoming a more and more positive force in Manitoba."⁵¹

Over time, historians of the Mennonites have nuanced the concept of an increasingly technologized, specialized, differentiated, and urbanized world noting that modernization in southern Manitoba was accompanied by complex and changing notions of gendered, religious, and ethnic identity. Royden Loewen, for example, augments this discussion of modernization within the southern Manitoba context with an exploration of the changing nature of gender roles and ethnic and religious identities. In his *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930* he identifies strategic social sites employed by Mennonites to enable the continuity of community despite the vast changes of the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements*, 161, 231.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 231.

⁵¹ Ibid., 312.

mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In her recent M. A. thesis on Friesens Corporation, a Mennonite printing business in Altona, Manitoba, Janis Thiessen examines the changing notions of gender as understood by consecutive generations of Mennonite entrepreneurs in a growing business in a small, but expanding, southern Manitoba town. Thiessen details the early paternalism of the Mennonite male businessman, which was subsequently reinvented and eventually replaced with a human relations management model. Adoption of business models from the wider society by a southern Manitoba Mennonite company further informs the discussion of continuity and change.

This study of the Loewen lumbermen of Steinbach, Manitoba, employs the aforementioned works on religion, gender, and ethnicity. Perceiving the importance and influence of religion in the Mennonite community of Steinbach, and to the Loewen lumbermen, in particular, and assuming the construction of gender which changes over time and differs in class and ethnic groups, as well as the invention of ethnicity, this study of four generations of Mennonite men in southern Manitoba tests E. K. Francis' hypothesis of continuity amid change. Each Cornelius Loewen understood himself to be a Christian, a Mennonite and a man; each lived a very different life from his father. Masculine, ethnic, and religious identities change over time, and are specific to each place and time. This study details the particular identities – multiple and interwoven – of four Mennonite men of Steinbach, Manitoba.

For this study I utilized documents generated by different sources to create a holistic account of the Loewen lumbermen. These included documents constructed by the lumbermen themselves, a household diary kept by first generation C. W. Loewen and ledgers detailing the business of second generation C. B. Loewen and his son C. T. Loewen. C. B. Loewen also wrote letters that were published in the pages

of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, an early American Mennonite newspaper, and in Steinbach's German-language weekly, the *Steinbach Post*. C. B. Loewen's second wife was an avid diarist, and some of her daily journals are still extant and were useful in reconstructing the "everyday worlds" of the Loewen family.

The documents also include newspapers. Both the *Steinbach Post* and the subsequent English-language, "booster" paper, the *Carillon News*, provide local perspectives on the Loewen entrepreneurs.⁵² The newspapers contained weekly columns of "Steinbach News" which often mentioned the travels, family functions, and business developments of the Loewens and other Steinbach business families. Lengthier articles on the lumber business record their accomplishments, announcing, for example, the installation of a new piece of equipment, the retirement of a long-serving employee, or the 'Grand Opening' of a renovated store. Anniversary celebrations of the so-called 1905 beginning, with histories of the C. T. Loewen business, are also featured extensively in the pages of these local papers. Advertisements placed by the Loewen lumber business were particularly useful in constructing the history of the firm.

Oral history provides a third source and interviews by local historian Ralph Friesen with "life historians"⁵³ – close family, friends and employees of the Loewen entrepreneurs, in particular C. T. Loewen – are housed at the Mennonite Heritage

⁵² Jacob S. Friesen began the German-language weekly, the *Volks-Bote*, in 1913. In 1915 he moved to Steinbach and changed the newspaper's name to the *Steinbach Post* in June 1915. In March 1927 the newspaper's name was again changed to the *Steinbacher Post*, then from 1929 to 1934 the paper was known as *Die Post*. In 1935 the paper was renamed the *Steinbach Post*. Apart from any references to the *Volks-Bote*, and for clarity and consistency, I refer to the paper as the *Steinbach Post* throughout this study. The *Carillon News*, begun in 1946, became the *Carillon* in 1973, but, for the same reasons of clarity and consistency, I have used the earlier name throughout my thesis.

⁵³ Nancy Cook uses this term in her article "The Thin Within the Thick: Social History, Postmodern Ethnography, and Textual Practice," *Histoire sociale/Social History* XXXII (Mai-May 1999): 85-101. She notes that she borrowed the term from Marjorie Mbilinyi, "I'd Have Been a Man: Politics and the labour Process in the Production of Personal Narratives," in Personal Narratives Group, ed., *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), and writes that Mbilinyi "recommends it as an alternative to the objectifying labels 'informant' or 'subject'".

Centre, Winnipeg. These eighteen taped interviews provide a wealth of anecdotes, images, and interpretations – some dissonant, some harmonious – of C. T. Loewen, the focus of the oral history project, and his father, C. B. Loewen, as well as C. T.'s brothers, and sons. They detail the growth of the business, the changing nature of Steinbach and the surrounding community, and the place of the Loewen entrepreneurs within their families, and their ethnic and religious communities.

Finally, records constructed by the Loewens' religious community allow for a more thorough interpretation of the Loewen lumbermen. Church records generated by the Evangelical Mennonite Church (previously the *Kleine Gemeinde*) such as church periodicals, the German-language *Christlicher Familienfreund* and the English *EMC Messenger*, congregational year end reports, and committee meeting minutes document the Loewen's involvement in their religious communities, and the changing meanings of religious identities within that community.

The sources, then, reflect the evolving worlds of the four generations of Steinbach Loewen lumbermen. They chart the expansion of the business enterprise and suggest that as the Loewens moved from an agrarian existence to a large commercial venture with national sales and provincial divisions, their identities and social roles also changed. Over time their gender, ethnic, and religious identities came to reflect their changing economic activity and the increasing interaction which the Loewens had with middle-class Manitoban, and Canadian society.

Chapter One: Cornelius Wiens Loewen, Communal Man

Cornelius W. Loewen can be cast as a quintessential communal man. A member of the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* community in the Molotschna and Borosenko colonies in South Russia (or New Russia as parts of present-day Ukraine were then known) and, later, in Manitoba, C. W. Loewen spent his adult life as a head of household, and as such was, in the words of Anthony Rotundo, “the embodiment of all its members,”¹ representing his family in village matters and church meetings. Rotundo identifies the family as the basic unit of the political system in a communal society and asserts that “to head a household, in sum, was to anchor the status system, preserve the political order, provide a model of government, sustain piety, ensure productive activity, and maintain the economic support of one’s dependents.”² This description of communal society in eighteenth century New England is useful to a study of the Mennonite community in mid-nineteenth century Russia and late nineteenth century North America. However, as noted in the previous chapter, masculinity is constructed differently from one class to another and from one ethnic group to another. C. W. Loewen was the head of a Mennonite household in a Mennonite community. Loewen, his family, and his community, had a specific understanding of what it meant to “be a man.”

The Mennonite communities of South Russia consisted of agrarian male-headed households which neatly lined the main streets. Villagers were often linked by kinship ties, and siblings, in-laws, and cousins worked, worshipped, and visited with each other, creating a close-knit community. But at the core was the patriarchal household. An example of the patriarchal nature of the Mennonite world in which C.

¹ Rotundo, 12.

² Ibid.

W. Loewen lived, is the way women were identified. Rarely referred to by their given names, a daughter was often identified by her father's name, as Johann Reimers' Anna, for example. Once married a woman was known by her husband's name which was simply given a feminized ending, hence in April 1887 C. W. noted in his daily journal that Johann Loewensche was buried.³ A married couple was identified by the man's name made into a plural. C. W. thus noted children born to Johann Reimers, for example.⁴ These were the marks of a patriarchal society.

Still, while a man was the head of the household in C. W. Loewen's New Russia, a form of partnership between a husband and wife in a Mennonite farm household, has been identified by historians of Mennonite society.⁵ It has been asserted that in Mennonite communities, their work in the house, barn, and farmyard gave women social status.⁶ In the Loewens' farm household, C. W. noted the bushels of wheat, oats and barley, his wife Helena recorded the butter prices.⁷ One Mennonite scholar has suggested that in *Gemeinschaft*, that is, in Mennonite agrarian village society,

women's and men's work roles, however they may have been specialized sexually, were not separated socially, geographically, or relationally. Accordingly both were equally valued in the workplace, not least because value was not determined by monetary returns.⁸

Mennonite inheritance laws which entitled the husband or wife to half of the property in the event of his/her spouse's death, with the other half being shared equally between male and female children, have also been credited with providing women

³ C. W. Loewen, "Diary," 22 April 1887.

⁴ Ibid., 4 September 1887.

⁵ For example, Calvin Redekop, *The Promise of Work*, (Waterloo, ON: Benjamin Eby Lecture, Conrad Grebel College, 1983), 5; and Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*.

⁶ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 44.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Redekop, 5.

with a “sense of ownership of the farm and hence with power.”⁹ The opportunity to inherit land and assets meant that a woman’s marriage to a less wealthy man could result in matrilocality, “the practice of the husband going to live with the people of his wife.”¹⁰

Mennonite society was nothing less than patriarchal, but its patriarchalism was tempered by the imperatives of the agrarian household and by an egalitarian inheritance system. C. W. Loewen, as a man, a husband, and a father, was the household head, first in the village of Lindenau, Molotschna colony, New Russia, and later as a member of the migration to the nearby Borosenko colony and then of the transatlantic migration to North America where the Mennonite *Strassendorf* was once again recreated; but it was a manhood shaped by distinctive sectarian and agrarian culture set in a farm village that was transplanted to North America.

The re-establishment of the Mennonite village plan and community structures in North America has been seen as a prime example of group transplantation. In his 1960 study of the two southern Manitoba Mennonite Reserves, John Warkentin called these Mennonite settlements a “virtual transplanting,” and suggested that “perhaps nowhere else in North America has a peasant culture from Europe been so completely re-established.”¹¹ More recently Kathleen Conzen and others have asserted that immigrants, like the Mennonites,

who settled in ‘empty spaces,’ isolated rural areas...were less subject to assimilative pressures, nativistic prejudice, and conflict with other ethnic groups. The result...was less need for the invention of ethnicity, since the more particularistic collective consciousness based on kith and kin continued to serve their needs for community.¹²

⁹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹ Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements*, 1.

¹² Kathleen Conzen et al, 14.

Still, some scholars have more recently questioned this viewpoint and considered the aspects of reinvention employed by Mennonites to ensure community continuity in a new world and changing environment.¹³ Historian Royden Loewen argues that

the new worlds [Mennonites] encountered in the 1870s demanded new articulations of social boundaries, new concepts of community, new strategies of household reproduction, new associations with neighbouring groups, and new ways of approaching markets.¹⁴

Loewen notes that the outcome of these changes, however, “ensured the strength of Mennonite identity and community in the New World.”¹⁵

C. W. lived in a transplanted agrarian community. True, there were changes in C. W.’s life, but for each change, other changes were made to maintain the communitarian nature of his world. Certainly as time was spent in Canada ties to Russia became more distant, but then letters sent by and to individuals, as well as those published in Mennonite ethnic newspapers, did shape a kind of imagined community which played an important role in the way Mennonites understood themselves and the world around them. In the lifetime of C. W. Loewen, adaptations were also made to the markets and climates of Manitoba, for example the shift from wheat to mixed arable farming.¹⁶ E. K. Francis noted that as the Mennonites had in Russia, “in Canada, too, they tended to orient economic action according to competitive capitalistic standards.” But, Francis concludes, “in other spheres of their culture they emphasized sacred traditions and the welfare of the group as a whole, so that the rate of social change was slowed down.”¹⁷ In their daily lives, the Mennonite immigrants kept their “distinctive creed,” – their village plans, kinship ties, and

¹³ Royden Loewen, *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 5. Loewen identifies the recent work of Marlene Epp, Fred Kniss, and Steven Reschly as employing the concept of the invention of ethnicity in Mennonite history.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 122.

¹⁷ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 111.

religious structures - as they adapted their farming practices in order to meet the challenges of life in nineteenth century rural Manitoba. Because of that adaptation, C. W.'s life, both in Russia and in Canada, would be shaped by a communitarian culture.

The strongest evidence of communal continuity in C. W.'s life was his diary. Social historians who seek to understand the "everyday worlds" of women, men, wives, husbands, parents, and children – their inter-ethnic relationships, economic market involvement, and gender roles, for example – study diaries, letters and other personal sources, in an attempt to "recreate" the details of life in the past. C. W. Loewen kept a diary from 1858-1892, from age 31 to a year before his death at age 66. This "daybook" is sometimes sketchy; sometimes entries are made long after the event and consequently, are not recorded in chronological order. And yet, even sketchy accounts represent an attempt by an author to make sense of his (or her) life, to establish order in an often chaotic world.¹⁸ In the first decade of his diary, C. W. records only the bare details of his household economy – money borrowed, interest paid, and items bought and sold. However, from 1869 the entries also detail C. W.'s social interactions, church involvement, weather conditions and crop prices. He also records, often in lists, the life cycles of his community – the births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths – giving order and definition (dates, names, and places) amid the chaos and uncertainty of life.

From 1869 C. W., seen through the pages of his diary, is the quintessential communal, agrarian, Mennonite man. His compact world revolved around his household, clan, village, and *Gemeinde*. Kinship ties linked him to Russia, and once in North America, also to Nebraska, and these relationships were kept up through letters, visits, and newspaper accounts. Church involvement provided him with a role

¹⁸ Royden Loewen, *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863-1929*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 20.

in his community and opportunities to serve, as his father had, and brothers did, and to remind him that God was in control, that his responsibility was to live simply, humbly, and in the hope that God would receive him at the end of his earthly life. A good Mennonite man cared for the needy – widows, orphans, and others who could not look after themselves – he participated fully in his community, accepting any call to serve in whatever capacity. C. W.’s diary reveals that he was indeed this kind of man.

A communal man’s identity and status was determined by his family. Cornelius W. Loewen’s father was Isaac Loewen; born in 1787 in Prussia, he emigrated to Russia with his family in 1804.¹⁹ Isaac’s father, also Isaac, was a carpenter and cabinet maker in Prussia, but became a “moderately well-to-do” grain and silkworm farmer in Russia.²⁰ Isaac, C. W.’s father, was the only child who survived to adulthood; a younger brother died as a child.²¹ C. W.’s mother, Margaretha Wiens, was also born in Prussia and migrated to Russia as a teenager with her parents. Isaac and Margaretha married in 1813 and took over Isaac’s parents’ farm in the village of Lindenau on the Mennonite Molotschna colony, raising a family of thirteen. Family historian Delbert Plett notes that “the ownership of a full farm at a young age will have provided a good degree of financial security for the family,”²² and that Isaac, like his father, was a silkworm farmer, identified by two German agricultural students as a “Lehrmeister,” a master teacher in the field.²³

It was C. W.’s family that guided his religious belief, seemingly without question. When C. W., born in 1827 as the ninth child of Isaac and Margaretha, was

¹⁹ Delbert Plett, ed., *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874*, (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 1993), 510.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. Plett cites Royden Loewen’s doctoral dissertation; this information also appears in Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 18, 274n35.

ten years old, his father was elected as a deacon of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church. He held this office until 1848 when he was removed from the position in this strictly pacifist church because he did not inform the ministerial that his son-in-law, Cornelius S. Plett (the husband of his daughter, Sarah), had struck his adult servant girl. The brotherhood removed Isaac from the position of deacon with the admonition that he should have taken the matter more seriously.²⁴ Despite this transgression, Plett describes Isaac as a “dearly beloved pillar of the Gemeinde,” asserting that he accepted the admonition and “was able to strengthen his Christian walk” evidenced by his writings which show that “his greatest concern in his retirement years was that all his children would be able to find salvation and live a life of discipleship.”²⁵

Letters written to family members reveal Isaac as a man deeply concerned for the spiritual well-being of his children and grandchildren. His son Heinrich, three years younger than C. W., proved a particular worry for Isaac; Heinrich left the *Kleine Gemeinde* after being widowed and then became immediately involved with a young woman, Maria Doerksen, who did not belong to the group and refused to join it. Heinrich had already been admonished for loose living as a widower, but he was unrepentant, renouncing the *Kleine Gemeinde* and joining the more liberal *Ohrloff Gemeinde*, eventually marrying Maria in that church.²⁶ On 2 June 1863, soon after their marriage, Heinrich, who had just returned from a Sunday evening church service, was struck by lightning and instantly killed while sitting between two close relatives inside a building.²⁷ This tragedy shocked the *Kleine Gemeinde* and the wider Molotschna community.²⁸ It was the only event that C. W. recorded during 1863 and was the only entry from 1858-1868 that did not deal explicitly with the household

²⁴ Ibid., 511.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 512.

²⁷ Ibid., 512, 522.

²⁸ Ibid., 512.

economy. For Isaac it was devastating, bringing him great sorrow. In one letter written to Heinrich and Maria before Heinrich's death (though not sent until after the sudden accident), Isaac pondered what his wife, Margaretha, who had died two years before, would think if she could see "her beloved son hastening on the broad road unto eternal destruction."²⁹

The spiritual ideas of the narrow and broad way, and the centrality of the church in living a life which was acceptable to God, provided the religious context in which C. W. was raised and lived. Unlike his younger brother, Cornelius remained active in the *Kleine Gemeinde* for the whole of his life. After Heinrich's death C. W., and the rest of the community, could only reflect on Isaac's hope that they would all

really be startled by the almighty God through this fearful death, that we would be deeply moved within our hearts and consciences and so that we might reflect earnestly upon this calamity, looking at the same and considering it in the light of God's word!³⁰

In an entry recorded in Manitoba in December 1876, C. W. reflected similarly on the sudden death of a Heinrich Wiebe from the village of Blumenort, Manitoba; Wiebe had been caught in a terrible snowstorm and "unable to find the way home...froze to death." C. W. wrote that "we always have things to ponder: that we might be faithful to the end and not assume too many things," and then in a more practical vein, "that, or what we must do when such weather strikes."³¹ A Mennonite communal man was aware of God's omnipotency, his own humble position in the world, and the importance of being "faithful to the end."

The economic context in which C. W. lived was also influenced by his religious context and community. Farming was deemed the ideal vocation for a person seeking to live a humble and simple life, and while Delbert Plett describes C.

²⁹ Ibid., 534.

³⁰ Ibid., 549. Letter from Isaac Loewen to daughter-in-law Maria Doerksen Loewen, 1863.

³¹ Loewen, "C. W. Loewen Diary," *From the Inside Out*, 29.

W. Loewen as an “active trader,”³² it would be more correct perhaps to refer to him as a farmer. True, Cornelius records selling wheat, borrowing money from family, friends, and neighbours, making loans to others, and selling oxen, pigs, and lard. His diary illustrates the volume of borrowing, lending, buying, and selling in the Mennonite communities, as well as the percentage of business conducted with money compared to bartering, and the extent to which Mennonites participated in the wider economy. However, this is the diary of a farmer. In Molotschna, Borosenko, and then Manitoba, C. W. Loewen was a communitarian agriculturist who apparently heeded the advice of his co-religionist forebears who held that “the lowest estate, that of a husbandman, is the most conducive one for the preservation of genuine simplicity in Christ.”³³

Molotschna, 1827-1867

While Isaac Loewen’s life has been researched in some detail, relatively little is known about C. W.’s years as a child, youth, and young adult on the Mennonite Molotschna colony. A family genealogy dates Cornelius’ baptism into the *Kleine Gemeinde* church as 1847.³⁴ He would have been either 19 or 20 years of age at that time and this fits with Mennonite baptism patterns. Traditionally courtship and marriage followed soon after church membership. However, C. W. married six years later, at the age of 26. In 1853 C. W. married Helena Bartel, the 20 year old daughter of Jakob Bartel and Helena Klassen, *Kleine Gemeinde* farmers in the village of

³² Delbert Plett, *Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde In Imperial Russia and North America*, (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2000), 46.

³³ Robert Friedmann, ed. and trans., “Faith and reason: the principles of Mennonitism reconsidered, in a treatise of 1833,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 22 (1948), 91. Friedmann translated and edited Heinrich Balzer’s *Verstand und Vernunft: Einfaeltige und nach der Lehre des Evangeliums erlaeuterte Ansichten ueber der Unterschied des Verstandes und der Vernunft eines Menschen*, 1833 (Quakertown, PA, 1886).

³⁴ Melvin J. Loewen, *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen and Helena Bartel*, 18.

Marienthal, Molotschna.³⁵ Different sources date this wedding as either 22 October 1853³⁶ or 29 November 1853,³⁷ reflecting in part the twelve-day discrepancy between the Gregorian and Julian calendars. Just as marriage usually followed baptism and courtship, so too children usually followed marriage in close succession, almost always between ten to twelve months after the wedding. So it is surprising that C. W. and Helena's first child, Cornelius, was not born until October 1863, ten years after they married. Perhaps Helena had miscarriages, perhaps they could not conceive, perhaps stillborn children were born, or even babies who died soon after birth. C. W. and Helena were not without dependents, however. In 1855 they took in their six-year old niece, Anna Friesen, after her mother, C. W.'s sister Katharina, died. This action had many precedents in the communal society of Mennonite Russia and, later, Manitoba. A Mennonite man was part of a large kinship group and it fell within his responsibility to take care of its members.

C. W.'s scant diary entries from this period record details of the Loewens' farm household economy, and provide the only other information on Cornelius and Helena's life on the Molotschna. These entries confirm that C. W. was farming, and indeed owned a farm, on the Molotschna colony, though the village location has not been established. C. W. records money borrowed, and interest paid, as well as crop yields. Over a period of sixteen years, C. W. borrowed 1800 rubles from ten different sources including family members, wealthy people from the *Kleine Gemeinde* congregation, non-*Kleine Gemeinde* mayors, and acquaintances from the Molotschna. These family members include C. W.'s brothers, brothers-in-law, and father. In 1866

³⁵ Plett, *Dynasties*, 45.

³⁶ Ibid. This is the same date which appears in the Loewen genealogy, Melvin J. Loewen, *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen and Helena Bartel*, 18.

³⁷ Ibid., 46. Plett takes this second date from the diary of a *Kleine Gemeinde Ohm*, Johann Dueck.

C. W. also recorded that he sold about 26 *chetvert*, or 150 bushels, of wheat.³⁸ C. W. lived a communal agrarian life in the Molotschna. He was head of a farm household, and could depend on kinship, congregational, and colony networks for the financial assistance required by a young man who was establishing a farm enterprise.

The diary also records the significant move of C. W.'s household from the Molotschna Colony to the new Borosenko Colony. A note from February 1867 records that C. W. sold his Molotschna farm for 3400 rubles. After the sale of the farm on 28 February 1867, C. W. gave his brother-in-law, Johann Warkentin, 1500 rubles to take to the newly established Borosenko colony to purchase land there for C. W.

Borosenko, 1867-1874

Members of the Molotschna *Kleine Gemeinde* congregation began to consider migration options because of the increasing land shortage on the Molotschna colony. The chosen location for the new colony was 150 kilometers north-west of Molotschna, north of the river port of Nikopol. Cornelius, Helena, and their young sons Cornelius and Isaac were part of this migration, as were C. W.'s nine living siblings, all of whom left the Molotschna colony to live in or near the new settlement. Their widowed father Isaac went with the family of his eldest daughter, Margaretha, to the village of Heuboden, where he died in 1873, a year before the Mennonite transatlantic migration. The Loewen clan were a tight-knit group and being a Mennonite man was not only about being head of a household, it also meant a continued role as son, brother, and uncle. C. W. and his younger brother Abraham, even settled in the same Borosenko village.

³⁸ C. W. Loewen, "Diary," 1866 (no date). C. W. sold 26½ *chetvert* of wheat. In his *None But Saints The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Hyperion Press Ltd., 1989), 9, James Urry notes that 1 *chetvert* equals 5.7 bushels (Winchester measure).

The village of Gruenfeld, Borosenko, founded in 1867 by seven *Kleine Gemeinde* families, including C. W. and his brother Abraham, a deacon in the *Gemeinde*, demonstrates C. W.'s close relationships within the *Kleine Gemeinde* colony, beyond the immediate kinship ties of his Loewen family. Delbert Plett notes that many of the Mennonite residents of the village settled in the village of the same name in Manitoba (now Kleefeld), in 1874. At least seven of the original pioneers of Gruenfeld, Manitoba had come from Gruenfeld in Borosenko.³⁹ These seven were C. W., Abraham Loewen, Johan Isaac, Jr., and his widowed mother, brothers Johan Toews and Cornelius P. Toews (one of the delegates sent to North America by the Mennonites in 1873), and Johan's son, Johan. Plett points out that not all of the *Kleine Gemeinde* villages "consisted of such transplanted groups."⁴⁰ These settlers were not close relatives (for example, brothers or sisters). However, an account of Johan Isaac's grandfather's migration to Russia from Prussia notes that he was in the same migration group as Isaac Loewen (C. W.'s father), Johan Toews (Johan and Cornelius's father) and Johann Warkentin, whose daughter Margaretha later married Franz Isaac (Johan Isaac's grandfather). These connections, as well as instances of inter-marriage through the following generations, melded this group together.

The everyday worlds of the Gruenfeld settlers, and their wider Borosenko and *Kleine Gemeinde* communities, are illuminated by the diary of C. W. Loewen which became much more detailed and personal during this period. In the first years in Borosenko C. W. kept in close contact with his siblings, and their spouses, purchasing rye seed from brother-in-law Johann Warkentin, selling wheat to his brother David, and being visited by sister Sarah and her husband Cornelius Plett, and brother Johan.⁴¹

³⁹ Delbert Plett, ed., *History and Events*. (Steinbach, MB: D. F. Plett Farms Ltd., 1982), 136.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Loewen, "C. W. Loewen diary," *From the Inside Out*, 23. These events are dated November 1867, Harvest 1868, and 4 April 1869.

The Molotschna colony also continued to be a part of C. W.'s world; in 1869 he records that he and Helena visited the colony with their neighbours, the Regehrs. The visiting party was away for twelve days.⁴²

Though C. W. wrote about much more than the details of his household economy while in Borosenko, he continued to use his diary to record money borrowed, lent, and spent, servants hired, and crops and animals sold. These economic interactions involve C. W.'s siblings and neighbours. Cornelius owed money to brother-in-law Johann Warkentin, brother Abraham Loewen, and Franz Kroeker, a resident of Steinbach, Borosenko.⁴³ Johann Toews and Peter Loewen owed him money, the latter after buying sheep from C. W.⁴⁴

C. W., however, had other contact with individuals who were not part of the Mennonite community. Delbert Plett notes that Gruenfeld "had the distinction of being the only village which was half Russian and half Mennonite."⁴⁵ Plett includes Gruenfeld's Russian name "Zelyonoye," but does not provide any further information on the village settlement pattern, its population, nor Russian-Mennonite relations in the village.⁴⁶ Further evidence that C. W.'s world expanded beyond his family, village, and congregation, is found in an entry from January 1870 in which C. W. recorded that he "lent the soldier 10 rubles and he gave me the horse from now until seeding time is ended."⁴⁷ The reference to a soldier identifies the horse owner as a non-Mennonite since the Mennonites were pacifists and did not join the military. C. W. also hired eight workers during their seven years in Gruenfeld, Borosenko, several of whom were clearly not Mennonites. Two of these – Marianna and Anna – were

⁴² Ibid. Entered on 4 April 1869; they returned on 16 April.

⁴³ Ibid., 23-25. 1 November 1872, 19 January 1868, 28 October 1872.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 24. 13 January 1870.

⁴⁵ Delbert Plett, *Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia, 1812-1875*, (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 1999), 115.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Loewen, "C. W. Loewen Diary," *From the Inside Out*, 24. 15 January 1870.

likely life-cycle servants from nearby Mennonite villages who were old enough to work but were not needed at home. But the others – Mawre, Paraska, Zwirith, Mischa, Jedoch – were probably Russians. C. W. did not record what these servants were hired to do but did note their wages which ranged from about 30 to 43 rubles per year. Both Mischa and Jedoch were hired in 1872 and then again in 1873. Jedoch's wages increased from 33 to 43 rubles, while Mischa, who was paid 30 rubles in 1872 was promised at least 35 rubles and, if it went well, as much as 40 rubles.⁴⁸ As well C. W. recorded trading with Jewish peddlers.⁴⁹ C. W.'s world in Borosenko, then, did include contact with individuals outside his kinship, village, and church communities. The Molotschna colony C. W. left in the 1860s had been an exclusively Mennonite settlement, much as the Mennonite East Reserve would be in the 1870s. However, for the decade C. W. lived in Borosenko, he interacted with non-Mennonites. This interaction was economic though, and non-Mennonites were peddlers and servants in C. W.'s compact *Kleine Gemeinde* world.

In fact, despite the inter-ethnic economic activity, the religious community of a Mennonite communal man was central to his life and identity. The man, as head of the household, attended *Bruderschaft*, "Brotherhood," meetings where the actions of every community member came under scrutiny of adult male members. Unacceptable behaviour was admonished, punishment, in the form of the ban, was meted out, and repentant pleas were heard. It was the male members of the community (those who had been baptized) who not only voted in ministerial elections, but also prepared themselves for the possibility of election. In 1870 C. W. recorded the results of one such election in his diary, when he wrote that the *Gemeinde* "elected Peter Toews as Ältester [bishop or elder] with 65 votes and Schellenberg received 8 votes and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 25. Mischa was hired 7 January 1872 and 9 April 1873. Jedoch was hired 6 March 1872 and 11 March 1873.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 24. 4 April 1870.

Goossen 2 votes.”⁵⁰ An open electoral process meant that any man could vote for any man. This was a religious community in which a man could not help but be active. Those at *Bruderschaft* were neighbours, family, perhaps even both, and these were the men who would elect their fellows to a church position or judge whether repentance was sincere. This was a staunchly communal society, and one in which men had little individual control. It was the community which determined a man’s status, keeping Mennonite men in check, bringing them down to size through the ban, or elevating them to the role of leader.

As his father Isaac’s letters revealed his concerns about the *Gemeinde*, so C. W.’s diary illustrates his own interest in the issues and decisions facing his religious community. While Isaac had been concerned with his family’s spiritual well-being, C. W. was particularly concerned with disunity within his religious community. An entry in 1869, written in the Molotschna, which apart from the reference to Heinrich’s death was the first to record something other than the details of the household economy, noted that some Crimean members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* were visiting “concerning the unification [within the fractious *Kleine Gemeinde*] which with God’s help occurred.”⁵¹ The earlier tensions which were due to Pietist influences among the Crimeans, apparently resurfaced and later the same year C. W. wrote (in an entry without a date) that the Crimeans, “after this year’s harvest, seceded or departed from us with the others and allowed themselves to be baptized another time.”⁵²

Other diaries from this period further highlight Cornelius and Helena’s close-knit *Kleine Gemeinde* social circle. The diary of Dietrich Friesen, in 1872 a thirty-year old schoolteacher in Rosenfeld, Borosenko,⁵³ recorded visits that he and his wife,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 10 September 1870.

⁵¹ Ibid., 23.

⁵² Ibid., 24. no date, 1869.

⁵³ Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 17.

and their parents, made to “Cor. Loewens” (C. W. and Helena) in October 1872, March 1873, July 1873 and September 1873. In February 1873 C. W. and Helena visited Dietrich and Katherina Friesen in Rosenfeld.⁵⁴ The diary of Abraham F. Reimer, a son of *Kleine Gemeinde* founder Klaas Reimer, who had moved to Steinbach, Borosenko in 1869,⁵⁵ noted that C. W. and Helena visited the Reimers in April and August of 1873.⁵⁶ These visits with *Kleine Gemeinde* co-religionists who were not members of the Loewen clan, nor Gruenfeld neighbours, are an indication of the size and scope of C. W. and Helena’s social circle.

The *Gemeinde*, then, provided C. W. and Helena with a social network which exceeded the boundaries of their extended family and their village, while also bringing together the men of the community to monitor village morality and ensure group solidarity. Rotundo also emphasizes the role of the communal man to “sustain piety” within his own household.⁵⁷ C. W.’s father Isaac’s preoccupation with the spiritual well-being of his children and grandchildren has already been noted. In February 1873 the newly elected *Ältester* Peter Toews was in Gruenfeld for the *Schulprüfung* (annual oral exams at which parents and community leaders were present to witness the achievements of their children) and remarked in his diary that “exceptionally noteworthy in the knowledge of Bible Stories among the little ones were Joh. Regehr, G. Goossen, and Isaac, son of Corn. Loewen.”⁵⁸ C. W., on this occasion, did not face reproach from his religious community, his son was only seven years old, but was already showing an aptitude for the faith of his forebears. Mennonite men were to be humble, but one suspects that grandfather Isaac, and father Cornelius, would have been at least a little proud.

⁵⁴ Dietrich Friesen Diary, EMCA, Steinbach, Manitoba.

⁵⁵ Plett, *Dynasties*, 395.

⁵⁶ Abraham F. Reimer Diary, EMCA, Steinbach, Manitoba.

⁵⁷ Rotundo, 12.

⁵⁸ Peter Toews Diary, EMCA, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Borosenko had allowed the *Kleine Gemeinde* to teach their children the Mennonite faith, and to secure land for the next generation. The 1860s migration had enabled them to maintain their way of life, and their kinship ties, church community, and village networks had remained intact. However, in February 1873, C. W. recorded that Cornelius Toews “departed for America. On the 15th of April he began his return and on the 5th of August he arrived.”⁵⁹ These scant details refer to the delegation of Mennonites who travelled to North America during 1873 to explore migration options. The Borosenko settlement, which had promised land and freedom in the 1860s, was threatened by Russian political reforms in the 1870s. This prompted many Mennonites to look to North America for farmland and the freedom to maintain a simple, pacifist, Mennonite way of life and to largely govern themselves.

C. W.’s world was about to expand exponentially, but the remarkable change was to leave the communitarian nature of his world unchanged. The expansion was the transatlantic migration. In 1874 C. W. records two trips made to “the *Wolost* [county offices] with regard to our move to America.” More important was their auction sale which took place in February of 1874.⁶⁰ C. W. and Helena’s household appears to have been well-furnished as the items sold included “two beds, three chairs, one table, two sleeping benches, numerous mattresses, one cradle, one clothes closet, three ‘sitting benches,’ one drawer cabinet, one mouse trap, and an assortment of cutlery, dishes and lanterns.”⁶¹ While the amount of furniture, as well as the mouse trap, suggests a comfortable household, the sale of these large items as well as the smaller household goods, such as cutlery and dishes, also focuses attention on the severing of ties with Borosenko, and the “Old World,” for C. W. and his family.

⁵⁹ Loewen. “C. W. Loewen Diary,” *From the Inside Out*, 25. 15 February 1873.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26. 1874.

⁶¹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 40.

Daniel Coleman suggests that for the migrant male, the “movement between cultures places him in a troubled relationship to conflicting codes for masculine behaviour.”⁶² For C. W., the preparation for migration might have been the beginning of this process. The move to North America promised a “better life,” but in the meantime it meant the sacrifice of the comfortable, the known, the material. However, although C. W. was severing ties with Russia, he was a participant in a group migration. An account of the migration which appears in C. W.’s diary was not written by C. W.,⁶³ but it does illustrate the magnitude of the new world which the Mennonites encountered on their transatlantic migration – the foreign places (often spelt incorrectly) and the icebergs and whales off the coast of Newfoundland. Yet this was a shared experience, C. W., Helena, Cornelius and Isaac, travelled with members of their kinship group, and *Gemeinde* and, once in Manitoba, they settled in the same village as many of their Gruenfeld, Borosenko neighbours.

Gruenfeld, Manitoba, 1874-1877

Even though C. W. and his family travelled in a group, and one that jointly established a village, the first years in Manitoba were a difficult time requiring close communitarian co-operation. Fellow Gruenfeld settlers Johan Toews and Johan Isaac had been given the responsibility of finding a suitable site for the village.⁶⁴ In his writings, John W. Dueck, a boy at the time of the migration to Manitoba and one of the Gruenfeld settlers, recalled that the first homes were very primitive, mostly earth

⁶² Coleman, 6.

⁶³ Loewen, *From the Inside Out*, 22. Loewen notes that neither the handwriting nor the style are his, and suggests that it could have been an account which circulated the villages in Manitoba, and perhaps Helena copied the account into the diary, or maybe she even wrote the account herself.

⁶⁴ Levi Dueck, trans., *Prairie Pioneer: The Writings of John W. Dueck*, (John W. Dueck Book Committee, 1995), 47.

huts or canvas tents covered with hay grass.⁶⁵ The Duecks lived in a tent which they shared with another family. A number of weeks after moving to the Gruenfeld site, “the neighbours reached an agreement to settle somewhat nearer to the forest” hoping that the bush would provide more protection for winter, and a more convenient firewood supply. This meant a move of about one kilometer from the site originally settled.⁶⁶

Dueck’s writings are testament to the difficulties experienced by the pioneers in this new land. Delbert Plett notes that C. W.’s brother-in-law, Cornelius S. Plett, husband of C. W.’s sister Sarah, who emigrated a year later than C. W., purchased a gelding at C. W.’s auction sale in Russia for the price of 48 rubles, “about a third of what a good horse would cost in Manitoba.”⁶⁷ Another family simply shot one old mare, only later discovering the “harsh reality that all livestock, including horses and cattle, was much more expensive in the primitive Manitoba economy” where the settlers would not even be able to afford a horse for several years.⁶⁸ Dueck recalled that his family did not have a horse for their first six years in Gruenfeld and instead had to rely on the “lazy oxen.” A trip to Winnipeg for essential supplies took three days during those early years.⁶⁹

These first years were particularly difficult for the Loewen family. The uncertainty experienced on the journey and on arrival in the “New World” was amplified by Helena’s pregnancy and childbirth. She gave birth to a son, Jakob, on 16 August 1874, just two weeks after the family arrived on the banks of the Red River in Manitoba.⁷⁰ Less than a week later the Loewens arrived at the place where Gruenfeld,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Plett, *Saints and Sinners*, 320.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Dueck trans., *Prairie Pioneer*, 50.

⁷⁰ Loewen, “C. W. Loewen Diary,” *from the Inside Out*, 27. 2 August 1874.

Manitoba was to be located,⁷¹ and on 28 August C. W. wrote that they found Jakob dead in his cradle: “Today after *Vesper* [a light afternoon meal] we buried him and his age had come to 12 days.”⁷² Less than two years later, in May 1876, Helena gave birth to another son, whom they named Johann. Apparently there were complications with the birth and Helena’s health deteriorated.⁷³ She died in the October of the same year. On 1 August 1876 little Johann was taken to the neighbours for wet-nursing, as Helena was too ill to breast-feed her son. Johann was to stay there until the New Year for a fee of \$25.⁷⁴ C. W. does not reflect on the losses of those first years in his diary. He does not even record the death of his wife, yet the events of the 1870s, the migration, the death of one child, the illness and death of his wife, must have caused C. W. to consider the meaning of all that had happened. It was in December of 1876, the year of Johann’s birth and Helena’s death, that C. W. recorded the tragic death of Heinrich Wiebe in a snowstorm. “We always have things to ponder,” C. W. wrote, “that we might be faithful to the end and not assume too many things.”⁷⁵ Being a Mennonite man in nineteenth century Russia, and then Manitoba, was not only about being a leader, the head of the household. Tragedy, loss and death were always close at hand to remind the Mennonite man that he was not in control. The communal, conservative Mennonite man knew in Manitoba, as he had in Russia, that he could plan all he wanted, it was God who ruled: “Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt.”⁷⁶

While this was unquestionably a personally difficult time for C. W., the basic characteristic of the agrarian household economy was replicated in the New World. Mennonite historians have debated the assumed poverty and hardships of the early

⁷¹ Ibid. 21 August 1874.

⁷² Ibid. 28 August 1874.

⁷³ Melvin J. Loewen, *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen and Helena Bartel*, 18.

⁷⁴ Loewen, “C. W. Loewen Diary,” *From the Inside Out*, 28.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁶ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 189. Loewen translates this popular Mennonite phrase as “Man plans, but God rules.”

pioneering years. Delbert Plett has extensively researched the migration of the *Kleine Gemeinde* to Steinbach and area and has challenged traditional views of this group as “poor and simple,” detailing the financial resources they brought with them from Russia and concluding that the immigrants “were not poorer than the Mennonites who remained in Imperial Russia, and arguably [were] much more economically secure than the large percentage of those who remained landless in Russia after 1880.”⁷⁷ He recognizes that they lost out financially on their land sales in Russia, partly because they were selling in such large numbers and so the market favoured buyers. However, the very fact that they had farms to sell (Plett estimates that “fully two-thirds of *Kleine Gemeinde* families in the Molotschna were in the full farm ownership category, a figure that rose as high as ninety per cent for the congregation in Borozenko”⁷⁸) dispels the myth of the immigrants as landless and impoverished. Plett suggests that each *Kleine Gemeinde* family brought around \$1000 in cash at the time of migration.⁷⁹

The fact then was that C. W. was among farmers who had the means to establish a commodity-producing household economy. Moreover there were significant internal economic resources within the Mennonite community which translated into loans and aid for those who needed it.⁸⁰ C. W. Loewen, whose labourer, Johann Broeski, accompanied Loewen to Canada and on arrival promptly borrowed \$98.03 from C. W. for the purchase of an ox, and took out his own homestead, is a prime example of the internal economic resources which the migrating group had at hand.⁸¹ As well as loaning money, C. W. Loewen also

⁷⁷ Delbert Plett, “‘Poor and Simple’: The Economic Background of the Mennonite Immigrants to Manitoba, 1874-79,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 18 (2000), 115.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸⁰ Loewen, *Family Church, and Market*, 112.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

continued to make use of the availability of credit within the community, as he had in Russia, borrowing a total of \$735 from 6 local farmers during the first 6 years of settlement.⁸² The example of C. W., who both lent and borrowed money during the first years of settlement in Manitoba, is particularly informative. While the need to borrow money might usually suggest an inability to lend money to others, in the Mennonite community this was not the case. Instead, lending money to an employee to help him start out on his own, while borrowing from wealthier farmers could occur simultaneously. Both facilitated the growth of the community, both kept financing within the close-knit community, both promoted group solidarity.

In the 1870s the community of *Kleine Gemeinde* families was, despite the taxing relocation from Russia to Manitoba, still intact. C. W. and brother Abraham were living in Gruenfeld with other neighbours from Gruenfeld, Borosenko. In October 1875 teacher Abraham R. Friesen recorded in his diary that he visited the “old Joh. Warkentins’,” C. W.’s sister Anna’s (who had already passed away) husband, and also visiting were Abraham Loewens (C. W.’s brother), Peter Toewses, and K. Loewens (C. W. and Helena).⁸³ As the Mennonite village plan was brought from Russia, so the religious community continued to function much as it had in the “Old World.” C. W.’s place in that community is suggested by an event in 1876. Ältester Peter Toews recorded the results of an open ministerial election in a January 1876 diary entry. As noted above, any male member of the congregation, baptized and in good standing with the church, was a candidate. Heinrich Reimer of Blumenort was chosen with an overwhelming majority of 56 votes, Franz Kroeker of Steinbach had 11, Abraham Kornelson of Heuboden had 7, Peter Reimer from Blumenort had 5, Peter Toews, also from Blumenort had 4, Cornelius Goossen of

⁸² Ibid., 114.

⁸³ Abram R. Friesen Diary, EMCA. Steinbach, Manitoba.

Steinbach had 3, and brothers David Loewen from Hochstadt and Cornelius Loewen from Gruenfeld had 1 vote each.⁸⁴ C. W.'s inclusion in the list with only one vote is significant. The open election was a humbling process for the men of Mennonite society, a process over which they had no control. Receiving only one vote must have been confirmation of C. W.'s humility within the *Gemeinde*.

C. W.'s community now also extended beyond the *Gemeinde*, Gruenfeld, and the surrounding villages on the East Reserve, the land which was set aside for the Mennonites by the Canadian government. Many of C. W.'s siblings, relatives, and friends had settled on the East Reserve, but others had decided to pioneer elsewhere. Some of the *Kleine Gemeinde* settled on the Scratching River settlement, fifty kilometers west of the East Reserve, across the Red River. Others had emigrated to Nebraska. And some had stayed in Russia. This increasingly diasporic community required new effort and strategies to ensure community survival. C. W., like others, employed letter writing and made visits, as he had to the Molotschna from Borosenko, in order to keep in contact with relatives and friends. In March 1876 C. W., Helena and two other couples travelled from the East Reserve to Scratching River for a week-long visit.⁸⁵ In 1878 and 1879 C. W. exchanged sixteen letters with his Nebraska cousins.⁸⁶ Here was a man whose community, though further dispersed, remained integral to his identity and daily life.

Steinbach, Manitoba, 1877-1893

And C. W.'s community remained central to his identity and life, even as he moved within Manitoba. In 1877 C. W., together with his three young sons – Cornelius, Isaac, and Johann – relocated from Gruenfeld twelve kilometers to the east,

⁸⁴ Peter Toews Diary, EMCA, Steinbach, Manitoba.

⁸⁵ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 96.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

to Steinbach. The reason for this move was C. W.'s remarriage to Katherina Thiessen Barkman, the widow of Reverend Jacob Barkman, who had drowned in the Red River on a trip to Winnipeg for supplies in June 1875.⁸⁷ Now her *Wirtschaft*, or farmstead, in Steinbach became his new home. Katherina Barkman had already been married three times when she and C. W. had themselves "served with the marriage ceremony" on 2 April 1877⁸⁸ and so the melding of households was not a new task for her. Mennonite inheritance laws, discussed above, which facilitated bilateral and partible inheritance, meant that Katherina was left with half of her husband's property, the other half being divided between their children when they reached the age of twenty-one.

It is not clear why it was C. W. and not Katherina Barkman who moved after the marriage. Perhaps her property was worth more than his. As noted above, the opportunity for a woman to inherit land and farm assets, meant that in a marriage to a man of lower income, matrilocality, "the practice of the husband going to live with the people of his wife," might result.⁸⁹ Katherina Barkman had married children who lived in Steinbach, so perhaps she did not want to leave them. Whatever the case, C. W. Loewen and his three sons left Gruenfeld, and the neighbours that they had lived with in Borosenko. There are obvious implications for masculine identity. As a Mennonite man, C. W., though head of the household and the family's representative in the village and congregation, left his own household, village, neighbours, and his brother Abraham, to move to the farmstead and village of his wife. There they melded their families and resources, but it was the man, the head of the household, who needed to adjust to life in a new home, on a new farm, in a new village.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁸ Loewen, "C. W. Loewen Diary," *From the Inside Out*, 29.

⁸⁹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 45.

Life in Steinbach was, no doubt, similar to that in Gruenfeld in many respects. Steinbach was a Mennonite farm village, and many of his new neighbours would have been known to C. W., through the *Kleine Gemeinde* and kinship ties. During his years in Steinbach, C. W.'s diary became much more detailed. It continued to serve as a kind of account book and farm ledger, as C. W. recorded annual crop yields, animals bought and sold, and money borrowed and spent. But there were more and more details of the Loewens' social circle, as C. W. recorded visits, letters, church services and *Bruderschaft* meetings, births and marriages of their children (and occasionally others in the community) deaths and funerals. Often these events were recorded as lists. For example three lists of letters sent and received appear in the diary each covering a span of a few years: 1877-9; 1880-2; and 1882-6. Births and deaths of infants are recorded in a similar manner, as are the lists of eggs, oats, and wheat sold. Other entries appear under the names of individuals. Son Cornelius, step-sons Johann, Cornelius, and Jacob Barkman, step-sons-in-law Heinrich Brandt, and Johann Reimer all have their own pages where business transactions between C. W. and his various children are recorded in a style more reminiscent of an account book than a diary. However, there are also chronological sections where visitors, farm details, community events, and strange weather conditions are recorded. C. W. was a communal agriculturist, concerned with his community – the local and the diasporic. His family, the “old” and the “new,” and his farm household were at the centre of his life.

The church also retained its central place in C. W.'s world in Steinbach. In his diary in 1879, for example, C. W. recorded that “Friend Holdemann [sic] was here in Steinbach and held services.”⁹⁰ Johann Holdeman, an American Mennonite reformer,

⁹⁰ C. W. Loewen, “Diary,” 7 November 1879.

initially came to Manitoba at the request of Ältester Peter Toews who felt the *Kleine Gemeinde* needed reforming. Holdeman concluded that the congregation was beyond renewal. The leadership and brotherhood struggled with this evaluation but after a visit to Holdeman's churches in Kansas, Toews concluded that Holdeman was right. He liked the personal approach to faith that Holdeman preached and his churches practiced and thus Toews invited Holdeman to Manitoba over the winter of 1881-1882, he accepted and came and preached and baptized on the East Reserve, establishing a congregation of his own.⁹¹ C. W. recorded these developments in his diary, noting that Holdeman again preached on 13 November 1881.⁹² Holdeman's church was called the *Gemeinde Gottes*, but was known locally as the *Holdeman Gemeinde*, and later by an English name, the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.

When the *Holdeman Gemeinde* split from the *Kleine Gemeinde* many of the leaders went with the new group and this left only three ministers in the *Kleine Gemeinde*. One of these men, Jacob Kroeker, minister at Scratching River, invited Ältester Abram Friesen, a *Kleine Gemeinde* bishop from Nebraska, to help rebuild the church. This was difficult in itself since only fifteen years earlier the Manitoba and Nebraska groups had broken with each other.⁹³ C. W. recorded that on 15 February 1882 Abraham Friesen and Johann Harms arrived from Nebraska "and we have united with them."⁹⁴ They then went on to Scratching River. Abram Friesen apparently left in March and C. W. noted that on 9 June 1882 the church service was held in Steinbach and a letter from Abram Friesen of Nebraska was read.⁹⁵ On 11 January 1883 C. W. recorded that the guests from Nebraska arrived. On 21 January Ältester

⁹¹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 174-176; D. K. Schellenberg, "The Story of Steinbach's fourteen churches," in *Reflections on our Heritage: A History of Steinbach and the R. M. of Hanover from 1874*, ed. Abe Warkentin, (Steinbach: Derksen Printers Ltd., 1971), 206-207.

⁹² C. W. Loewen, "Diary," 13 November 1881.

⁹³ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 178.

⁹⁴ C. W. Loewen, "Diary," 15 February 1882.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 February, 17 March, 9 June 1882.

and preacher elections were held and on 29 January Jacob Kroeker was installed as Ältester. On 31 January the Nebraska elders left for home. The transition was completed. Steinbach was no longer only a *Kleine Gemeinde* village, but C. W. stayed with the church of his father, the church in which he had been baptized. With this decision he rejected the *Holdeman Gemeinde*'s focus on personal faith, and put his faith in the *Kleine Gemeinde*'s emphasis on communal salvation, faith which was worked out in community from birth to death.

In addition to recording the details of his religious community, C. W. noted the daily happenings and life events as they occurred in his family, his local community and the wider Mennonite ethnic diaspora. C. W. made lists of letters sent to, and received from, Nebraska, Russia, and Manitoba. Correspondents included Cornelius' first wife Helena's two half-brothers, Jacob and Johann Bartel, who migrated to Nebraska; a Kornelius Dueck in Reinland, Manitoba; Peter Fast and David Flaming, both in Nebraska; and the Abram Toewses, residents of the Crimea, Russia. David Flaming has been identified as the husband of Helena's widowed step-mother, Agatha Fast Bartel.⁹⁶ However, C. W.'s connection to Peter Fast is unknown. Fast was a member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Nebraska until 1880 when he joined the *Krimmer* Mennonite Brethren and soon after became a minister in that congregation.⁹⁷ After several letters were exchanged in 1880 C. W. received only one more letter from Fast in March 1881 and thereafter there is no mention of letters sent to or from him.⁹⁸ Perhaps Fast's move to the *Krimmer* Mennonite Brethren brought about the end of the relationship. Both Abram Toews and Kornelius Dueck remain

⁹⁶ Delbert Plett, ed., *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874*, (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1987), 103.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ C. W. Loewen, "Diary," 10 March 1881.

unidentified. However, they demonstrate C. W.'s continued link to Russia and his use of letter writing in communicating with Manitoba residents.

In addition to lists of letters, C. W. recorded engagements, marriages, deaths and funerals in the Steinbach community. Many of these events involved close relatives of Cornelius and Katherina. The engagements and weddings of their children are noted, albeit concisely. When his son Cornelius was married C. W. wrote "4 June [1882] Kornelius married Anna Toews."⁹⁹ The birth of grandchildren were also recorded in a succinct fashion and the first note of Cornelius T. Loewen, C. W.'s first grandchild, was written as "5 April [1883] son born to Kornelius Loewen, named Kornelius."¹⁰⁰ Dates and time were important. When deaths were reported the age of the person was calculated to the day. The date of burial was recorded as well as the date of death; each was an important part of life. These short phrases filled with dates and names and written in list form, represent C. W.'s attempts to record the life events which marked the passing of the years, again to impose an order, a rhythm, on the unpredictability and upheavals of life.

As well as a record of life events and the happenings in the *Gemeinde*, C. W. recorded his household's crop yields in Steinbach during the 1880s. Of wheat, oats, and barley, barley was always the smallest percentage of total yield, usually at around 100 bushels from 1881-1885. In 1886 it rose to 170 and in 1887, the last year which C. W. kept records, it jumped to 426, almost rivalling the wheat crop. In 1881 wheat was the highest yielding of the three at 411 bushels, with oats at 383 bushels. Oats then became the most important crop in every year except 1886 when wheat and oats were dramatically lower than any other year. This general trend away from wheat as the primary crop, to more mixed arable farming where oats eventually overtook the

⁹⁹ Ibid.. 4 June 1882.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.. 5 April 1883.

growing of wheat occurred across the East Reserve. This has been identified as a strategic adjustment to the markets and climate of Manitoba which, while meaning a change in Mennonite farming practices, actually ensured the continued survival, and prosperity, of the Mennonites' agrarian and communal way of life.¹⁰¹ In 1882 oats yielded 609 bushels; wheat 351. In 1884, 438 bushels of oats were produced and 334 of wheat. In 1885, 580 bushels of oats and 454 bushels of wheat. In the final year, 1887, 683 bushels of oats were brought in while only 464 bushels of wheat were harvested.¹⁰² C. W. directed his household to actively participate in the adaptation to the economic markets and the climate in Manitoba.

The general increase in crop yield suggests that Cornelius and Katherina farmed successfully during their decade together in Steinbach. The tax assessment rolls confirm this, providing in some detail the particulars of the Loewens' farm enterprise. In 1883 C. W. had 160 acres, of which 40 were cultivated. Buildings and furniture were listed at half of their actual value meaning that C. W.'s buildings were worth \$550 and the furniture valued at \$300. The Loewens owned three horses, one foal, four cows, three yearlings, four calves, and four pigs. They owned a grass mower valued at \$25, a hayrake worth \$6, a \$35 wagon, a plough worth \$15, a harrow at \$5, and a sleigh also valued at \$5. C. W. was also listed as the half owner of a feedcrusher at \$7, it appears that he owned this with Katherina's son-in-law, Heinrich Brandt, also of Steinbach. The total assessment was for \$821 ranking C. W. as the sixth wealthiest resident of Steinbach in that year.¹⁰³

In the assessment of the following year C. W. had acquired more land and the farm value had increased overall. C. W. now farmed almost 220 acres of land, of which 45 were cultivated. The buildings were assessed at \$600, and the Loewens

¹⁰¹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 122.

¹⁰² C. W. Loewen, "Diary."

¹⁰³ Plett, *Profile*, 76-77.

now had 4 horses, 4 cows, 4 yearlings, 4 calves, and 4 pigs. The grass mower was now valued at \$10, the plough at \$8, the harrow at \$2, and the sleigh at \$5. A new feed crusher had apparently been purchased, now listed as owned by C. W. alone and assessed at \$100. C. W. and Katherina had two wagons in 1884 valued at \$25 and now owned a hayrake with son-in-law Heinrich Brandt, valued at \$8. The total assessment was \$955, more than a hundred dollars increase over the previous year.¹⁰⁴

From 1885 the assessment rolls are less detailed but the collected data still allows a glimpse into the farm holdings and relative wealth of C. W. and Katherina. In 1885 C. W. was again identified as a farmer of 160 acres, 55 of which were cultivated. He was assessed as having a real value of \$328, and a personal value of \$786 to a total of \$1314. This was the seventh highest assessment in Steinbach. C. W. and Katherina had ten cows, eight young cattle, four hogs, and four horses.¹⁰⁵ In 1886 C. W. owned five horses, two oxen, six cows, seven young cattle, and two hogs and was assessed at \$1254 total.¹⁰⁶ In 1887 the total assessment was \$1192 and livestock holdings were five horses, five cows, nine young cattle and two pigs.¹⁰⁷

If this data indicates the successful functioning of an agrarian household, a traumatic event in 1889 demonstrated the existence of a cultural check on any economic aspiration. This was the year that Katherina died and Mennonite inheritance laws, possibly the reason for C. W.'s move to Steinbach after his marriage to Katherina, now necessitated the sale of half of the Steinbach farmstead in order to divide the other half of the estate between his and Katherina's children, all of whom were over twenty-one in 1889. Tax records indicate that in this year C. W.'s land base was reduced to 80 acres, 22 of which were cultivated, and his total assessment

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁵ Tax Assessment Rolls, Rural Municipality of Hanover, MB, 1885

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1886.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1887.

was reduced to \$945.¹⁰⁸ C. W., the communal man, provided for his family, but in the process lost half of the farmstead which he and Katherina had built up through the 1880s. Diarist Abraham M. Friesen recorded that on 29 March 1890 he attended an auction sale at “old Cor. Loewens” in Steinbach.¹⁰⁹ C. W. was now “old Cor. Loewen,” his eldest son and namesake had become the mainstay of the family. C. W. sold his household and went to live with his eldest son and family on their small farm in Steinbach.¹¹⁰ Once again, C. W. sold his household, and divided his wealth; the accumulation of goods would not be the measure of his manhood.

C. W. spent his last years with his son Cornelius B. Loewen and his family. C. B.’s daughter Elisabeth, remembered her grandfather being sick during the years he lived with them,¹¹¹ and on 11 November 1893, C. W.’s younger son Isaac wrote to the German-language *Nordwesten* newspaper to “inform our dear friends that my beloved father died yesterday at eight o’clock in the evening after a long period of suffering and having been bed-ridden for the last month.”¹¹² In a letter to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in January 1908, C. B. Loewen noted that his father died of tuberculosis.¹¹³ The funeral was held on 14 November 1893; C. W.’s age had come to 66 years and 10 months, less a day.

Conclusion

C. W. had lived his life in the communal agrarian Mennonite society of the Molotschna and Borosenko colonies and this communitarian world was recreated in southeastern Manitoba. In the 1885 tax assessment rolls for Steinbach every male

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1889.

¹⁰⁹ Abraham M. Friesen Diary, EMCA, Steinbach, Manitoba.

¹¹⁰ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, “Cornelius Bartel Loewen (1863-1928),” *Preservings* Part One 9 (December 1996), 46.

¹¹¹ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46.

¹¹² *Nordwesten*, 16 November 1893.

¹¹³ *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 1 January 1908.

head of household was listed as a farmer. Yet in the following year two individuals were listed with other occupations – Peter K. Barkman as a miller, and Klaas Reimer as a merchant. By 1896, just three years after C. W.'s death, Steinbach appeared a very different place, many of the residents were listed with occupations other than “farmer.” A little over a decade later, Steinbach was surveyed, and farmers moved out of “town,” old businesses grew and new ones were established in what was fast becoming the service centre of southeastern Manitoba. C. W. had, of course, lived in a quite different place. His Steinbach was much more like Lindenau (Molotschna), Gruenfeld (Borosenko), and Gruenfeld (Manitoba).

During his years in Molotschna and Borosenko in New Russia, and in the East Reserve in Manitoba, C. W. kept a household journal which vividly portrayed the communal world of nineteenth century Mennonites. Mennonite farm households were headed by a father, a husband, a man and Mennonite society was patriarchal in nature. The male head of the household represented his family in the village and the *Gemeinde*. A daughter was identified by her father's name, a wife by her husband's name, and a couple by the plural of the husband's name. It was a patriarchy rooted in community. In the life of the communal Mennonite man, in Russia and Manitoba, the household, extended family, village, and congregation, were at the centre. This remained even as the community relocated from New Russia to Manitoba, and as changes were made to their new environment; their social institutions, village plans, and family relationships remained intact.

This very communal nature, however, shaped a particular masculinity and male social role. C. W. was a communal man in a Mennonite setting. He derived his social identity not from his individual achievement, but from his communal obligations and identities. Any economic ambition he might have envisioned in the

wheat boom in Borosenko was interrupted by the transatlantic migration of the 1870s. Any image he might have possessed of being self-made would have been challenged by inheritance practices that led to matrilocality and periodic land division. Any notion he may have harboured of clan advancement was tempered by the ever-present *Kleine Gemeinde* church whose communitarian nature survived the religious challenge from the more pietistic *Holdeman Gemeinde* and *Krimmer* Mennonite Brethren churches. As he moved from Molotschna to Borosenko in New Russia, and from Gruenfeld to Steinbach in Manitoba, C. W. Loewen's manhood was defined by the communal culture of his sectarian and agrarian community.

Chapter Two: Cornelius Bartel Loewen, Transitional Man

Of Rotundo's three distinct phases of masculine identity – *communal manhood*, *self-made manhood*, and *passionate manhood* – the first phase is especially useful to the study of C. W. Loewen and the nineteenth century world in which he lived. A man's status was determined by that of his family and community and, Rotundo asserts, he “fulfilled himself through public usefulness more than his economic success.”¹ Rotundo's second phase, *self-made manhood*, developed amid the rise of individualism in nineteenth century New England and emphasized the centrality of work to a man's identity, allowing him to determine his own status within his community. In a discussion of C. W. Loewen's eldest son Cornelius B. Loewen, both of Rotundo's first two phases of masculinity, *communal manhood* and *self-made manhood*, are useful. C. B. Loewen was a complex individual, perhaps best understood as a transitional figure who, while living and participating in a community, also acted as an individual, doing “his own thing,” within an advancing capitalist economy. Steinbach itself was undergoing a transition as first generation Mennonites who had migrated to Manitoba as adults to look for good farmland and freedom to largely govern themselves, were succeeded by their sons and daughters who had left Russia as children or were born in Manitoba.

C. B. Loewen, however, does not fit neatly into this transitional pattern. He did, like others of his generation, display aspects of both the communal and self-made man. He was conditioned by his Russian Mennonite ethno-religious background, which espoused agrarian communalism, yet, for him, his vocation and work culture, which took him off the farm, were integral to his self-identity, in a way that they had

¹ Rotundo, 2.

not been for his father. As well, C. B. was something more. He was a non-conformist, a “black sheep.” While other Steinbach Mennonites, if they left the *Kleine Gemeinde* church of their mothers and fathers, attended the more progressive *Bruderthaler* or *Holdeman* churches, C. B. Loewen joined a little known non-Mennonite group, the *Abendlichter*, a group inspired by the holiness movement of eighteenth century England, which eschewed formal church membership, allowed all to take communion, and permitted women to pray audibly in public.²

C. B.’s complexity derives in part from the multiplicity and simultaneity of his identities, and the variety and polarity of his life experiences. He was a husband, a father, a Mennonite, an immigrant, a sawmill owner, a thresherman, a house mover, a farmer, a store owner, and a land investor. He was at times successful in his business ventures, but suffered severe financial losses later in life. Caught between communal and capitalistic Mennonite society, he worked away from the home of his first wife and ten children, but the death of his first wife and, six months later, his remarriage, precipitated a great change in his life. C. B. returned to working the land with his second wife, his younger children, her daughter, and their six additional children. This “return” was, in some respects, a reinvention. The farm enterprise which C. B. operated was a much more capitalistic venture than his father’s had ever been. Expansion at inflationary prices leading to the loss of the farm was evidence of C. B.’s departure from the communal agrarianism of his father. Late in his life, C. B. also detached himself from the community of Steinbach, after living in and around the village from 1877 to 1926, and retired from outdoor, physical work, when he and wife Maria moved to Morris, some seventy kilometers away, to operate a store. This venture was also unsuccessful and C. B. returned to Steinbach eighteen months later,

² Delbert Plett, “Ovent Lichta,” *Preservings* 15 (December 1999), 84; Levi Dueck, trans., *Prairie Pilgrims: Sequel to Prairie Pioneer*, (John W. Dueck Book Committee, 1999), 134.

worked at his son's pulpwood camp over the winter and then went south to Kansas for the early wheat harvest, where he died suddenly at the age of 64 in 1928.

Childhood and Youth

The importance of kinship lines, as well as the farm household, the village, and the *Gemeinde*, in C. B.'s early childhood in Russia, first on the Mennonite Molotschna colony, and then, after the age of four, on the newly established Borosenko Colony, suggests the makings of a communitarian life. C. B. grew up within the close-knit kinship group, the parochial school of the strictly communitarian, pacifist *Kleine Gemeinde*, the farm household, and the insulated, agrarian village. The global wheat economy for which the Mennonite farmers of New Russia produced in the heady days of the 1860s, described by his father's diary, did bring non-Mennonite workers to Mennonite villages, but it was a Mennonite, Low German-speaking world which C. B. knew as a boy.

At ten years of age, in 1874, C. B. moved with his parents and younger brother, Isaac, to Manitoba, where the Mennonite communities in which C. B. had spent his early childhood – the kinship groups, the village, and the congregation, remained largely intact. C. B.'s eldest daughter Elisabeth recalled that her father “experienced much poverty and hardships of the first years in a new country.”³ As noted above, the popular myth of poverty during these years has been significantly challenged,⁴ as well, the family's settlement in the village of Gruenfeld, Manitoba, with at least six other families with whom they had lived in the Borosenko village of the same name,⁵ must have been helpful and heartening as they were faced with new and different challenges. When C. W. remarried in April 1877, however, the family

³ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46.

⁴ See discussion of Delbert Plett's work on the poverty of the pioneers, pages 36-37 of this thesis.

⁵ Plett, ed., *History and Events*, 136.

moved to their new mother's farmstead in Steinbach, and C. B. was taken from this close-knit community and thrust into a large melded family in a new environment. None of C. W. nor Helena's siblings lived in Steinbach, nor did any of the Gruenfeld, Borosenko villagers settle in Steinbach.⁶ C. B., at thirteen years old, had participated in a transatlantic migration, lost his mother, and an infant brother, and was faced with the challenge of adjusting to a new family and community.

This adjustment to Steinbach was, it appears, successfully made by the teen-aged C. B. That the Barkman children who became his step-brothers and -sisters were an important part of C. B.'s adult life, featuring prominently in his own later diaries suggests successful childhood bonding. His father's remarriage increased the size of his family group, which within this Mennonite community meant increased work opportunities, larger social circles, and wider contacts, and later, customers. Before these adult relationships, though, came a period of transition from childhood to youth, when boys worked, but were not full members of the community. Entries in C. W.'s diary provide scant details of this period in C. B.'s life but do point to C. B.'s journey toward adulthood as his world expanded and his responsibilities and workload increased.

Early references to C. B. in C. W.'s household diary suggest the world which would shape C. B.'s adult life. Work replaced play in the life of a Mennonite youth and in 1880, at the age of sixteen, C. B. did three and a half days of work for Heinrich Brandt, the husband of Katherina Barkman's daughter. The money earned was credited to C. W.'s account with Brandt which, after C. B.'s work, stood at 9 dollars and 80 cents.⁷ It was a common arrangement in Mennonite society for a son under

⁶ This assertion is made from an examination of records from Plett, ed., *Profile*, 21-25, 76-77.

⁷ C. W. Loewen, "Diary," 28 June 1880.

the age of twenty-one to work for a neighbour to pay off his father's debt.⁸ Beyond work in the village of Steinbach, young C. B. was also exposed to the bush and the sawmills situated in the coniferous forests east of Steinbach. The seasonal sawmills became an integral part of C. B.'s adult life, and his love of the forest, his *Waldlust*, was well-known to the community.⁹ One source recalled how, like other youth at the time, C. B. would make trips to the woods twelve kilometers south of Steinbach and that on one occasion he and fellow Steinbacher A. W. Reimer, three years older than C. B., barely escaped freezing to death.¹⁰ In addition to work, C. W. recorded that his children Cornelius and (step-daughter) Aganetha went to Gruenfeld for a church service.¹¹ These few references reveal C. B.'s youth as a time of new responsibilities, opportunities and roles within the family. He is mentioned in his father's diary for the first time as he begins to do chores, work, and attend church. These brief notes reveal a widening of C. B.'s world. He was well on the way to adulthood.

Lumberman in Southeastern Manitoba

C. B.'s youth ended abruptly at age nineteen when he followed traditional Mennonite practice and was baptized and married in quick succession. Baptized into the *Kleine Gemeinde* church of his parents, C. B. then married Anna Toews, the daughter of the relatively poor Steinbach household of Peter and Elisabeth Toews, on 4 June 1882.¹² Anna's mother Elisabeth was a granddaughter of the financially secure *Kleine Gemeinde* founder Klaas Reimer, but the daughter of Abraham F. Reimer of

⁸ Joseph Kett, in his article "Growing Up in Rural New England," *Growing Up in America: Historical Experiences*, ed. Harvey J. Graff, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 180, notes that before the age of 21, a boy "was conceived of as a piece of property under obligation to work for his father."

⁹ G. G. Kornelsen, "Ostreserve Nachrichten," *Steinbach Post*, 1 August 1928.

¹⁰ Abe Warkentin, ed., *Reflections On Our Heritage: a History of Steinbach and the R. M. of Hanover from 1874*, (Steinbach: Derksen Printers Ltd., 1971), 42.

¹¹ C. W. Loewen, "Diary," 17 October 1880.

¹² C. W. Loewen, "Diary."

Blumenort, known to all as ‘lazy Reimer.’¹³ Anna’s father Peter was a teamster, handyman, and night watchman, but in Manitoba his health deteriorated further and the family largely relied on financial assistance from the church, a situation exacerbated by Peter’s death at age forty-four, just a month before C. B. and Anna’s wedding on 9 May 1882.¹⁴ Still, young C. B.’s status within Steinbach would have been raised with marriage. He may not have married to his financial advantage, but Anna’s uncles constituted the Steinbach economic elite. Moreover, C. B.’s inheritance from his first mother’s death would have been due him when he turned twenty-one. C. B. and Anna lived with Anna’s widowed mother, Elisabeth, during the first years of their marriage, but this would not have diminished C. B.’s social standing since it was common practice for young newly-weds to live with parents. His status would have been enhanced when, further mirroring Mennonite family patterns, the couple’s first son was born ten months and one day after their wedding day. C. B. was then, at the age of nineteen, a member of the church, a husband, and a father. He was, by all appearances, a typical Christian, Mennonite, communal man.

C. B.’s household grew quickly. Three children, Cornelius, Elisabeth, and Anna, were born to C. B. and Anna in the four years that they lived with Anna’s mother. In 1886 the young family moved to Lichtenau, just three kilometers from Steinbach, where C. B. “went to work.”¹⁵ Two and a half years later the family, now with four small children, moved back to Steinbach. Soon after their return to Steinbach, they moved to a small farm, the first agrarian home which C. B. and Anna shared. There, C. B. and Anna’s home included more family members than just C. B.

¹³ Ernest P. Toews, “Elisabeth Reimer Toews, 1843-1918,” *Preservings* Part Two, 8 (June 1996), 12. Growing up, Elisabeth’s family were quite poor since her mother largely supported the family through her work as a seamstress. Elisabeth’s married situation was similar, although their poverty was largely attributed to Peter’s ill health.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

¹⁵ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46.

and Anna and their children. As C. W. and Helena had taken C. W.'s niece into their home in Russia, C. W. himself, after he was widowed (for the second time) in 1889, lived with C. B. and Anna until his death in 1893. C. B.'s only brother, Isaac, also lived with them for a time since he did not marry until he was 29, in 1895.¹⁶ Isaac was without his own farm household during his bachelor years, working instead in agriculturally-related fields.

C. B.'s marriage, young family, and small farm did not hinder his own work away from his household. Increasingly he was drawn into bush work, custom threshing, and house moving. A daughter Elisabeth remembers these were difficult years for her mother, Anna: "The children were small, Grandfather [C. W.] sick, and father away working, in the winter he always went to the bush to work." C. B.'s family lived on a farm household, but C. B. was not a farmer. Son Cornelius was responsible for the farm chores, splitting wood, and milking the cow.¹⁷ A diary which C. B. kept for the first month or so of 1888, six years after he was married to Anna, reveals that while he worked in the bush, sawing wood, during that winter, he did often come home, where he and Anna had guests, attended church services, and he attended *Bruderschaft* meetings, and looked after his parents.¹⁸ C. B.'s diary notes that he travelled often from "his land" in the bush to home, and to Steinbach and Blumenort (eight kilometers north of Steinbach) for church services and meetings.¹⁹ Yet while C. B.'s family lived on a farmstead, C. B. was not a farmer of his father's description. C. B. participated in a world which was unfamiliar to the previous generation. He was a man in two worlds.

¹⁶ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46. Marrying at age 29 was highly unusual in nineteenth (and twentieth) century Mennonite society.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ C. B. Loewen Diary, January-February 1888, from Almon Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba. C. B. records hauling barley to his parents.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Even as C. B. worked within familiar social networks, working with his younger brother Isaac and also with other relatives and neighbours, he was charting new paths. As early as 1892 newspapers report the Loewen brothers going into the woods with their sawmill.²⁰ In 1891 the German-language newspaper, the *Nordwesten*, reported a new sawmill owned by A. W. Reimer (C. B.'s wife Anna's cousin), C. B. Loewen, and Isaac B. Plett.²¹ In 1893 the newspaper noted that the A. W. Reimer sawmill had employed C. B. who planned to move out to the bush for the winter with his family.²² In 1895, the sawmill belonged to "Reimer and Loewen Co."²³ and two years later, in 1897, the *Nordwesten* reported a newly formed sawmill company, the Loewen Bros. and Co.²⁴ There are also reports that Isaac and Cornelius were involved in a threshing company together. In 1897 the *Nordwesten* noted that C. B. sold his threshing machine and bought another tractor²⁵ and in 1899 the Loewen Bros. are listed as the owners of one of five steam engine threshing machines in Steinbach.²⁶ The newspaper also identifies C. B. as the third machine dealer in Steinbach in June 1899 when he reportedly became the dealer for McCormack threshing machines.²⁷

All of these activities kept C. B. away from the family farm household. In 1899 C. B. and Anna bought a farm three kilometers from Steinbach, and his eldest daughter Elisabeth remembers, "we farmed but Father worked in the bush, moved houses, planed lumber and went out threshing."²⁸ Help from his growing family enabled C. B. to continue his varied work even after his brother Isaac left in April

²⁰ *Nordwesten*, 15 January 1892.

²¹ *Nordwesten*, 14 August 1891.

²² *Nordwesten*, 3 November 1893.

²³ *Nordwesten*, 17 January 1895.

²⁴ *Nordwesten*, 23 December 1897.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Nordwesten*, 12 October 1899.

²⁷ *Nordwesten*, 29 June 1899.

²⁸ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46.

1901 to homestead in Canada's northwest, his own return to the agrarianism of their childhood. By this time son Cornelius was sixteen and he joined his father in his work away from home, while the oldest of the other children, three girls and four boys ranging in age from infancy to fifteen, looked after the farm.

On the one hand, C. B.'s varied work of sawing, threshing, and house moving was not unusual in late nineteenth century Steinbach. Agricultural services were deemed necessary so that though farming was still viewed as the most acceptable way to live a god-fearing, simple existence, even C. B.'s farm machinery dealership would not have been frowned upon. However, C. B.'s work as a younger man took him into lines of work that marked a departure from the simple agrarian world of his father. Moreover, the employment of wage labourers, though they were seasonal, demonstrates a significant break with traditional Mennonite agrarianism. C. W. had employed servants and labourers in Russia, but these were to help on the farm while his sons were too young to work. C. B. employed Mennonite and German-Lutheran men at his sawmill operation, and this payment of wages for profit signalled an important break with the previous generation. Finally, C. B.'s lengthy absences from home, though he did travel between the bush and home, at least in the early years, is not representative of the earlier *communal man* for whom community and family were the central focus of life. Klaas R. Reimer, Steinbach's foremost merchant, (and C. B.'s wife Anna's uncle) has been described as a conservative, communal-oriented man, who despite the significant wealth he accumulated throughout his career retained a deep commitment to his family and community.²⁹ For him, even the "thought of leaving caused 'a lot of tears to fall, for by nature I am quite soft-hearted...[and find

²⁹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 161.

it] quite hard...to part from friends and family.”³⁰ For C. B. the amount of time spent away from his family and the manner in which work became a source of identity is more reminiscent of Rotundo’s *self-made man*. Reimer was a family man living and working within his community; C. B. was a lumberman, thresherman, and housemover, who though a member of the Mennonite community in southeast Manitoba, was often away from it. That is, at least until the death of his first wife.

C. B.’s first wife, Anna Toews Loewen, did not enjoy good health. In 1898 diarist Johann W. Dueck recorded that Anna’s mother, Elisabeth, now married for the second time, travelled from her new home in Rosenhof, near Morris, Manitoba “to be at the bedside of her daughter Mrs. C. B. Loewen who expects to die.”³¹ Anna lived for another four years but her daughter Elisabeth remembers that while growing up, her “mother was always ill.” Anna gave birth to ten children over a period of sixteen years, two of whom did not survive infancy. This, no doubt, took its toll on her physical health.

In 1902 C. B. and son Cornelius T. Loewen did not come home from threshing until November and consequently there was much to do in order to prepare for the fast-approaching winter. They were preparing to slaughter pigs when Anna became very ill. She died three days later, leaving her 39 year old husband and eight children, ages three to nineteen. A correspondent to the German-language Mennonite newspaper, the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, commented on how heartbreaking it was to see small children standing at the coffin of their mother. The funeral was held at the Steinbach school house as the *Kleine Gemeinde* did not have a church building; reports were that many attended.³²

³⁰ Ibid. Loewen quotes from a letter Reimer wrote to Gerhard Willms, March 2, 1886.

³¹ Ernest P. Toews, 14-15.

³² *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 17 December 1902.

In the days and weeks after Anna's death C. B. wrote two letters to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* which testify to his grief and sense of loss. The first letter, written only six days after Anna's death is mainly a notice of her death, with a description of her illness at the end, which C. B. wrote, she had had for over a year, had worsened in the last month, then improved slightly until three days before her death when it became very bad. C. B. wrote of the deep grief of the eight children she left behind and signed himself as "your suffering friend."³³

In his second letter written less than two months later, dated 8 January 1903, C. B. writes mostly about Russia and addresses the letter to his relatives there. His uncle, David Loewen, C. W.'s younger brother, was visiting there from Manitoba, and C. B. wanted to connect with him as well as other family and friends. C. B. wrote of how he would have liked to spend a couple of days with his aunt there, since he had been very lonely since the death of his wife. He shares words of consolation: The Lord gave her, The Lord took her away; to him alone belongs praise.³⁴ C. B. requests news from Russia, particularly as to who has died. He reports that his brother Isaac now lives 1600 kilometers away from him, in the Northwest. He closes with a greeting and signs himself as "your friend and fellow pilgrim to Zion."³⁵ C. B.'s loss left him reflective, reaching out to kin whom he had not seen for thirty years, since he was a ten-year old boy in Russia. He was consoled by words which reflected God's control over life and death, he was a "fellow pilgrim" with the other members of the diasporic Mennonite community. Here is C. B. as communal man, identifying himself, within a German-language newspaper, as both a Christian and a Mennonite member of a kinship group and a larger community.

³³ *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 3 December 1902.

³⁴ Taken from the first chapter of the Book of Job.

³⁵ *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 21 January 1903.

Five months after the writing of this letter C. B. remarried a recently widowed woman from the neighbouring village of Blumenort, Maria Dueck Reimer. Maria had one daughter, also Maria, from her marriage to Johann R. Reimer, the son of Abraham F. Reimer and Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, and therefore C. B.'s first wife Anna's uncle. Johann was physically weak and so earned his living as a storekeeper, until his early death in 1902.³⁶ Expeditious remarriages were the norm in Mennonite society, where a high death rate, particularly of women in childbirth, left many with young families without a mother, or father.³⁷ Mennonite inheritance laws were also a factor in remarriage, since the death of a spouse meant the division of land and assets between the surviving spouse and children once they reached twenty-one. Remarriage of two widowed individuals, or between a widowed man or woman and an unmarried person with an inheritance could provide a degree of financial stability for both spouses and their young children, which the death of a spouse may have jeopardized. Of course, remarriage to a widowed individual with little inheritance and many children could have the opposite effect. It is not clear whether C. B.'s remarriage increased his and Maria's financial security, it is apparent, however, that the marriage brought vast changes to C. B. and Maria's lives, as well as the lives of their children. C. B.'s eldest daughter Elisabeth remembered that after his marriage to Maria Dueck Reimer in June 1903 "a great change for our family took place."³⁸ Within a year or two C. B. sold his sawmill interest to son C. T. and son-in-law Gerhard F. Giesbrecht (Elisabeth's husband), and his threshing company also became listed as C. T. Loewen and Co.³⁹ Their father, Elisabeth recalled, decided to stay at home and try to make a living on the farm. Her parents would even visit people

³⁶ Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition, 1874-1982*, (The Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983), 141-142.

³⁷ James Urry, *None But Saints*, 61.

³⁸ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 47.

³⁹ *Nordwesten*, 29 September 1904.

during the week and this all seemed very strange to his children from whom he had so often been away.⁴⁰

Farmer in Steinbach

Newspaper reports, and a ledger from the winter of 1903-04 confirm that C. B. continued his work at the sawmill in the bush for a year after his second marriage, although he clearly had farm expansion on his mind.⁴¹ After working off the farm for the first twenty years of his adult life, C. B. returned to the land. This farmstead did not feature the traditional and uniform housebarn of his father's generation, however. The *Nordwesten* reported in December 1903 that "wood cutter lumber man" C. B. was going into the bush and that he wanted to cut 30 to 40,000 feet of lumber for himself this winter as he was planning to build a new house, barn and granary, beginning with the house in the coming summer.⁴² The new house attracted attention. One correspondent to the *Nordwesten* noted in August 1904 that it was already visible at a distance, and described it as an "ornament on the local landscape."⁴³ In a piece she wrote about all the places she had lived in her life, C. B.'s second wife, Maria, a conscientious diarist and committed correspondent, remembered that when they were first married she lived in their old house, but from there they moved into "our big, new house."⁴⁴ By June 1906 C. B. was also building what the *Nordwesten* described as a "very big" barn.⁴⁵ C. B. was finally a farmer as his father had been before him, but this was a large enterprise in which C. B. was investing heavily. It was a different

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 47.

⁴¹ *Nordwesten*, 17 December 1903; C. B. Loewen ledger, 1903-04, EMCA, Steinbach, Manitoba.

⁴² *Nordwesten*, 17 December 1903.

⁴³ *Nordwesten*, 18 August 1904.

⁴⁴ Maria Dueck Loewen, "Wo ich habe gewohnt." front page of ledger. From Almon Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba.

⁴⁵ *Nordwesten*, 13 June 1906.

kind of farm, a capitalistic venture, and because of this C. B., at least in his work, was a different kind of man.

In other aspects of his life with Maria, C. B. was arguably as much, or more than, the communal man that he had been with Anna. The diaries of C. B.'s second wife, Maria, which record daily events from November 1909 to March 1911, depict the Loewens as closely tied to their family, kinship group, village, and *Gemeinde*. All of C. B. and Maria's children feature in the diary. Peter, Abe, and Jake, aged 18, 16, and 14 in 1909 often either accompanied their father, or went by themselves, to get wood from the bush, to take crops or cattle to the railway station at Giroux, or to take milk, eggs and/or family members to Steinbach. "The girls," – C. B.'s daughter Katharina "Tin" and Maria's daughter Maria – went to school, either by foot, or were taken by "Father" (C. B.) or their brothers with the horses and sleigh. Maria and the girls also did laundry, made butter and soap, planted and tended the vegetable garden, and picked many kinds of fruit. Maria prepared meals for the threshing team, and for the many neighbours and relatives that the Loewens entertained. Here is a picture of a communal Mennonite farm household, where husband, wife, and children worked together to sustain the family. The women grew vegetables, and made soap and butter, while the men grew and transported crops, cattle, and milk for the local and city market. Here was the partnership of man, woman, and children at work, in the life of a transitional man.

C. B.'s new role as a farm household head allowed him to be a much more visible father to his and Anna's younger children, and his children with Maria, than he had been with his eldest children. C. B. went out most days, either on farm business to the nearby villages of Steinbach or Giroux, or he travelled as far as Morris or

Winnipeg, and on occasion brought back treats of watermelon, plums and grapes.⁴⁶ He often took his children with him on these trips. C. B. and Maria's eldest son Johann, "Hans," frequently accompanied his father to Steinbach and Giroux even as a five year old. C. B.'s daughter Tin travelled with her father on other occasions, and on 5 October 1910 C. B. took his and Anna's two youngest children, Tin, 11, and Jakob, 15, to a fair in Giroux.⁴⁷ A return to the farm household, from the bush and the threshing team, made C. B. into a more visible husband and father for his younger children. This was, as noted above, a strange reality for his older children, most notably his daughter Elisabeth.⁴⁸

C. B.'s older children apparently made the most of this change, however. Maria's diary often mentions visits made with their older married children, daughters Elisabeth and Anna, who married brothers, Gerhard and Jacob F. Giesbrecht. As well, C. B. and Maria's siblings, other relatives, and neighbours were visited or received as visitors. The Loewens, C. B., Maria, and their younger children, often visited Elisabeth, Anna, and their husbands, and C. B. also worked closely with his sons-in-law. Elisabeth, Anna, and their step-mother Maria also visited one another. Maria also saw her sisters, Elizabeth and Helena, often, since they both lived in Steinbach. They visited Maria's brothers in Morris several times and one such trip, in March 1910, involved a four-day stay in Morris during which C. B. and Maria attended her brother Heinrich's wedding, visited three other brothers, and attended a church service.⁴⁹ Visitors to Steinbach from the Mennonite settlements in Kansas also receive mention in Maria's diary. This was very much the social world – close

⁴⁶ Maria Dueck Loewen, Diary 1909-1911, 15 July 1910.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5 October 1910.

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 47.

⁴⁹ Maria Dueck Loewen Diary, March 1910.

family, neighbours, kin in other Mennonite communities in Manitoba and Kansas – in which the previous generation had lived.

Other aspects of communal life were carried over by C. B. and Maria, and one in particular, won him community accolades. In her diary, Maria enters seventeen accounts of slaughtering hogs, chickens, a bull and calves over sixteen months from November 1909 to March 1911.⁵⁰ Some of these record the Loewens slaughtering animals at their farm, while others involved the Loewens going to other people's homes to help them. On 10 October 1910 C. B. and Maria slaughtered one bull and two pigs with the help of Cornelius Barkman (C. B.'s step-brother) and Cornelius Kroeker (also a relative of C. B.).⁵¹ On 23 November of the same year the couple helped Klaas Friesens (the plural denotes a married couple) slaughter pigs.⁵² This aspect of C. B. and Maria's community participation was recalled by Steinbacher K. J. B. Reimer in one of a series of articles he wrote celebrating Steinbach's ninetieth anniversary in 1964 and 1965. He wrote that the Loewens were gladly invited to slaughtering bees and that even in the 1920s, C. B. Loewen's "efficiency and quick and sure approach" were remembered.⁵³

C. B. was still very much a part of the communal world of his father, with his slaughtering bees and kinship ties, yet in the 1910s his farming and lifestyle began to resemble more and more the new capitalistic and consumeristic world which confronted Steinbach Mennonite and Anabaptist-Christian values. In 1911, C. B. and Maria moved to what daughter Elisabeth described as a "better" farm just north of

⁵⁰ Maria Dueck Loewen Diary.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10 October 1910.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 23 November 1910.

⁵³ *Steinbach Post*, 16 March 1965.

Steinbach.⁵⁴ The couple had twelve children by this time, eight from C. B.'s first marriage, one from Maria's first marriage, and three children from their second marriage (a fourth child had been born to C. B. and Maria but had died at the age of fifteen months). C. B.'s eldest two daughters, Elisabeth and Anna, as well as three of C. B.'s sons, Cornelius, Isaac and Abraham, were working away from the parental home, yet the family remained close and daughter Elisabeth remembered that "for a while things worked out very well." Over the next decade, she noted, her father, C. B., bought a car, a tractor and 640 acres of land at Ile des Chenes, Manitoba.⁵⁵ C. B.'s investment in land (which he never farmed himself), his purchase of a car, a hotly contested buy in the *Kleine Gemeinde* of the 1910s, and the increased size and technology of his farm enterprise, all signalled a break with the communal agrarianism of the previous generation.

C. B.'s earlier business ventures – the sawmill, threshing team, implement dealership, and his farm – had not inherently threatened the communal, agrarian existence which Steinbach prized. They did make him a different kind of husband, father, man, and Mennonite than his father had been, but it was the move to a new, bigger and better farm which appears to have precipitated C. B.'s break with the *Gemeinde* of his forebears. In Maria's 1909-1911 diary there are references to the Loewen family attending the Steinbach *Jugendverein*, a church youth meeting that was not linked to the *Kleine Gemeinde*, and on Sunday 24 April 1910 they attended church in the *Holdeman Gemeinde*, Steinbach's second and more progressive church which had its beginnings in a painful split from the *Kleine Gemeinde*.⁵⁶ Maria also

⁵⁴ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 47. Elisabeth actually dates this as 1912, but in her diary Maria recorded that they moved in 1911. By "better" farm Elisabeth could have meant that the farm was larger than her parent's previous farm, or perhaps that the soil was of better quality.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* This purchase is described in more detail below.

⁵⁶ Maria Dueck Loewen Diary, 24 April 1910. For more on the Holdeman split, see the previous chapter on C. W. Loewen who recorded the events of the split in his diary.

recorded that C. B. went to *Bruderschaft* meetings during this same period, and though the family did not attend Church every week, they did do so regularly, sometimes travelling to Blumenort for the service, sometimes attending twice in one day, and Maria, particularly, attended baptismal services. These references suggest that C. B. and Maria were still active members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* during this period, though they were open to other religious groups and experiences. However, in the diary of the *Kleine Gemeinde* leader, *Aeltester* Peter R. Dueck, is found a request by “C. Löwen” on 10 September 1911 to leave the church:

Announced that Johan Goossen has resigned from the church as he wishes to join the Schmitten [Bruderthaler] Gemeinde; C. Löwen has declared that he too wishes to join that church. Because our Steinbach brethren were not at the Brotherhood meeting we decided to have another Brotherhood meeting next Sunday in Steinbach.⁵⁷

This is the last mention of C. B. Loewen in *Kleine Gemeinde* church records; at the end of 1911 Ältester Dueck recorded that the Johan Gossens, Klaas W. Reimers, Jakob Barkmans, and Benjamin Janzes left the church, but no mention is made of a final break with C. B. One local history suggested that C. B. Loewen was excommunicated from the *Kleine Gemeinde*, which “didn’t change quickly enough to suit him,” for “publicly expressing views which contradicted those of the church leadership.”⁵⁸ There is no evidence to support this claim.

And there is no evidence of C. B. ever joining the *Bruderthaler* church, Steinbach’s third Mennonite church which had an evangelical, progressive outlook. What is known with greater certainty is that C. B., and later, Maria, joined a church variously called the *Abendlichter*, *Ovent Lichta* (in Low German), *Gemeinde Gottes*,

⁵⁷ Loewen. *From the Inside Out*, 222.

⁵⁸ Gerald Wright, *Steinbach: Is there any place like it?* (Steinbach, MB: Derksen Printers Ltd., 1991), 78. The author does not footnote this assertion. He does suggest that C. B. publicly expressed his views in the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, specifically, that he advocated greater involvement of the Mennonites in politics. This could be a reference to the letter C. B. Loewen wrote to the *Steinbach Post* discussed below.

and the Church of God, which was always accompanied with the description, “not Holdeman.” The *Abendlichter* group is difficult to pinpoint. The translated diary of Johann W. Dueck contains a rare description of the *Abendlichter* when he discusses C. B.’s brother Isaac who belonged to the group, a “‘pure’ church, without sin, as it were,” noting that they “practice faith healing,” and “do not believe in formal church membership.”⁵⁹ In the genealogy book of Maria’s Dueck lineage, her son-in-law, John C. Reimer records that C. B. left the *Kleine Gemeinde* and later joined the Church of God (not Holdeman), while their mother, Maria, stayed 11 more years and then also joined the Church of God in 1925 when she was baptized again. Thus C. B.’s move can be dated to 1914.⁶⁰ Maria’s obituary in 1960 remarked that she had joined the *Gemeinde Gottes* three years before C. B.’s death (in 1928), and that he had already belonged to the group for many years. The Loewen genealogy book does not mention C. B. leaving the *Kleine Gemeinde* but does note that, though Maria was baptized in the *Kleine Gemeinde*, she later joined the *Ovent Lichta* (the Low German variation of *Abendlichter*) Church of God (not Holdeman).⁶¹

The exact nature of the *Abendlichter* is uncertain. While several people describe the group as Pentecostal, others believe the emphasis was on the intensity of the religious rebirth experience. The group was perhaps connected with the Reformation Movement of the Church of God, better known as the Church of God, Anderson Group.⁶² Steinbach historian Delbert Plett makes this connection between

⁵⁹ Dueck, trans., *Prairie Pioneer*, 314-315.

⁶⁰ Peter H. Dueck, ed., *Abraham L. and Elizabeth Dueck and their Descendants, 1841-1965*, (N. p.: n. p., [1965?]), 41.

⁶¹ Melvin J. Loewen, *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen and Helena Bartel*, 29.

⁶² These notes are based on the Dave K. Schellenberg, and Ernie Toews interviews, C. T. Loewen Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB; a conversation with Naomi Reimer Lepp, Steinbach, Manitoba, in March 2003; email response from Walter Sawatsky, Professor of Church History and Mission, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, 5 March 2003; email response from Kurt Pudel, on behalf of the Church of God, 5 March 2003.

the *Abendlichter* and the Church of God, Anderson.⁶³ The beliefs and practices of this group fit with Johann W. Dueck's description of the *Abendlichter*. The Church of God, Anderson Group do de-emphasize formal church membership and are sometimes called the "evening light reformation" based on Zechariah 14:7: "It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime – a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light."⁶⁴ A diary entry by Johann W. Dueck's wife records that on 7 July 1926

Abram R. Duecks [Maria's brother] offered us a ride to Morden and Winkler to visit the "Church of God," so called. We do not wish to judge them, but did not agree with their practices of no official membership and no barrier to communion (anyone who wanted to, could partake of the bread and wine). Many women prayed openly one after the other. The sermon was good.⁶⁵

This description also fits the Church of God, Anderson, and suggests that Maria's family were also interested in the movement. At the time of this diary entry C. B. and Maria were living in Morris near to her Dueck family. Still, exactly where and when C. B. Loewen and his wife Maria encountered this movement and became involved in it is difficult to establish.

Though C. B. had been a member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* for thirty years when he left to join the *Abendlichter*, the decision is perhaps not as out of character as it first appears. Despite following traditional Mennonite patterns and being baptized and married within a few months, becoming a father of a large family, living on a farm, and engaging in agricultural service businesses to support his family, C. B. Loewen was not a mainstream Steinbach Mennonite. As already established, C. B. spent a great deal of time away from his community and family to pursue work opportunities. As well, his "return" to the land was not an embrace of all his father

⁶³ Plett, "The Ovent Lichta," 84.

⁶⁴ Email response from Kurt Pudol, on behalf of the Church of God, 5 March 2003.

⁶⁵ Dueck, trans., *Prairie Pilgrims*, 134.

had been, rather it was a reinvention of the Mennonite farm householder. For C. B. was, as his father had been, a Mennonite, a Christian, an agriculturist, a household head, a man, but he and C. W. understood these things differently. For C. B. agriculture was a capitalistic venture, land was an investment, profits were to be spent on cars and tractors. Being a Christian was about evangelical and charismatic individualism, no longer did the communitarian *Bruderschaft* govern C. B.'s life. Even being a Mennonite, for which the Low German and High German languages had long been an identifier, was open to reconsideration for C. B., the non-conformist.

Perhaps the most pointed example of C. B.'s unconventional ideas is a letter which he wrote to Steinbach's weekly newspaper, the German-language *Steinbach Post*, in December 1918, sharply criticizing his fellow Mennonites for failing to teach their children English. From October 1918 until the end of the following year, the newspaper was published in English due to a Government order passed amid the anti-German sentiment of the First World War era. The epistle illustrates his progressive ideas. He asserted that "everything is improving in the modern life especially in the schools," though he doubted whether this could be said of all the schools since "there seem to be people always, who believe there is some sanctimony in certain languages, especially their own!" He frames his argument in religious terms, with an allusion to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, "let us consider [sic] what was the cause of so many languages coming into the world," and the advantages of a missionary being able to speak foreign languages. However, the main reason for C. B.'s concern is not that the Mennonites should be training their children to bring more people to "know the Lord"; rather, C. B. is concerned about the Mennonites' non-involvement in local politics because of their inability to speak English. "I am sometimes very close to blaming my parents for not giving me the opportunity to learn the English language,"

he writes. “We should be able to master it as well as our own,” he chastises. There is no escaping the blame: “if we are to blame anyone it would have to be ourselves, as we have been in this country long enough to learn the language.” “And it seems to me we are about to loose [sic] control over the Municipal Council from this very cause, as the Galicians are not afraid of the english [sic] language and no doubt they will try hard to get the reigns in their own hands.”⁶⁶

This letter illustrates just how far C. B. Loewen had come from his “quiet in the land,” Low German speaking, Mennonite background which preached against political participation. Yet, importantly, C. B. addressed this letter to his fellow Mennonites, he included himself in the criticism, he was criticizing a community of which he still considered himself a part. C. B. thought of himself as a Mennonite just as his father had, though the insularity of the Mennonite community, and the exclusive use of the German language which had been integral to C. W.’s Mennonite identity, were now renounced by his son. Also noteworthy is C. B.’s sense that the world was progressing positively, there was no fear here of the encroachment of the “world.” C. B. wanted his community to embrace change, even in the form of another language, and political participation. Two years later, from 1920-21, C. B. served a year on the Municipal Council of the R. M. of Hanover as the representative for ward three. C. B. was an active, and particularly vocal, participant in the early twentieth century reinvention of what it meant to be a Mennonite.

Not only did C. B. still consider himself a Mennonite, he also remained part of the Mennonite community, not in the *Gemeinde*, but through kinship and village ties, for the rest of his life. In 1916 the *Steinbach Post* reported that C. B. and a Heinrich Neufeld had gone to Prince George, BC with Mennonite land agent P. P. Kroeker to

⁶⁶ C. B. Loewen letter, *Steinbach Post*, 1 January 1919.

look at land options there.⁶⁷ Whether C. B. was seriously considering moving west is unknown, but significantly his only brother Isaac was farming in Alberta. Although C. B. would not leave southern Manitoba, the 1916 trip out west was an opportunity to reconnect with Mennonite family and friends. In the Swalwell, Alberta news section of the 15 November issue of the *Post*, a local resident Peter T. Friesen reported that C. B. and two associates, Heinrich Neufeld, and Cornelius Friesen of Niverville, had visited on their way back from Prince George, and noted that “I got a feeling of being right at home when I saw C. B. Loewen.”⁶⁸ Despite his departure from the *Kleine Gemeinde*, and from any Mennonite church, C. B. was still an integral part of the Mennonite community.

Free from the confines of the *Bruderschaft* of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, C. B. spent, invested, and expanded rapidly during the heady days of World War One and its immediate aftermath. In 1916 C. B. was one of twenty-three shareholders of a land company which had bought 40,000 acres of land near Lake Charles, south of St. Paul, Minnesota, and were offering it for settlement. The other shareholders were Mennonites from Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Texas; C. B. was the only Manitoba, and Canadian, shareholder.⁶⁹ Nothing else is known about this investment. However, his involvement in an American Mennonite land company, offering a large tract of land indicates the extent of C. B.’s economic activity during this period. In 1918 the *Steinbach Post* noted that C. B., with his sons Isaac, Abraham, and Jacob, bought a section of land in the Lorette area, this may be the 640 acre Ile des Chenes piece to which his daughter Elisabeth referred.⁷⁰ The land around Landmark, Prairie Rose, and Ile des Chenes, took place during, and immediately after,

⁶⁷ *Steinbach Post*, 1 November 1916.

⁶⁸ *Steinbach Post*, 15 November 1916.

⁶⁹ *Steinbach Post*, 31 May 1916, 6.

⁷⁰ *Steinbach Post*, 4 September 1918; Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 47.

World War One and had been made possible partly by provincial drainage projects.⁷¹ These examples of land investment illustrate that C. B., though a farmer, was far from the communal agriculturist his father had been.

C. B. also proved himself a successful Steinbach farmer in these boom years. In January 1919 the *Steinbach Post* noted that C. B. had recently travelled to Winnipeg the old-fashioned way by a team of horses and a sleigh, to take a 2336 pound load of pork to the market. C. B. was paid 22¢ per pound for his seven month old pigs which weighed in at an average 179¾ pounds, giving C. B. a total income of \$518.92. The moral of the story, the *Post* concluded, was that it pays to raise pigs.⁷² Though travelling to Winnipeg by horse and sleigh in January of 1919, C. B. was the owner of a Chevrolet car by August 1917.⁷³ C. B.'s break from the *Kleine Gemeinde* had allowed him certain freedoms which he seized as he invested heavily in land, and purchased an automobile, a controversial buy in the Steinbach of the 1910s, in the boom years of World War One and its immediate aftermath.

The War and post-war boom period were characterized by unparalleled inflation. The cost of living rose dramatically throughout the period and business historian Michael Bliss suggests that the Canadian economy did not return to any level of normalcy until "at least 1926, and perhaps not then." Bliss has consequently renamed America's "Roaring Twenties," the "Stuttering Twenties" in Canada.⁷⁴ For C. B. Loewen it was even more serious than that. One local historian wrote that C. B. had seen great farming possibilities in the new district of Prairie Rose, "but when the high post-war prices slumped he suffered great material losses."⁷⁵ Daughter Elisabeth

⁷¹ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 148-149.

⁷² *Steinbach Post*, 22 January 1919.

⁷³ *Steinbach Post*, 15 August 1917. C. B. Loewen took Dr. Johann Peters from Grunthal to Selkirk in his "chevrolet."

⁷⁴ Bliss, 381-383.

⁷⁵ Abe Warkentin, ed., 43.

noted after the purchase of the car, the tractor, and the 640 acres at Ile des Chenes, "everything got cheaper, debts had to be paid, so Father sold his farm to pay debts."⁷⁶

On 22 October 1924 C. B. Loewen listed his farm for sale (a quarter section of land with house and farm buildings), as well as another two hundred acres at three different locations.⁷⁷

The Loewens also held two auction sales in the first months of 1925 at which they sold not only farm animals, machinery, but other household and personal items. On 4 February 1925 the Loewens listed 60 sheep for sale, 3 horses, some beef cattle, a cultivator, a plough, a washing machine with engine, a sewing machine, a cream separator, a wardrobe, and other household items. Also the auction advertisement lists books, the *Martyr's Mirror*, *Menno Simons Writings*, and others.⁷⁸ The sale of these canonical Mennonite works is curious. The *Martyr's Mirror* and the writings of Menno Simons were often family heirlooms to be passed from generation to generation, similar to the family Bible. It may be that C. B. and Maria had other copies, or that they desperately needed money, or perhaps the sale of these Mennonite classics reflects the growing distance between C. B. and his religious heritage. Maria recorded that this auction raised \$1,200. A second auction sale, which took place on 15 April 1925 and was a sale of horses and machinery, brought in another \$2,000. Five days later the Loewens moved into a rental house since their farm had been sold on 1 April 1925 for \$5,000.⁷⁹ Their farming days were over and they bought a store in the town of Morris, Manitoba, 70 kilometers southwest from Steinbach.

⁷⁶ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 47.

⁷⁷ *Steinbach Post*, 22 October 1924. Listed were ¼ section 2-7-6 with house and buildings; 53 acres in section 12-7-5; 80 acres in section 23-6-6; 60 acres in section 33-6-6.

⁷⁸ *Steinbach Post*, 4 February 1925.

⁷⁹ Maria Dueck Loewen, *Diary 1918-1946*, 1.

Storeman in Morris

C. B.'s departure for Morris in 1926 was marked by the *Steinbach Post*, mouthpiece of the community of which he was such an integral part. On 24 February 1926 both the "East Reserve News" and the "Steinbach News" columns of the *Post* recorded the departure of an "old pioneer of the East Reserve," who had lived there for 51½ years and was well-known as an old sawmiller and thresher. Column writer G. G. Kornelsen also mentioned C. B.'s work in moving houses and other contract work and finally wished him much luck and well-being.⁸⁰ J. S. Friesen, the Steinbach news columnist, noted that henceforth C. B. would stand behind a counter, presumably a reference to Morris being C. B.'s first attempt at indoor, sedentary work.⁸¹ The move, when C. B. was 62 and Maria 51, does seem surprising. Both had lived in Steinbach and environs for most of their lives, and although Maria had brothers in the Morris area, many other relatives, siblings, and even some of their children remained in and around Steinbach. Furthermore, C. B., who had pursued several different careers, had always done physical outdoor work.

Though living in Morris, C. B. continued his contact with Steinbach during the eighteen months C. B. and Maria operated the store. According to the *Post*, C. B. visited Steinbach once in May and twice in June 1926.⁸² In July and in August 1927 both C. B. and Maria visited their children in Steinbach.⁸³ In their second summer in Morris, C. B. also advertised in the *Steinbach Post*. In August 1927 he placed the first of two advertisements which listed items such as corn flakes, gold dust, soap, currants, plums, soda biscuits, brooms, and raisins, as well as Singer sewing machines, for which they took old machines in trade. The first advertisement

⁸⁰ *Steinbach Post*, 3 March 1926.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Steinbach Post*, 5 May 1926; 2 June 1926; 30 June 1926.

⁸³ *Steinbach Post*, 6 July 1927; 10 August 1927.

reminded prospective customers that it was not necessary to go to Winnipeg and pay more there.⁸⁴ The second advertisement appeared only a month later in the 21 September 1927 issue of the *Post* and announced a clearance sale which should not be missed. C. B. listed the prices of soda, sunflower salmons, sardines, rolled oats, jam, mixed candy, coffee, “Bee Hive” syrup, dried apples, vinegar, and “Red Bird” brooms, and noted that there were many other things, all of which must be sold.⁸⁵ Daughter Elisabeth recalled that her parents sold the store because it was not successful.⁸⁶ Diarist Johann W. Dueck stated more directly that C. B. “had to give up his store in Morris, being in financial straits.”⁸⁷

Wage Labourer in Manitoba and Kansas

After losing his farm, and then a store, C. B. Loewen, who appears to have been quite wealthy during the beginning of his second marriage, returned to Steinbach in November 1927 poor. He became, quite absurdly, a wage labourer for his son. C. B., Maria and their youngest children went to the bush to cook for eldest son C. T. Loewen’s workers at his sawmill. The *Steinbach Post* reported on 30 November that “our ‘bushpeople’ can today report that they have partially moved into the countryside.”⁸⁸ The Loewen Bros. sawmill planned to begin work after the Christmas holidays, the paper noted, while at the Loewen pulpwood camp work was already underway and “C. B. Loewen went there today with his wife and child[ren], to run the food and lodging houses.”⁸⁹ In her diary, Maria recorded that the family was at the sawmill for four months and that they were responsible for feeding from 20 to 38 men

⁸⁴ *Steinbach Post*, 24 August 1927.

⁸⁵ *Steinbach Post*, 21 September 1927.

⁸⁶ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 47.

⁸⁷ Dueck, trans., *Prairie Pioneer*, 314.

⁸⁸ *Steinbach Post*, 30 November 1927.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

per day.⁹⁰ Elsewhere she noted that she and C. B. took three of their children, Ben, Helena, and Margaretha to the lumber camp with them.⁹¹

When the seasonal work in the bush was over in the springtime, C. B. and Maria returned to Steinbach and lived in a rented place at son C. T.'s place. Not only were they in financial difficulty, they were in their senior years. A letter which Maria wrote from Jansen, Nebraska in June 1928 noted that the elderly couple had spent the spring wondering how they could make a trip to the U. S., when three workers who wanted to go south offered to pay for the trip if C. B. and Maria would take them in their car.⁹² Diarist J. W. Dueck wrote that "wanting to earn some money also in the summer [as well as the winter at the camp], he [C. B.] and his wife, and several workmen (who paid him travelling expenses) drove to Kansas to help in the harvest."⁹³ On the way C. B. and Maria visited sons Abraham and Isaac who lived in Nebraska with their families. Then they went on to Meade County in southwestern Kansas where, Dueck wrote, "they found work with Loewen Bros, she as a cook and he was driving a grain truck to the elevator."⁹⁴ The Loewen Brothers were grandsons of C. W.'s brother Heinrich, who had been struck by lightning and killed in Russia, and whose son, also Heinrich, came to Kansas with his mother's brother and his family.⁹⁵ The brothers were widely-known in Kansas for their large-scale wheat farming and for having introduced from California the first combine harvester east of the Rockies.⁹⁶ The work, however, proved too much for the 65 year old Manitoba pioneer. On 20 July C. B. became very ill and five days later, on 26 July 1928, he

⁹⁰ Maria Loewen, *Diary 1918-1946*, 1.

⁹¹ Maria Loewen, "Wo ich habe gewohnt."

⁹² *Steinbach Post*, 4 July 1928, 3.

⁹³ Dueck, trans., *Prairie Pioneer*, 314.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Melvin J. Loewen. *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen and Helena Bartel*, 22.

⁹⁶ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 198.

died.⁹⁷ Dueck and C. B.'s daughter Elisabeth both attributed this in part to the extreme heat of the Kansas summer. His obituary stated that he had suffered with heart problems before, though at that time friends thought the problem lay with his lungs.

Diaries and letters record the details of C. B. Loewen's final days, as well as the intricacies of his funeral arrangements, which emphasize C. B.'s integral place in Steinbach and the wider Mennonite community. Dueck's 13 August 1928 diary entry noted that on 20 July, when C. B. first became ill, the doctor had told him that he would die. "Mostly delirious," Dueck noted, "C. B. had remarked in a sane moment that although he didn't want to die in Kansas, there would be no help for [no way of avoiding] it."⁹⁸ C. B.'s children were notified by telegram and two adult children Jacob and Katharina, "Tin," drove down to Kansas but arrived just hours after he died.⁹⁹ When the other children were informed of their father's death a few days later, they requested his body be brought back to Steinbach. Maria had C. B.'s body embalmed and services were held, first in Meade, Kansas, and then, with his sons Abraham and Isaac present, in Jansen, Nebraska. Maria, Jake and Tin then accompanied the body by train to Manitoba where the other children met them at Niverville. From there they travelled the short distance to Steinbach where C. B. was buried on 1 August after a service in the *Bruderthaler* Church which was attended by 600 people. Dueck was fascinated by the cost of this procedure, noting that the undertaker in Nebraska, where C. B.'s body had to be embalmed again and placed in a larger coffin in accordance with Nebraska law, had charged \$25. The total cost of the funeral, according to Dueck, surpassed \$500.¹⁰⁰ And after the service, Dueck wrote,

⁹⁷ "Nachruf," *Steinbach Post*, 5 September 1928, 6.

⁹⁸ Dueck, trans., *Prairie Pioneer*, 314.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 314-315.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 315.

“the oldest son [C. T.] invited us to partake of a light lunch, and we sang several songs in the shade of the trees.”¹⁰¹

The number of services, and the size and cost of the funeral in Steinbach, are noteworthy. This was a man who had left the *Kleine Gemeinde*, invested heavily in land, expanded his farm, lost almost everything, and then moved from his community to operate a store which had also been unsuccessful. He had successful sons – C. T., and Peter and Jacob, had all established profitable enterprises by this time – but C. B. himself died a wage labourer working in the early American harvest. Yet \$500 was spent on a funeral which 600 people attended. In 1929, C. T. was selling secondhand sleighs for \$25-\$50, and in 1928, the year of their father’s death, the Loewen Bros. Garage, a joint venture between C. B.’s oldest sons, C. T. and Peter, sold the 1928 Chevrolet Roadster Express for \$650 plus tax, not very much more than the cost of C. B.’s funeral.¹⁰² In 1905, five hundred mourners attended the funeral of Steinbach store owner, and essentially *communal* man, Klaas R. Reimer, two hundred more than the funeral of a *Kleine Gemeinde* bishop eight years earlier. C. B.’s funeral twenty years later, was attended by six hundred. C. B., for all his non-conformist views and actions in life, was embraced by his community in death.

Reports of C. B.’s death and his obituaries written in the days and weeks after his death depicted C. B. diversely, either as a *communal* or *self-made* man. A newspaper piece in the *Steinbach Post* described him as a man who spared no effort in his work as a thresherman, lumberman, and who then concentrated on farming, eventually feeling a final pull back to the bush, *Waldlust*, in the winter of 1927-28.¹⁰³ C. B. was, in the mind of G. G. Kornelsen, best understood by his work, in which he “spared no effort.” The obituary written by the family, on the other hand, briefly

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *Steinbach Post*, 6 February 1929; Abe Warkentin, ed., 108.

¹⁰³ G. G. Kornelsen, “Ostreserve Nachrichten,” *Steinbach Post*, 1 August 1928.

outlined his life: born in Russia, part of the 1874 migration, his baptism, first marriage, children, second marriage, children, listing those who died before him and those he left behind.¹⁰⁴ There was no mention of his work in this outline of his life; this was a depiction of a son, brother, father, and husband. Even in the accounts of his life written shortly after his death, descriptions of C. B. suggest that he exhibited characteristics of both a communitarian-oriented man and a self-made man, willing to transcend community boundaries for both economic security and religious quest.

Conclusion

Years later son-in-law Gerhard F. Giesbrecht, Elisabeth's husband, wrote down his recollections of his father-in-law for an historical sketch of C. B. Loewen to be included in a history of the R. M. of Hanover. He wrote:

Mr. Loewen is remembered as an upright Christian in the community, ever willing to lend a helping hand to his neighbours and friends in distress. He was an expert butcher and the writer still marvels at the speed with which he did his work, whether it was slaughtering of hogs or killing a steer for the winter's supply of meat.¹⁰⁵

Memorialized here as a Christian, good neighbour and friend, and an expert butcher, his obituaries remembered him as a father, brother, son, husband, and a thresherman, lumberman, farmer, store owner. Joy Parr's sense of an "inherent instability in identities – that being simultaneously a worker, a Baptist, and a father, one is never solely or systematically any of these"¹⁰⁶ is pertinent, particularly in this discussion of C. B. C. B. Loewen was many things simultaneously. Understanding him as a transitional figure situated somewhere between *communal* and *self-made*, between his father and his son, between community and individual is helpful. Yet these terms must not hide the complexity of his character. Leaving the *Kleine Gemeinde* for the

¹⁰⁴ "Nachruf," *Steinbach Post*, 5 September 1928.

¹⁰⁵ Abe Warkentin, ed., 43.

¹⁰⁶ Parr, "Gender History," 361.

Abendlichter, chastising his community for failing to learn English and therefore being unqualified to participate in municipal politics, living a drastically different life with his first and second families, cannot be completely rationalized.

In her discussion of the complexity of religious identity which was “negotiated within the often conflicting demands of gender, family, church, and community,”¹⁰⁷ Marguerite Van Die suggests that we keep in mind Nancy Ammerman’s observation, that

if we focus on how people make a life, rather than on how they make sense, we may find the practical coherence that transcends the apparent ideological coherence. Religious practices – both actions and rhetorics – are organized, but we will not discover that organization without paying attention to what people are doing, where, and with whom.¹⁰⁸

This chapter attempted to heed this advice and focused on how C. B. Loewen made a life, what he did, where, and with whom. A man, studied in the “ordinariness of his multiplicity,”¹⁰⁹ and a life, lived within a Mennonite world, a Christian worldview, and a patriarchal system, all in transition, suggest the interconnectedness, diversity, and changing nature of ethnic, religious, and gender identities.

¹⁰⁷ Van Die, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Quotation in *ibid.* Van Die cites this as Nancy T. Ammerman, “Organized Religion in a Voluntaristic Society,” *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997): 207.

¹⁰⁹ Parr, “Gender History,” 361.

Chapter Three: From Bush Camp to Small-Town Business

In 1858 J. A. Dickinson, a member of a party led by explorer H. Y. Hind, crossed the northern part of what later became the Mennonite East Reserve, and found a flat region, with poor drainage, and plentiful timber reserves.¹ Fourteen years later, in 1872, surveyors noted that the three northern townships of the reserve were covered with tall weeds, grasses, and scrub, rather than forest.² Upon arrival in Manitoba, many of the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonite immigrants from New Russia, settled in the northern townships, preferring the soil quality there over the poorly drained, rocky, and wooded southern townships.³ Timber, for building and firewood, was immediately required, however. One early Steinbach settler recalled that “after we had found a place to hang the Russian clock and the ham that we had bought in Duluth...we took the oxen and wagon into the bush.”⁴ Another Steinbach “old-timer” noted that “our settlement derived great benefit from being located close to the woods east of Steinbach.”⁵ The lumber industry became an important economic activity in southeastern Manitoba and, in particular, to Steinbach entrepreneurs.

Early entrepreneurial activity in Steinbach was tempered by the ethno-religious values, and inherited notions of masculinity, of the conservative *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites who settled Steinbach, and other villages of the East Reserve, in the 1870s. The above discussion of the Steinbach of C. W. Loewen depicted a communal, patriarchal, and agrarian world which in 1886 registered just two residents – Peter T. Barkman, miller, and Klaas Reimer, merchant – with an occupation other

¹ Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements*, 11, 14.

² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Abe Warkentin, ed., 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

than farmer.⁶ However, seasonal lumber operations became an accepted part of Mennonite agrarian society from the beginning of the settlement. One local history noted that a contract for a large order of lumber from the German Consul in Winnipeg in 1876 “brought badly-needed cash and hope into the tiny struggling village of Steinbach” and that a sawmill powered by two horses was built by Steinbach entrepreneur, Abram S. Friesen in the same year.⁷ From the time of settlement, Steinbach men left their farm households and went into the woods during the winter months to cut their own logs and have them sawn into lumber.⁸ Lumber was an important resource for life on the farm, and the seasonal nature of lumber industry did not compete with other events in the farm calendar, nor did it conflict with the communal and agrarian ethos of the *Kleine Gemeinde* community.

By the turn of the century, Steinbach was a significantly different community. More aptly described as a large rural service centre, it was home to 349 residents in seventy-six households and boasted more than a dozen different business establishments.⁹ Sociologist E. K. Francis attributed this growth to the non-Mennonite immigrants and poor farmers who lived in the “large under-developed hinterland” in the southeast corner of the province, and who, unlike the “better-situated” Mennonites on the East Reserve who tended to get their supplies from Winnipeg, depended more heavily on Steinbach, particularly its flour mill which did custom milling of flour and livestock feed for the subsistence farmers.¹⁰ By 1891 Steinbach also had the added attraction of a large sawmill capable of sawing 8,000 feet of lumber per day.¹¹ And in the late 1890s a lumberyard business was begun in

⁶ R. M. of Hanover Assessment Roll, 1886.

⁷ Abe Warkentin, ed., 175.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 150.

¹⁰ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 159.

¹¹ Abe Warkentin, ed., 175.

the village.¹² The Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* population were “entering more fully into a modern, urban industrial world,” with a growing merchant class, landless wage earners, more markets and services for commercializing farms, and increased interaction with outsiders.¹³ The growth of the lumber industry, and the particular expansion of the Loewen lumber enterprise, is an important part of the account of Steinbach’s development from farm village to Southeastern Manitoba’s service centre.

Every anniversary booklet and promotional leaflet which tells the story of the Loewen lumber enterprise begins the narrative in 1905 when C. T. Loewen as an innovative and adventurous young man of 21 or 22, depending on the account, left the family farm to start a business with his father’s sawmill. The successful business of C. T. Loewen & Sons, which, in 1971, split the millwork and the lumberyard divisions into two separate concerns, has long traced its beginning to 1905 and attributed its founding to C. T. himself. This intergenerational study contextualizes four individual Mennonite men and the times and places in which they lived and asserts that, while C. T. with his growing lumber enterprise lived a very different life from his communal agrarian grandfather, C. W., the business interests of C. T.’s father, C. B. Loewen, were direct antecedents to the businesses with which C. T. was involved. While C. B. and his family continued to farm the land, C. B. also ran a sawmill, implement dealership, threshing team, and house moving operation, during his early working years. Thus, while C. T. left the farm and lived in town operating a large and expanding business on Steinbach’s growing Main Street, his entrepreneurial activity was not a direct break with his father; rather he continued and expanded on the enterprising work of his father, no doubt having learnt much in his teenage years

¹² Ibid., 177.

¹³ Ibid.

working for C. B. C. T. was a member of the generation of self-made men venerated by the community of Steinbach, yet his start in business must be attributed to the entrepreneurial activity of his father.

One extant ledger from C. B. Loewen's sawmill enterprise illustrates the continuity of business activity and strategy that took both C. B. and C. T. from the closed agrarian community into the commerce of a wider world. C. B.'s winter 1903/04 ledger and C. T.'s 1907-1909 account book (the earliest of his surviving ledgers) demonstrate similarities between C. B. and C. T.'s record keeping style, customer and employee base, as well as the area served by the sawmill, and total lumber cut in a season. On the one hand, both C. B. and C. T.'s economic outlook was rooted in a pre-industrial, cashless society. Payment to the Loewens for lumber and to employees as wages was in the form of what business historians term as "book debt," where accounts were "likely to be paid off over a long time through offsetting book credits...[which] might result from goods provided or services performed."¹⁴ These accounts did not bear interest charges but "borrowers were socially obligated to pay off their debts," while "lenders similarly were obligated not to pressure those who owed them for goods."¹⁵ In the Loewens' ledgers most accounts were settled around April (the sawmill operated from late December to early March) though sometimes partial payments were made and the balance was carried over to the next ledger (and the next year). Occasionally interest (of around 4%) was charged on accounts after five or six months of non-payment but these were few.

Both ledgers, however, are records of nascent capitalism. Wage labour was used to create products to be sold to a consuming public. C. B.'s ledger contains

¹⁴ Naomi R. Lamoreaux, Daniel M. G. Raff, and Peter Temin, "Beyond Markets and Hierarchies: Toward a New Synthesis of American Business History," *American Historical Review* 108 (April 2003), 411.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 412.

about one hundred names of customers and employees, approximately half of which appear in C. T.'s ledger three years later. C. T. had a larger clientele base with his list of customers and employees comprising over one hundred and seventy names. In both ledgers there are three main categories of entries. The first, the basic employee, earned between \$1 and \$1.75 per day. Before Christmas, wages were sometimes set at a monthly wage, for example, \$20 per month, and some employees earned an hourly wage during January, February, and March, perhaps as much as 20¢ per hour. Overtime was also paid. The wages of employees were calculated anywhere from every few weeks to once or twice during the whole winter. During the sawing season these employees charged items such as axe handles, gloves, "Painkiller", oil, meat, butter, and (by the non-Mennonite employees) tobacco to their accounts, as well as periodically withdrawing a few dollars of cash from their accounts. In April most of these accounts were settled with final payments of wages.

Again, it was a capitalism checked by informal and even communitarian economic exchange. Frequently no cash exchange took place. The other accounts in the ledgers can be divided into two categories: the customer-employees who worked for the Loewens while getting lumber from the bush; and the customers who simply got their lumber sawed at the Loewen sawmill but paid their bills in a variety of ways. The customer-employee came to the sawmill to cut lumber, cut some for the Loewens while there, and his account was credited for this work. Others took some lumber back to Steinbach from the sawmill and the payment for this work was also debited from what customers owed. For the customers who simply came to get wood sawed at the sawmill, or planed, or to purchase shingles, perhaps on several different occasions throughout the winter, their amount owing was totalled at the end of the season and, while sometimes paid in full in cash, at other times was partially paid

with goods, for example, oxen and horses,¹⁶ or with services such as accommodation in a town along the way to the sawmill.¹⁷ Sometimes a son's wages from working at the Loewen sawmill, if he was under twenty-one, were credited to his father's account, as in the winter of 1909-1910, for example, when the wages of C. T.'s younger brothers Isaac and Peter were credited to C. B.¹⁸

Mennonite young men worked for C. B. and C. T., but the lists of workers and clients of the enterprise also point to a broadening world of inter-ethnic relations. The one hundred employees and customers listed in C. B.'s ledger, and the one hundred and seventy in C. T.'s account records were mostly Mennonites from Steinbach, and the rural districts of Blumenort, Blumenhof, and Greenland to the north of Steinbach. Seventy-five of C. B.'s names are identifiably Mennonite, the other twenty-five are German names probably from the rural German Lutheran settlement of Friedensfeld south of Steinbach. Several of these Germans worked for C. B. Gustaff Freund's son Adolf earned a total of \$71.12 over the winter of 1903/04 which was then taken as payment against Freund's purchase of 14,395 feet of lumber (a value of \$72.00), a permit costing \$7.95, and shingles which cost \$13.44. Freund paid \$8 and still owed \$19 at the end of the season.¹⁹ Of C. T.'s one hundred and seventy names, one hundred and ten are identifiably Mennonite. C. T.'s Mennonite customers were also from the East Reserve villages of Kleefeld, Giroux, Halbstadt, Hochstadt, and Neuanlage. The other sixty names are German, some of which are the same as C. B.'s customers, but C. T. also has a significant number of French surnames which do not appear in his father's business records. Dagangery, Boely, Michaud, Jubreis, and Bresson are new names to the Loewen lumber business in 1907 and they demonstrate

¹⁶ C. B. Loewen ledger 1903-1904, Johan Berkowski account, for example.

¹⁷ C. T. Loewen ledger 1907-1909, Boely account, 29.

¹⁸ C. T. Loewen ledger 1909-1910, C. B. Loewen account, 7.

¹⁹ C. B. Loewen ledger 1903-1904, G. Freund account.

the growth of the business under C. T., both in terms of numbers of customers, and the communities, and ethnic groups, which the business began to serve.

And it was increasingly a world that contradicted old Mennonite agrarian gender relations of mutuality. For instance, while there is evidence to suggest the presence of women, this was a man's world. C. B.'s list of customers includes only one woman client, a widow, Eva Schenkel, a German Lutheran, judging from her name, who bought lumber on four different occasions in January 1904 to a total of \$10.35 which she paid in three installments: \$1.35 on 27 January 1904; \$5 on 20 May; and the remaining \$4 on 21 July 1906.²⁰ C. T. also appears to have had only one woman customer, Miss Barkman, who also bought lumber and shingles and paid after each purchase.²¹ The task of food preparation was predominantly given to men. Stories of C. T.'s childhood recalled a winter he spent in the bush with his family, presumably with his mother and his father, and A. W. Reimer's family, presumably both the husband and wife, in the 1890s. And in C. B.'s 1903/04 ledger Wilhelm F. Giesbrecht is paid for 63 days at \$1.50/day, seventeen hours overtime at 15¢/hour, also \$19.20 for food and \$2 for his wife who cooked for five days at the sawmill for 40¢/day.²² C. T. hired Jacob F. Giesbrecht to cook at the camp for \$30/month in 1907. He worked seventeen days in January, twenty-nine in February, and nine in March and was paid \$1/day.²³ Few women were part of sawmill society and, beyond their usual domestic roles, even fewer were customers. Winter trips into the bush to cut wood were an important part of life in Steinbach, but the lumber camps were very different from Steinbach society. The bush was primarily a man's world, and these men came from a diversity of communities and ethnic groups.

²⁰ C. B. Loewen ledger 1903-1904, Eva Shenkel.

²¹ C. T. Loewen ledger 1907-1909, Miss Barkman, 42.

²² C. B. Loewen ledger 1903-1904, Wilhelm F. Giesbrecht.

²³ C. T. Loewen ledger 1907-1909, Jakob F. Giesbrecht, 1.

A new wilderness-based masculinity arose in this man's world. One report on C. B.'s life noted that in the winter of 1927-28, C. B. had been pulled back to the bush by a passion for lumber and life in a sawmill camp, which he called *Waldlust*.²⁴ C. T.'s winter in the bush as a boy, and later working at his father's sawmill in his teens, appear to have planted in him a similar love of lumber and the adventure of bush life which remained with him throughout his life. A local history noted that in the early 1950s C. B.'s sons Cornelius, Isaac, and Abraham, with fellow Steinbachers, K. R. Toews and G. G. Kornelsen, "made a determined effort to relocate the old sawmill site at Pine Hill," the location of the sawmills at the turn of the century where "hundreds of farmers and laborers were active for many winter seasons."²⁵ The woods, and the sawmill culture, impacted deeply on the men of Steinbach and area. Physical work, a largely male, homosocial culture, and the "wild outdoors" were all part of the masculine ritual of winter logging.

C. T.'s experiences as a boy and youth provided him with more than this *Waldlust*, however. C. T.'s ledgers closely resemble his father's accounts and his clientele built upon his father's contacts. He took more than his father's sawmill in 1905, he left the family farm with a going concern. And though his customer base in 1907 was larger than his father's in 1904, his lumber output was similar. Over sixty-seven days from 8 December 1903 to 16 March 1904, C. B.'s sawmill cut 444,950 feet of lumber, an average of 6641 feet per day. The greatest output in a single day was 11,192 feet on 22 January; the least was 834 feet on 29 February. Despite a somewhat shorter season in 1907, from 9 January to 9 March, C. T.'s sawmill cut a total of 373,451 feet in 52 days. This works out to 7182 feet per day. The greatest output was 11633 feet cut on 26 February; the least was 2908 on 31 January.

²⁴ G. G. Kornelsen, "Ostreserve Nachrichten," *Steinbach Post*, 1 August 1928.

²⁵ Abe Warkentin, ed., 43.

The important similarities of the early 1900s should not diminish the ways in which the business rapidly grew and changed under C. T.'s leadership over the next few years, however. Central to this growth were the partnerships which C. T. entered into during these early years. Perhaps the most important, and an example of the extension of traditional kinship networks, was the partnership with John R. Toews, C. T.'s uncle (his mother Anna's younger brother), who was only two years older than C. T. Toews operated an implement dealership and repair shop on Steinbach's Main Street and the partnership of Loewen & Toews which began in 1910 and ended in 1917 provided C. T. with an important office site in Steinbach. This partnership has assumed a central place in the "official" C. T. Loewen story. All of the anniversary booklets published by C. T. Loewen & Sons, and Loewen Windows, recognize 1910 as the beginning of C. T.'s business in Steinbach selling building materials as well as lumber. However, there are other partnerships during this same period that are also important, though often ignored, parts of the narrative.

Beyond traditional generational succession and kinship networks, C. T. took the business in a different direction; he became the first Loewen to even consider an inter-ethnic business partnership. One of the extant C. T. Loewen ledgers bears the stamp "Loewen and Boely 1912" and is evidence of a partnership between C. T. and Roger Boely, a Franco-Manitoban from the town of La Broquerie, fourteen kilometers east of Steinbach. The ledger details the usual late November and December preparation for the sawmill season and then the lumber cut and employees hours worked from January through March. There are, as might be expected, more French customers than in the ledgers of three years earlier, but there are also many German Lutheran and some Ukrainian surnames, alongside Mennonite names. The earlier ledgers belonging to C. B. and C. T. contained an eclectic mix of German and

English, and Gothic and Latin scripts, sometimes a three-word phrase would contain two German words and an English one. And spelling was quite poor, particularly English words and non-Mennonite people and place names. The Loewen & Boely ledger added an assortment of French words to the mix. The pages under “Rodger Boely,” in particular, contain more English than earlier Loewen ledgers, as well, the writer reverts to the French: *huile, reçu en argent, and bouteilles*.²⁶ There is no evidence of Loewen & Boely after this ledger. Accounts in the ledger are settled in cash or are transferred to either Roger Boely, a C. T. Loewen book, or a Loewen & Toews ledger. Boely does appear in later C. T. Loewen ledgers as a customer but the partnership was no longer in place. It remains, however, an example of C. T.’s entrepreneurial activity beyond the immediate Mennonite community. Although in 1904 C. B. had no French customers, eight years later, C. T. was in partnership with a Franco-Manitoban from La Broquerie.

Another important development indicating a fundamental shift in family economic arrangements was the relationship C. T. had with his younger brothers. As has already been noted, C. B.’s sons’ wages at C. T.’s sawmill were credited to their father’s account when they were under twenty-one, and this was quite in keeping with pre-industrial household economies; older male siblings often hired younger siblings as lifecycle servants. What was new here was a continued economic relationship between C. T. and his younger brothers even after their marriages. Previously it had been the aim of the parents to establish each of their children on an independent farmstead. C. T. appears to have taken over this paternalistic role from his father, not establishing his brothers on a farm, but in business. Once they were old enough, Isaac, Peter, Abraham, and Jacob were, in various ways, taken under their older

²⁶ Loewen & Boely 1912 Ledger, 5-6.

brother's wing. One Steinbach history asserts that C. T., "the oldest and most aggressive" of the five brothers, "became a role model for dozens of the community's gifted and ambitious young men, including his own brothers."²⁷ Abraham, ten years younger than C. T., may be the only brother who did not work for C. T., but as a teenager he did borrow \$31.75 from his eldest brother to buy a bicycle and tires.²⁸ Isaac worked for C. T. in his early adulthood but, like Abraham, moved to Nebraska and married an American Mennonite. Some observers thought that Abraham and Isaac's return to Steinbach in the 1930s was made possible by C. T.²⁹ In the 1910s and 1920s, however, it was Peter and Jacob with whom C. T. worked closely.

While the Loewen brothers may have depended more on their oldest and "most aggressive" brother than on their father, who was farming and raising a second family at this juncture, the C. B. Loewen sons did engage in the same off-farm ventures, and ventures offering custom work to farmers, that C. B. had pursued in his early work years. "Book No. 1," the earliest extant Loewen Brothers ledger, dated 28 March 1914, records the details of several different enterprises: threshing; lumber planing and sawing; and house moving, all of which C. B. had tried. C. T. and Peter were the Loewen Bros. in these first two or three years; Jacob, the youngest, was only turning twenty-one in 1916 and until then his wages were credited to C. B.'s account. Perhaps the fact that Peter was twenty-one in June 1912 led C. T. to end his short partnership with Boely and run his sawmill with his brother instead. The sawmill output in the winter of 1914-1915 was 453,402 feet, comparable to C. B. and C. T.'s earlier records. Customers continued to come from Steinbach and Blumenort, as well as the French communities of La Broquerie and Marchand. There were, however,

²⁷ Wright, 77.

²⁸ C. T. Loewen Ledger 1909-1910, A. T. Loewen, 249.

²⁹ Wilbert Loewen and Mary Loewen Hoepfner interviews, C. T. Loewen Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB.

also customers from the Ukrainian village of Sarto and the Anglo-Canadian settlement of Clearsprings.

The other Loewen Bros. ventures – custom threshing and housemoving – allowed the brothers to work year round. The outstanding balances of the 1914-1915 accounts were transferred to the Loewen & Toews system in March, yet Peter's hours worked suggest that Loewen Bros. was more than a seasonal arrangement. Peter worked about sixty hours per month from April to July 1915 earning 25¢/hour. (C. T. earned 30¢/hour for the seventeen hours he worked in June 1915.) In August Peter was paid for 193 hours as well as two days threshing at \$4/day. In September he was paid for 18 days threshing and 15½ days in October. Presumably some of the summer hours were for house moving. As C. T. broadened the customer base his father had built up, and established a Main Street office to sell building supplies, so the Loewen Bros. expanded the work their father had begun.

The Loewen Bros. partnership lasted for several decades. Through the 1910s and the early 1920s they continued their house moving and threshing businesses. In 1918 they moved 25 buildings. Most were houses and they were moved at a cost of anywhere from \$30 to \$150. They moved the Winkler Flour Mill during that same year and charged \$730 for that job.³⁰ Jacob T. eventually took over this business and became known in the community as "Mover Loewen."³¹ In 1913 and 1914 the Loewen Bros. were assessed as a threshing outfit at a value of \$800. By 1915 they were described as contractors and valued at \$305. A year later their value had increased to \$1305.³² The Loewen Bros. were still threshing, however. In a 1918 Christmas Wishes advertisement from Steinbach businesses the Loewen Bros.

³⁰ Loewen Bros. Ledger 1915-1920, 270.

³¹ Melvin J. Loewen, *The Descendants of Cornelius W. Loewen and Helena Bartel*, 207.

³² R. M. of Hanover Collector's Rolls, 1913-1916.

described themselves as “House Movers and Threshers.”³³ As well they were operating the sawmill in Steinbach inviting customers to bring their lumber on certain dates to be cut at the Loewen & Toews Lumberyard.

Meanwhile, C. T.’s main business venture continued to grow in scope and size. During this same period Loewen & Toews was advertising in Steinbach’s local paper that it had building wood, cement, shingles, nails, windows, doors, plaster, and coal for sale, and that it offered free plans and estimates and could build whole buildings. In a decade C. T.’s worth had increased dramatically. In C. T.’s first three assessments from 1906 to 1908, C. T.’s personal property was valued at \$900, in 1909 this increased to \$1835. In 1910 C. T.’s property is described as a lumberyard and threshing machine which together are valued at \$3450.³⁴ In 1911 and 1912 this amount dropped to \$2650, but in 1913, the first year that the lumberyard was assessed as Loewen & Toews, the total assessment had increased slightly to \$2690. By 1915 the valuation was for \$3600. It remained the same in 1916, the final year of the lucrative Loewen & Toews partnership.³⁵ According to Steinbach memory, John R. Toews sold his share of the business to C. T. Loewen in 1916 or 1917 and, “true to the traditions of his forefathers,” raised his growing family on a farm, rather than on Steinbach’s fast-growing Main Street.³⁶

C. T. now was on his own. From January 24, 1917, the *Steinbach Post* advertisements were placed by the C. T. Loewen Lumberyard, rather than Loewen & Toews, which soon became a dealer for outside companies selling products such as Canada Cement (January 1917), Beaver Board (March 1917), J. I. Case machinery,

³³ *Steinbach Post*, 25 December 1918, 6.

³⁴ R. M. of Hanover Assessment Rolls, 1906-1910.

³⁵ R. M. of Hanover Collector’s Rolls, 1911-1916.

³⁶ *Carillon News*, 29 April 1955, 44.

and Samson tractors.³⁷ These advertisements were often printed by the actual companies which meant the bulk of the print was in English, often with a few sentences of German at the bottom. C. T. did not exclusively advertise in English in the *Post*, but the advent of English into a local German paper due to the sale of outside products from large companies is an important development in the history of Steinbach business and its effect on the wider community. A ledger from 1920 belonging to C. T. contains the names of more than a dozen outside companies with which C. T. did business, including the Canadian Western Lumber Co., Columbia River Lumber Co., Empire Sash & Door Co., Foss Lumber Co., Imperial Oil Co., and the Western Lumberman. C. T. paid an \$8 subscription to the *Western Lumberman*, indicating an association with wider Canadian business.³⁸ By 1920 C. T. was a much more cosmopolitan lumberman than his father ever was. He was also a much wealthier one.

C. T. took the opportunities afforded by the First World War years to establish an undisputed commercial presence on Steinbach's main street. The C. T. Loewen lumberyard supplied the building materials for many of the large two-storey homes built in Steinbach during this period.³⁹ C. T. and his wife, Helena P. Friesen, whom he married in 1914, built their own large residence on Main Street in 1919. In 1917 C. T. had built a small woodwork shop and installed a three-sided planer and a combination woodworker. He also hired his wife Helena's brother, Frank Friesen, as a "yard man and mill worker."⁴⁰ Friesen went to Chicago for nine years during the 1920s but returned when the Depression hit and played an instrumental role in the later expansion of the business, particularly the manufacture of bee supplies and

³⁷ *Steinbach Post*, 24 January 1917, 5; 28 March 1917, 2; 13 June 1917, 5; 22 September 1920, 8.

³⁸ C. T. Loewen ledger, 1920.

³⁹ "A 75th Anniversary Flashback," collected from 1980 issues of the *Carillon News*, 4.

⁴⁰ C. T. Loewen & Sons, *60 Years of Progress, 1905-1965*, "Serving Each New Generation."

windows. In 1919 the first sash and door factory was erected next to the Main Street lumberyard. By 1921 the business was valued at \$18,575.⁴¹ The assessment rolls recorded the breakdown: \$2475 for land; \$6300 for buildings; and personal property valued at \$9800.⁴² The war had been good to C. T. Loewen.

When the economic downturn of the early 1920s occurred, C. T. showed remarkable economic flexibility. In 1922 C. T. Loewen's total assessment dropped to \$13,550 and then to \$8840 in 1923. A 60th anniversary booklet published by C. T. Loewen & Sons explained that "during the Twenties, the line of the volume graph took a decided plunge," and, it went on, "it was a renewed interest in the ancient art of producing honey around 1932 which served as the answer to the problem faced by Mr. Loewen."⁴³ The local newspaper, the *Steinbach Post*, reported on the growth of the honey industry in 1919, noting that the amount of honey produced and the number of producers was increasing every year. The *Post* gave the figures for Manitoba production: 800,000 pounds produced in 1916 by 680 beekeepers; 900,000 pounds by 741 beekeepers in 1917; and 1,000,000 pounds from 921 beekeepers in 1918. In a January 1924 issue of the *Post*, C. T. Loewen advertised that his firm was taking orders for Italian Bees and by July of the same year they were advertising that they had everything for beekeeping. A C. T. Loewen letterhead from the 1920s also advertises the sale of beekeeper's supplies, as well as lumber and building material and all kinds of mill work. The letterhead actually bears a drawing of a bee! It seems that C. T.'s involvement in beekeeping supplies began in the 1920s, rather than the early 1930s. It is true though that interest in beekeeping did increase throughout the 1930s and early 1940s and "proved to be a boon" for C. T. Loewen, which by the

⁴¹ R. M. of Hanover Collector's Rolls, 1920- 1921.

⁴² R. M. of Hanover Assessment Roll, 1921.

⁴³ *60 Years of Progress*.

mid-1930s was advertising its beekeeping products in a catalogue sent to apiarists across Canada.⁴⁴

The beekeeping supplies and the lumberyard were not the only entrepreneurial activities with which C. T. Loewen was involved during the 1920s. Throughout the decade the Loewen Bros. continued to move the sawmill to the bush during the winters to cut wood for Southeastern Manitobans. It was a venture that took them regularly from the close confines of a Mennonite community. In October 1921 the *Steinbach Post* reported that C. T. was in the bush looking for a base for the sawmill this winter.⁴⁵ The following month Jacob T., the youngest of the Loewen brothers, wrote a fascinating two-part account of an eventful trip he and Cornelius had made.⁴⁶ They were guided around the Woodbridge and Sandilands area, sixty kilometers southeast of Steinbach in the Canadian shield and forest, by several locals who had good ideas as to a location for a sawmill. They met a couple, the Ortman, along the way whom they knew from when Mr. Ortman was the blacksmith in Niverville. And they lost Cornelius for a while when he decided to leave the boat and Jacob and a Mr. Charlie Harrison, their guide at the time, to go and explore an island.⁴⁷ C. T. and J. T. eventually found a suitable spot with trees twenty to twenty-four inches in diameter and tall enough to make twelve and fourteen foot logs. It reminded J. T. of the B. C. forests which he had visited.⁴⁸ The following year, in 1922, Loewen Bros. were advertising a warm camp for customers which they had built at their sawmill as well as much more room for horses. They had tamarac, not just spruce, and permits were

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Steinbach Post*, 26 October 1921.

⁴⁶ "Eine Reise im Walde," *Steinbach Post*, 16 and 23 November 1921.

⁴⁷ "Eine Reise im Walde," *Steinbach Post*, 23 November 1921, 2-3. When C. T. did not return, Jacob fired double shots hoping to hear a reply but they only heard one shot. They saw a fire and J. T. went into the bush to search for his older brother. He found him very tired. It was he who had fired the single shot; he had only had one cartridge left. He had started the fire with a match he found in his pocket/bag. They returned to the boat together and when the moon was high enough to see (it was night by now) they went back to the mainland.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

\$2.50 per 1000 feet of lumber, 50¢ cheaper than 1920's rates. The sawmill continued to be an important part of the business, and the winter life of southeastern Manitoba, throughout the 1920s.

In the meantime, C. T. continued to partner with his younger brothers in a variety of business ventures. C. T. and J. T. operated the sawmill together in the 1920s, and in 1924 C. T. and middle brother P. T. opened the Loewen Brothers Tourist Garage, a Chevrolet dealership, right next door to the C. T. Loewen Lumberyard on the corner of Reimer and Main. In 1924 the business was valued at \$2460, in 1926 P. T.'s house was moved back from its main street location to allow for expansion of the garage⁴⁹ and by 1927 the business was assessed at \$3060.⁵⁰ Its impact on the town is noteworthy. Loewen Garage was an early automobile dealership in the village of Steinbach which eventually became known as the "automobile city." Business Historian T. D. Regehr has noted that "rural service businesses, the franchised automobile dealerships, and the housing construction industry were the three most important and strategic sectors of the Canadian economy where aspiring Mennonite businessmen could plug in."⁵¹ Regehr argues that the franchised dealership was a natural extension of earlier Mennonite business where "old traditional values of the small independent operator prevailed. Rewards were commensurate with the hard work, honesty, integrity and ability of the individual."⁵² Yet the repercussions of the advent of these franchised businesses selling fast transportation made by a large corporation must not be underestimated. Regehr himself concludes that "this economic assimilation preceded, and in turn facilitated,

⁴⁹ *Steinbach Post*, 27 October 1926. 6.

⁵⁰ R. M. of Hanover Collector's Rolls, 1924, 1927.

⁵¹ Regehr, "Mennonites and Entrepreneurship in Canada," 124.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 120.

the integration and assimilation of Mennonites into other aspects of Canadian life.”⁵³

While by the early 1920s it was no longer taboo to drive a car, Loewen Garage signalled other changes to Steinbach society, particularly through its advertising techniques.

As with C. T.’s Beaverboard advertisements, the Chevrolet ads were in English, despite the fact that they were appearing in the pages of a German-language newspaper, and that many other businessmen, including C. T. in his lumberyard ads, were still advertising in German. Also significant are the different advertising methods which Loewen Garage introduced to the community. In October 1925 Loewen Garage and Chevrolet invited the people of Steinbach to come and see forty posters showing how Chevrolet vehicles are made.⁵⁴ On other occasions, including on 8 March 1927, Chevrolet Chassis lectures were held at the Garage by a representative of the Chevrolet factory.⁵⁵ In 1928 Loewen Garage were “packing them in with (no sound) moving pictures about new Chevrolets in the [Steinbach] town hall.”⁵⁶ Advertisements, films, and outside, English-speaking, experts, were entering Steinbach, its Mennonite businesses, and its German-language newspaper, promoting the purchase of fast automobiles. Many commentators have noted the tremendous impact the car had on Canadian society. One historian has capitalized the word, “CAR,” suggesting it became the new God for Canadians after 1945.⁵⁷ Regehr suggests that “next to the television, the automobile probably did more to break down the isolation of rural communities than any other modern invention.”⁵⁸ The Loewen

⁵³ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁴ *Steinbach Post*, 21 October 1925, 3.

⁵⁵ *Steinbach Post*, 23 February 1927, 4.

⁵⁶ Abe Warkentin, ed., 108.

⁵⁷ Regehr, “Mennonites and Entrepreneurship in Canada,” 119. Regehr is quoting Arthur R. M. Lower, *Canadians in the Making: A Social History of Canada* (Don Mills, ON: Longmans Canada, 1958), 424-6.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 120.

brothers embraced these changes, this breaking down of isolation, and in doing so were participating in a world that C. B. had seen glimpses of (he owned a car from the 1910s). But now it was big business.

This growing series of businesses, of course, was interrupted somewhat by the Great Depression of the 1930s. Loewen Garage did not pay their taxes in 1938 or 1939,⁵⁹ presumably because of financial difficulties related to the Depression. One surviving C. T. Loewen ledger from the period demonstrates first the scope of C. T.'s lumber business by this time. A list of customer's home communities includes thirty-five different place names as distant and varied as "Ile Dechene [sic]," "Morris," "Niverville [sic]," "Otterburne," "Ste Pierrie [sic]," "Woodridge," "St Adolf [sic]," "Letellier," and "Landmark." Upon closer examination, the pages of accounts rarely list purchases, rather there are outstanding amounts carried over from previous years with interest added.⁶⁰ There are notes on each page which bring to mind the letters Canadians wrote to Prime Minister R. B. Bennett during the 1930s, letters that strip away any "tawdry glamour and stupid nostalgia" accorded the period.⁶¹

The brief notes, sometimes only comprising a few words accompanying a date, tell the stories of tremendous hardship caused by the drought and depression of the 1930s. But they also tell of a new economic activity, the art of debt collecting. There is the Steinbach farmer, Frank D. Kroeker, owing \$36.75 who, it notes on 9 August 1934 "will know better when he has thresht [sic]."⁶² A Ste. Anne resident, Abraham K. Unrau, owed \$17.50 but on 10 August 1934 there was a note to "(leave alone for a while) Wife sick should have operation [he] has nothing."⁶³ John Voth of

⁵⁹ R. M. of Hanover Collector's Rolls, 1938, 1939.

⁶⁰ C. T. Loewen Ledger 1934.

⁶¹ L. M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, eds., *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R. B. Bennett, 1930-1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), xxv.

⁶² C. T. Loewen Ledger 1934, 181.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 172.

Burwalde owed \$12 in 1934, but after C. T. sent him two letters and he agreed to pay \$1 per week starting in September. came a November note stating, “very pore [sic] no crop big family (lost turkeys).”⁶⁴ The list goes on: G. G. Enns replied to a letter that he could not pay because people did not pay him; in July 1934 Peter Wiebe said he would pay \$5 within a few weeks but in November, when he still had not paid, someone wrote, “can pay nothing till next summer. maybe”⁶⁵

Others found ways to pay at least something. Steinbacher Henry Warkentin owed \$16.88, was sent a letter on 13 February and came in two days later and promised to pay soon. The next day, 16 February, he brought 11½ bushels of oats for which C. T. paid 32¢/bushel, he paid a further \$10 in cash and was left with a more modest balance of \$3.20.⁶⁶ W. Donlychuck of Sandilands settled his account of \$2.95 with eggs and sugar.⁶⁷ Another customer, Peter K. Harder from Niverville owed \$160.65 but this was reduced by \$60 which he had as credit at Loewen Garage.”⁶⁸ K. W. Reimer of Steinbach settled his account of more than \$60 with a chicken house.⁶⁹ Several customers paid off their account with lumber. J. T. Loewen, signed this account with the word “Jake” after visiting customer John Lund:

we was at John Lunds to see cordwood and they agreed to cut about 100 cords and haul to open spote [sic] near John’s buildings and splite [sic] and pile up for the price of 85¢ per cord and the money is to be applied on account, they will start to cut right after Jan 1th [sic] 1935.⁷⁰

This vigorous process of debt collection through letter-writing, visits, and payment plans substantiates Lamoreaux, Raff, and Temin’s concession that the social conventions which meant “that borrowers were socially obligated to pay off their

⁶⁴ Ibid., 219.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 140, 178.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 173.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 201.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 191.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 223.

debts,” and that “lenders similarly were obligated not to pressure those who owed them for goods,” might break down “during periods of severe economic strain.”⁷¹ But what is significant is that C. T. now belonged to a different economic world than did his farmer neighbours (and forebears). His business enterprise was dependent on payment of products and he found it necessary to take unprecedented steps to ensure payment. A vivid illustration of this is the case of Harry Smock who owed \$17.22 at the beginning of 1934. In November of the same year someone recorded in the ledger that “I told his wife they would have to do something or we would take action against them.”⁷² The implied threat of legal action contrasts starkly with the ledgers of the 1910s and 1920s when much larger sums of money were carried over from year to year. This type of situation is rare, however, and there is no evidence that the threat was carried out. The wife of Harry Smock told the employee (or perhaps C. T. himself) that she would come into the office [on Main Street, Steinbach] in a day or two.⁷³ There are no other entries, but the incident signalled further change.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of C. T. Loewen’s Depression story is the actual growth and expansion of the business during the drought and devastation. An anniversary brochure recalled that “the financial depression of the Thirties marked a crisis in Mr. Loewen’s business career.” In answer to the question “what could he do?” the author notes again the importance of the beekeeping industry during the difficult decade.⁷⁴ “In a manner typical of the energetic man he was,” another booklet narrates, “Mr. Loewen made a trip to Eastern Canada to visit factories producing beekeepers’ supplies,” and upon his return reorganized his business facilities in order

⁷¹ Lamoreaux, Raff, and Temin, 412.

⁷² C. T. Loewen Ledger 1934, 257.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ “75th Anniversary Flashback,” 8.

to produce beekeeping supplies on an assembly line.⁷⁵ During the early 1930s C. T.'s brother-in-law Frank Friesen returned from his sojourn as a labourer in Chicago, where he had been hard hit by the Depression, and accepted a position rare for a Mennonite of the time, a career as a waged employee for a fellow Mennonite, and a close relative at that. Friesen worked for C. T. and later for his sons, Edward, George and Cornie, until his retirement in 1971. He was the millwork manager for many years and much of the growth in manufacturing was personally attributed to him. At his retirement in 1971, Friesen was remembered as the individual who "initiated Loewen's entry into the manufacture of beekeeping supplies and later the introduction of window making on a plant production scale."⁷⁶ Isaac D. Plett, a local inventor, advanced C. T.'s beekeeping venture by creating a way to reinforce the wax foundation in beekeeping equipment by imbedding wire in the wax.⁷⁷ This innovation gave C. T.'s an edge on the market. There was some controversy surrounding Plett's invention. It was leased to the C. T. Loewen firm and Plett was paid small royalties. "In later years," the *Carillon News* vaguely narrates, "disputes arose as to ownership rights, patents, etc. resulting in a long 'hassle' which both parties now prefer to forget."⁷⁸ There are no other details but the importance of the machine for the Loewens must not be underestimated.

In 1936 C. T.'s firm exhibited a truly expansionist mindset. In that year it printed its first beekeepers' supplies catalogue which it sent to beekeepers across the country, making it, in the estimation of one commemorative booklet, "the first local firm to seek a market in the national field."⁷⁹ The firm also shipped bees to Steinbach from the southern States, and in 1943 the *Steinbach Post* reported that beekeeping

⁷⁵ C. T. Loewen & Sons, Steinbach, *C. T. Loewen & Sons Seventy-fifth Anniversary*, 9.

⁷⁶ "C. T. Loewen millwork head retires after 43 years," *Carillon News*, 6 January 1971, 2:1.

⁷⁷ "Tribute To An Inventor," *Carillon News*, 15 March 1963, 1:1.

⁷⁸ "Tribute To An Inventor," 4:3.

⁷⁹ "75th Anniversary Flashback," 9.

supplies that were manufactured at C. T. Loewen's were sent for the first time to England.⁸⁰

The success of C. T. Loewen's beekeeping supplies business can perhaps be evaluated by the continuing expansions and improvements which the lumberyard and store went through during the Depression. Several anniversary booklets remember that a new store was constructed in 1936.⁸¹ The *Steinbach Post* suspected that building fever had broken out at C. T. Loewen's in November 1937 when not only was an ice house being built behind the lumberyard but also a warehouse in the front.⁸² In March 1939 the paper reported that "our old and always-in-the-news, circumspect friend has now splendidly fit out his 'showroom.'" With paints, millwork, electric lamps, ovens, and irons, the newspaper was suitably impressed.⁸³

All this activity during the financially difficult time of the Depression is difficult to explain, but it does suggest a spirit of optimism, innovation, and a willingness to assume a public role. C. T.'s daughter Elvira remembered her father painting the storefront during the Depression and associated the action with her father's words to his children that if you are in a position of authority or responsibility, you should look like you're doing something in order to reassure people, even if nothing can really be done.⁸⁴ A Progress Edition of the *Carillon News* in 1947 suggested that with the high unemployment during the Depression, "Mr. Loewen planned on how he could best employ at least a few of the men who were so eager to work." According to the report, "the manufacture of beekeeper's supplies

⁸⁰ *Steinbach Post*, 3 March 1943, 4.

⁸¹ "75th Anniversary Flashback," 10; *Seventy-fifth Anniversary*, 9.

⁸² *Steinbach Post*, 3 November 1937, 8.

⁸³ *Steinbach Post*, 15 March 1939, 8.

⁸⁴ Elvira Loewen Toews interview, C. T. Loewen Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB.

seemed to be the most logical undertaking.”⁸⁵ The beekeeping industry certainly seems to have been a profitable venture, even in the difficult years of the “Dirty Thirties.” By all appearances, C. T. managed to come out of the Depression quite well.

Of course, “coming out” of the Depression was a direct result of Canada entering into the Second World War, and this next world event also greatly affected the expanding business of C. T. Loewen. To begin with, wartime shortages of the staple of sugar ensured the continued interest in beekeeping, which in turn ensured the viability of C. T. Loewen’s enterprise. Other wartime shortages also provided C. T. with opportunities to expand his business. The construction boom associated with war precipitated a lumber shortage which prompted C. T. to again cut his own lumber directly from the source. The business now established several different lumber camps, this time further afield than Sandilands, the forests to the southeast. One was located at Simonhouse, Manitoba; another at Hudson Bay Junction, Saskatchewan; and the third at Rock Creek, British Columbia. This move north and westward took Steinbach men, many as Conscientious Objectors (COs), including C. T.’s three sons, their families, and C. T. Loewen equipment across the country, signalling a new phase in the scope of the company, the story of which is an important part of Steinbach’s wartime history.

In his study of masculinity in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ontario, Mark Moss suggested that “in the period from Confederation to World War I, war was consistently presented as the definitive test of manhood.”⁸⁶ Gender historian Marlene Epp, notes that there “is a wealth of literature that investigates the

⁸⁵ “District Benefits from Loewen Payroll, Service,” *Carillon News Progress Edition*, December 1947, 28.

⁸⁶ Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War*, (Oxford and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001), 143.

links between war and patriarchy, that examines militarism as a ‘gendered process’” and in her article, “Heroes or Yellow-bellies? Masculinity and the Conscientious Objector,” Epp discusses the consequences of these gender identities for pacifist Canadian Mennonites during the Second World War. She identifies “ironic similarities” between the Second World War soldier and conscientious objector and asserts that the likeness of experience between the soldier and the CO is “rooted...in common understandings of gender.”⁸⁷ Men, whether on the European battle field or in Canada’s hinterland, lived with the same expectations and understandings of what it meant to be a man. “Non-resistant teaching [in the church] may have offered a nonconformist stance with respect to militarism,” Epp writes, “but it did not counter the male image of ‘fighter, warrior, protector.’”⁸⁸ Instead, Epp propounds, COs became “mimetic warriors:” fighting forest fires was described as “combatting” and “standing on guard”; dangerous work was embraced as it had the ability to “remove the stigma of cowardice and gave the CO the sense that he was not passive when his country was at war.”⁸⁹

C. T. Loewen’s camps provided alternative service work for local young men who opted for CO status. The reports on camp activities which appeared regularly in the pages of the *Steinbach Post* and later the *Carillon News*, are comparable to the type of reports on young men who signed up for active duty. The newspapers noted when the men and their families left for the camps, reported on happenings at the camp, particularly injuries and other mishaps (demonstrating the danger of the work), and listed the names of the returning alternative servicemen. In reporting the departures, homecomings, and work-related injuries of its alternative servicemen the

⁸⁷ Epp, “Heroes or Yellow-bellies?” 108. Epp notes that Jean Bethke Elshtain (*Women and War* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 203) has pointed out some of the similarities between the soldier and the CO.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

newspaper gave its approval to their participation in this wartime work, recognizing the dangerous work they did. On 25 August 1943 the *Steinbach Post* reported an injury which Wilbert Loewen, C. T.'s nephew, incurred at the Hudson Bay Junction camp. While standing near the planing machine, the belt flew off and hit Wilbert in the leg, leaving pieces of metal in the wound; two weeks later he was reported as recovering in the local hospital.⁹⁰

It was still *alternative* service work, however, and despite taking Mennonite young men from the comfort of their communities, the camps were very different from the front lines in ways other than the obvious absence of large weapons, and the Nazi enemy. Perhaps most importantly while some young men did leave with their friends, others departed for the camps with their wives and young children. C. T.'s eldest sons, Edward and George, were both newlyweds and their wives, Anna, and Helen, went to the bush camps with them. Other family members of the young men came to visit as well. In January 1946 the *Post* reported that "the A. R. Klassens" were planning on taking a trip to C. T. Loewen's lumber camp when the days got longer because their children lived there.⁹¹ A young female cook was also sought through newspaper advertising. In the summer of 1944 and the spring of 1945 "a girl" to cook for 8, to be paid \$40 per month and the trip to and from the camp, was needed as soon as possible.⁹² While these camps consisted mostly of young men, some young women and children lived there as well, and family members visited.

These camps, then, despite their distance, became an important part of Steinbach life in the war period, and were represented as a significant contribution to Steinbach's collective war effort. In an early edition of the English-language *Carillon News*, a front page column praised three local lumberyards – Steinbach Lumber

⁹⁰ *Steinbach Post*, 25 August 1943, 4; 8 September 1943, 4.

⁹¹ *Steinbach Post*, 9 January 1946, 4.

⁹² *Steinbach Post*, 12 July 1944, 4; 4 April 1945, 4.

Yards, C. T. Loewen & Sons, and Plett & Co. of Giroux – for “not being satisfied to sit back and tell customers that they simply couldn’t have any lumber because none was available.” Instead, “these resourceful gentlemen took stock of the situation, gathered all the help they could and hied on into the woodlands to make their own.”⁹³

From this “modest beginning” grew industries of considerable proportion, the newspaper boasts. “The lumber shortage in Canada would not be nearly so critical if more firms followed the example of our local lumber yards.”⁹⁴ This piece occupied the same front page as an account of a “welcome home” celebration held for Steinbach’s returning servicemen.⁹⁵ The discussion of the lumber businesses is slightly shorter, yet its front page position indicates its perceived importance to the war effort. More importantly, both articles illustrate the changing nature of Steinbach. Eighty servicemen returned from the war, five were missing in action, and at the “welcome home” a toast was made to war brides, “the wives overseas.”⁹⁶

These demographics precipitated the change from an almost homogeneous pacifist Mennonite community to a more culturally diverse town. And, central to this study, the praise of Steinbach’s lumbermen indicated that entrepreneurship was now a venerated trait in local men.

Reflecting his entrepreneurial thinking, C. T. found another way to harness the CO program with business. The program for alternative service in approved jobs enabled C. T. to send Edward, his eldest son, and then Dave Loewen, a nephew-employee, to work at the newly purchased lumberyard in the Rosenort, Manitoba area during the war years. (Alternative Service workers were paid their regular wages from their employer, but they were required to give much of monthly income to the

⁹³ “Resourceful,” *Carillon News*, 7 March 1946, 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ “‘Welcome Home’ Big Success,” *Carillon News*, 7 March 1946, 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Red Cross.⁹⁷) C. T. had bought the store in 1941 and moved it from its farm location into the village of Rosenort. It was renamed the Loewen Lumber Co. and Edward operated it for the first year, until his cousin, Dave Loewen, took over as manager and then ran the store until 1949.⁹⁸ Cornie, C. T.'s youngest son, with his wife Annie Loewen and their young son Paul, managed the store from 1949 until 1954. Edward, Cornie, and cousin Dave, all went on to hold important positions in the business in Steinbach. As he did with the camps (which George worked at throughout the 1940s) it seems likely that C. T. felt that experience at Rosenort "would serve as valuable training for his sons, who would follow in his steps in the business world."⁹⁹ The process of handing the business over to his sons was visibly begun in 1944 when C. T. Loewen Lumber Yard became C. T. Loewen & Sons Ltd. A *Carillon News* report in 1947 described the firm's incorporation as a joint stock company in which C. T. Loewen, the two eldest sons Edward and George, Mr. Jonas Friesen, long-time business manager; and brother-in-law Frank Friesen, shop foreman, were the principal shareholders.¹⁰⁰

The post-war period saw many other changes. Expansion had always been on the agenda and in 1946 a large new factory was built to increase the production of beekeeping supplies, of which C. T. Loewen & Sons was Western Canada's leading manufacturer.¹⁰¹ Within a year or so it became obvious that this had been an ill-timed venture as the end of the war (and the Depression) signalled a sharp decline in the beekeeping industry. In 1947 C. T. Loewen & Sons sold \$110,000 worth of

⁹⁷ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 53.

⁹⁸ Lenore Eidse, ed., *Furrows In The Valley: A Centennial Project of the Rural Municipality of Morris, 1880-1980*, (Inter-Collegiate Press, 1980), 351.

⁹⁹ "75th Anniversary Flashback," 12.

¹⁰⁰ "District Benefits from Loewen Payroll, Service," *Carillon News Progress Edition*, December 1947, 28.

¹⁰¹ "75th Anniversary Flashback," 13.

beekeeping equipment, but when sugar rationing was lifted, annual sales fell to \$10,000, where they stayed until C. T. sold the factory equipment in 1963.¹⁰² C. T. had to look elsewhere for manufacturing projects and in August of 1946 the *Carillon News* reported that since June had been a record month for construction in the farm electrification scheme which had led to a shortage of crossarms, the commission had decided to place an order in Manitoba (previously the crossarms were manufactured in B. C.) and C. T. Loewen & Sons had won the contract to do the millwork.¹⁰³ During the winter the company also went into the production of church pews, perhaps taking advantage of post-war suburbanization and rise in church attendance. The standardized design of these pews enabled C. T. Loewen & Sons to produce in volume and at a very reasonable cost.¹⁰⁴ In 1947 the business also bought a lumber drying kiln, an important piece of equipment which ensured the lumber dried uniformly and allowed the firm to branch into the manufacturing of office furniture such as counters and desks.¹⁰⁵

The decline of the beekeeping industry and the rural electrification scheme were just two aspects of the new post-war Canada which affected C. T. Loewen & Sons. J. M. Bumsted noted that by the end of the war “a fifteen-year deferral of expectation had produced a powerful desire for normal conditions and the opportunity to enjoy material comforts. It would,” he explained, “lead Canada into a new era of consumerism.”¹⁰⁶ Historians have identified the serious shortage of housing by the end of the Second World War which the government attempted to correct through programs such as the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, begun in the 1930s,

¹⁰² “Tribute To An Inventor,” *Carillon News*, 15 March 1963, 1, 4.

¹⁰³ “Power Consumption Up,” *Carillon News*, 8 August 1946, 1.

¹⁰⁴ “75th Anniversary Flashback,” 15.

¹⁰⁵ *Seventy-fifth Anniversary*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ J. M. Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada: A Post-Confederation History*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 243.

and the 1944 National Housing Act, which provided federally guaranteed loans with excellent terms for repair or construction of a home.¹⁰⁷ T. D. Regehr identifies the new entrepreneurial opportunities which opened up as the most important aspect of these housing policies for Canadian Mennonites.¹⁰⁸ In March 1946 the *Carillon News* contained a large advertisement placed by C. T. Loewen & Sons which informed home builders that Steinbach had been proclaimed a designated area for the National Housing Plan.¹⁰⁹ This phase of house construction also prompted the large-scale production of windows and doors which became an important part of the business.

In addition to the construction and renovation of homes, Canadians, including Steinbachers, spent much money on domestic goods during the post-war period. Royden Loewen has argued that John Shover's concept of the "Great Disjuncture" is useful to a discussion of Steinbach and its surrounding area, the Rural Municipality of Hanover. The post-war changes of "consumerism, agricultural capitalism, government intrusion, mass media, and military service and conscription" which could not but affect much of Canada were, "in a sense," Loewen asserts, "particularly pronounced" in Hanover where, "as late as 1940 its lingua franca was still German and identity still Mennonite,...its tie to the outside world was still tenuous."¹¹⁰ When E. K. Francis visited the Mennonite East and West Reserves from September 1945 to March 1947, carrying out the field research for his acclaimed work *In Search of Utopia*, he described the Steinbach of the early post-war period as a "boom town," with a Main Street "lined with substantial business buildings equipped with large show windows and neon signs." There was "nothing provincial about it" in Francis's

¹⁰⁷ T. D. Regehr, "Mennonites and Entrepreneurship in Canada," 121-122.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰⁹ *Carillon News*, 7 March 1946, 6.

¹¹⁰ Royden Loewen, "Poultrymen, Car Dealers, and Football Stars: Reinventing the Mennonite Man in Steinbach, Manitoba, 1945-75." Paper Presented at the University of Winnipeg, November 1995, 3.

mind, and new shops and homes were continuously under construction.¹¹¹ Loewen charts further growth, noting that Steinbach's population almost doubled between 1945 and 1960, from 1900 to 3739¹¹² and in 1951 spending in Southeastern Manitoba was over \$13,000,000 in the retail sector, six times the amount spent in 1941; half of this amount was spent in Steinbach, where "businessmen concentrated on bringing to Hanover residents not only farm services, but the promise of easily accessible consumer goods."¹¹³ This focus on consumerism has been a continual focus of historians of the post-war period. However, in her 1999 monograph, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, Joy Parr attempts a re-evaluation of the history of domestic goods in Canada from 1945-1960.¹¹⁴

Parr challenges the view that Canada was simply a part of the culture of mass consumption which characterized postwar U.S. and other North Atlantic countries, while moving beyond the simplistic view that Canada was more subdued than its southern neighbour. Parr argues that the experience of consumers, which differed greatly depending on gender, class and location, was sometimes cautious, sometimes restricted, and often resistant. Women (the main consumers of domestic goods) were wary of spending because of vivid recollections of the Depression. Often goods were not even available since the government gave priority to producer goods industries, rather than household goods production, a decision influenced by gender politics, Parr argues. Furthermore, women resisted being only or primarily consumers, for the most

¹¹¹ Francis, 250.

¹¹² Loewen, "Poultrymen, Car Dealers, and Football Stars," 3.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

part ignoring advertising's push for a culture of mass consumption.¹¹⁵ Women's responses to consumer goods in Steinbach – whether cautious or resistant – have not been studied. However, Parr's discussion of restriction during this post-war period is pertinent to a study of C. T. Loewen & Sons in the post-war era.

A reading of C. T. Loewen & Sons advertisements during the second half of the 1940s confirms that C. T. sold household goods during the post-war period, and suggests that these goods may have been, as Parr asserts, in short supply. Building supplies and coal stores were certainly sparse during this period. In the first issue of the English-language *Carillon News* on 21 February 1946, C. T. Loewen & Sons placed a large advertisement which asked rhetorically: "Everything for the Home Builder? Not quite but don't let that stop you from starting to build your new home. Even though supplies are short, goods are always coming in." The same advertisement announced the imminent arrival of Frigidaire refrigerators and ranges and told customers to place their orders to get theirs early.¹¹⁶ Later ads listed the appliances which were actually available. In February 1948 C. T. Loewen & Sons placed an advertisement which informed customers that only one electric rangette was available, the following month an advertisement appeared listing the few appliances which were for sale.¹¹⁷ Throughout the late 1940s coal advertisements often warned customers that a decent supply of coal for the winter was doubtful.¹¹⁸

While consumerism might not have taken off quite as quickly as some commentators have suggested, it is clear that the Steinbachers, and Canadians, of the post-war period were living in a very different time and place to the Depression of the 1930s and the controlled economy of wartime. Consumerism did "catch on" or "take

¹¹⁵ Rachel J. Mills, "Conscientious Consumers: Resisting Mass Consumption in Canada, 1945-1960," Unpublished graduate essay, University of Manitoba, February 2002.

¹¹⁶ *Carillon News*, 21 February 1946, 4.

¹¹⁷ *Carillon News*, 20 February 1948, 7.

¹¹⁸ For example *Carillon News*, 15 May 1947, 3.

hold” and the new focus of Canadians, and the government, on home construction and renovation certainly strengthened the growing business of C. T. Loewen & Sons. The 1950s saw the successful planning and construction of the first subdivision housing development in Steinbach by C. T. Loewen & Sons, bringing suburbia to southeastern Manitoba. This, and other innovations, were not the work of C. T. Loewen, however. In December 1949, after twenty-five years as business manager Jonas Friesen sold his share in Loewen Lumber Co., Rosenort, to C. T. so that he could finance his purchase of Steinbach Lumber Yards, C. T.’s competitor.¹¹⁹ There were no hard feelings, according to those who remember it, Friesen simply recognized that C. T.’s sons were getting ready to come into the business and when the opportunity came to buy a lumberyard, he took it. His son, Edward, became manager of C. T. Loewen & Sons in January 1950, and eighteen months later, in July 1951, C. T. sold the business to his three sons, Edward, George, and Cornie. C. T. was already suffering from heart problems, and in November of 1951 he had a stroke which left him bed-ridden for the remaining nine years of his life.

In May 1951, just two months before C. T. sold the business, there was a fire at the lumberyard. An anniversary booklet recalled the details:

Around seven in the morning on Tuesday, May 15, 1951 Steinbach’s siren sounded the alarm. A fire had broken out in the shavings bin adjoining the C. T. Loewen factory. Almost immediately Steinbach’s volunteer fire brigade was on the job, as was a large volunteer bucket brigade. Thousands of pails of water taken from the nearby creek were poured onto the roof of the burning annex. While the loss due to the fire included the kiln, the shavings bin, and the engine room, 16,000 feet of lumber in the drying process, as well as the machinery in the engine room were not damaged. Work in the factory was resumed in the afternoon, and by six o’clock of the same day the framework for a temporary shavings chute had been erected. Interestingly enough, Mr. C. T. Loewen and son Edward, who was the local fire chief, were away on a trip to New York at the time of the blaze.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ “Steinbach Lumber Yards Changes Ownership,” *Carillon News*, 23 December 1949, 1.

¹²⁰ “75th Anniversary Flashback,” 17.

The work ethic was still evident in Steinbach, as was the community spirit. But this was a very different C. T. Loewen and business and community from those of 1905; significantly the community members exercised a centuries-old community ethos, even as C. T. and his eldest son were pursuing business in an international setting.

C. T. Loewen & Sons had become an important business beyond southeastern Manitoba, not only had products been shipped across Canada, and even as far as England, the business itself had moved beyond Steinbach and environs to find its own lumber during the wartime shortage. The pioneering spirit, the resourcefulness of the lumbermen and, perhaps more to the point, economic circumstances had drawn Mennonites from their isolation. And the “world” had returned the favour arriving in Steinbach through the Chevrolet corporation displays, films, and lectures, the neon signs on Main Street, and the English advertisements for Beaverboard in the pages of the German-language *Steinbach Post*. By 1951 Steinbach had a well-established English-language, booster paper, the *Carillon News*, and its wealthy businessmen were no longer simply taking month-long vacations to the southern U. S. or the Pacific coast (where they spent their time with Mennonite relatives who lived there or fellow Steinbachers who were holidaying there), they were travelling to New York on business. It was a portent of what was coming to Steinbach, and to C. T. Loewen & Sons, for, just as the sawmill operation was inherited by C. T. from his father and then expanded and changed almost beyond recognition, so the three sons of C. T. brought vast changes to the business they bought from their father, and to the town in which it was situated.

Chapter Four: Cornelius Toews Loewen, Self-Made Man

A series of photographs depicts C. T. Loewen, his wife Helena, daughter Mary, and Steinbach friends, Rev. Peter D. and Margaret Friesen on their journey to Omaha, Nebraska where Mary was soon to be attending a Bible School. The snapshots were taken in Bemidji, Minnesota, in front of a statue of Paul Bunyan, the giant lumberjack who, according to American legend, invented logging in the Pacific Northwest, dug Puget Sound, Washington, to float huge logs to the mill, cleared North and South Dakota for farming, and scooped out the Great Lakes to provide drinking water for his giant blue ox, Babe. As a lumberman who demonstrated great strength, a pioneering spirit, and just plain hard work, Bunyan possessed many “manly” qualities which would have easily been identified as such in C. T. Loewen’s Steinbach. One can imagine that C. T. would have enjoyed “meeting” Paul Bunyan.

This chapter asks what being a man meant to C. T. and his communities – family, village, and church. C. T. has been variously described as a “man of action,” a “real man,” a “he-man,” a “man’s man,” and as a “man of courage, faith and enterprise.”¹ What, in their estimations, made a man, a man? Masculinity is constructed: “manhood is not a social edict determined on high and enforced by law. As a human invention, manhood is learned, used, reinforced, and reshaped by individuals in the course of life.”² Rotundo, in his work *American Manhood*, examines the nineteenth century, which he terms “the crucial century of change” for the meanings of manhood, in an attempt to answer the questions: “Who is a real

¹ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, Frank Reimer, Nora Rieger, Wilbert Loewen interviews, C. T. Loewen Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB. All interviews cited in this chapter are from this collection at the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

² Rotundo, 7.

man?” “What is ‘naturally’ male?” “How does a ‘manly man’ act?”³ Rotundo asserts that the nineteenth century emphasis on individualism deeply affected masculine identity. And the resulting *self-made man* found his identity in his work, rather than his household, and was able to secure his status and identity through his achievements, since his place in society was no longer pre-determined at his birth.⁴

In her article “A ‘Christian Businessman’ in the Eastern Townships,” Marguerite Van Die identifies the necessity of incorporating religion into a discussion of masculinity. Van Die seeks to understand the extent to which religion intersected and influenced the family life and business affairs of one nineteenth century Canadian businessman, Charles Colby. Her work challenges historians’ understanding of nineteenth century women’s “cult of domesticity” and the juxtaposed men’s “myth of the self-made man” which assumes that for men “participation in religious activity was a remnant of the old order. Religion was, Van Die states, “not something experienced in isolation, but intimately interwoven with economic, social and political concerns, which in turn bound families to larger networks of kinship and community.”⁵ Van Die concludes that a religious moral responsibility “did not seek to undermine the capitalist socio-economic order” but did temper individualism by reminding men of their responsibilities “to family, community, business partners, nation, and God.”⁶

The interaction between gender and religion, which Van Die explores, is particularly important to a study of C. T. Loewen. C. T. was defined by his work. He was a lumberman to all who knew him. His obituary remarked that his “most notable

³ Ibid., 1.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Van Die, 125.

⁶ Ibid., 126.

accomplishments were, of course, in the business realm.”⁷ He found his identity in his work and secured his status and identity through his achievements. However, Van Die’s study of the interconnectedness between his family, faith, and work, is useful in this discussion of the multiple and simultaneous identities of C. T. – lumberman, Mennonite, Anabaptist-Christian, husband, father, and Steinbacher.

A study of eighteenth century merchants found that they spent much of the day away from their businesses performing their public and religious roles in the community. However, Rotundo asserts, in the nineteenth-century as “the individual emerged in importance from the communal context, . . . a man’s work [took] on a separate meaning and provide[d] the chief substance of his identity.”⁸ C. T. was very active in his community with the village committee, the first telephone system, and as fire chief, and the first president of the Rest Haven invalid home. He was on the Steinbach Tabernacle board, one of four men who started the Red Rock Lake Bible Camp, chair of the Victory Bonds committee during the Second World War, and personally responsible for the first board sidewalk in Steinbach. These achievements were secondary to his work, however, and significantly different from the communal behaviour of previous generations.

Here Joy Parr’s description of Daniel Knechtel, a furniture factory owner in Hanover, Ontario in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is useful to the study of C. T. Loewen. Parr quotes from Knechtel’s obituary which remembered him as a man ““ever engrossed in his business, his home and his philanthropy,” an ‘example of Christian manhood.’”⁹ Daniel Knechtel emphasized work and, like Rotundo’s nineteenth century *self-made man*, believed that status was achieved, not

⁷ *Carillon News*, 28 October 1960.

⁸ Rotundo, 167.

⁹ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 140.

inherited, and that “the men employed in his factory could have all he had.”¹⁰ Indeed, this belief was founded in their common beginnings, Knechtel had been just like the men he employed and to some extent he remained like them, living “without ostentation...in a house near the plant, refusing leisure as weakness.”¹¹ Parr writes that he “worked for work’s sake, and he worked to serve God,” as a pietist, his “sense of manly work, extended to good works.”¹² Involvement in community, for the self-made man, was not organic; rather, contributions – of time and money – were given from a sense of responsibility or duty. Rotundo’s description of the self-made man, Van Die’s examination of “Christian businessman,” Charles Colby, and Parr’s depiction of furniture manufacturer and philanthropist, Daniel Knechtel are useful to the study of C. T. Loewen.

Boyhood and Youth

There are few stories of C. T.’s childhood, but Joseph Kett’s depiction of boys in early nineteenth century rural New England attending school and working on the farm from a very young age (around the age of seven, Kett suggests) appears to accurately describe C. T.’s early childhood.¹³ As the eldest son with a father working away from home, a mother with young children and a sick grandfather (C. W. Loewen) who lived with the family, C. T.’s sister Elisabeth remembers that C. T. was responsible for splitting wood, taking care of the cow and doing other chores everyday after school.¹⁴

Three stories of C. T. at school suggest that he did not enjoy nor do well in the classroom. In an article in the *Carillon News* a fellow student remembered an

¹⁰ Ibid., 141.

¹¹ Ibid., 140.

¹² Ibid., 140-141.

¹³ Kett, 177.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46.

exchange between Cornelius and teacher G. E. Kornelsen at oral examination time when parents came and watched their children be tested. He noted that the teacher was pleasantly surprised when Cornelius Loewen raised his hand in response to one of his questions, “thinking that at last the boy was showing an interest.” “But,” the narrator explained, “far from having an answer to the question, young C. T. was only concerned about a noise he had heard at the other end of the building where the stable was located.” He suggested that the reason it was so hard for Kornelsen to teach Cornelius anything was “perhaps [because] his mind was filled with more practical things.”¹⁵ Another Steinbacher recalled that C. T. and fellow student A. A. Reimer spent some winters in the bush at their fathers’ sawmill. As boys of around ten years old they were given school instruction in the morning and they cut boards under teacher supervision in the afternoon often severely testing the patience of the teacher.¹⁶ A third source recalls seeing, in G. E. Kornelsen’s records, a *Strafliste*, a punishment list, in which C. T.’s name appears. He was apparently the recipient of corporal punishment as a result of *pludern*, that is, talking in class.¹⁷

There are only a few stories of C. T.’s boyhood. It is clear that he was not very interested in school and that his early years as the eldest son on a farm with an absent father meant he had considerable responsibilities at home. However, as more sons came along, Cornelius was able to accompany his father and he seems to have found his interest off the farm, in the bush. He had an instinct and love for lumber which later prompted him to leave home at twenty-one after purchasing his father’s sawmill interest and to head into the forests east of Steinbach to Pine Hill. This followed some very significant events in the Loewen household which C. T.’s sister Elisabeth recalled in an article she wrote about their father, C. B. Loewen. Elisabeth

¹⁵ “Oldest Resident Recalls Many Steinbach Changes,” *Carillon News*, September 16, 1960, 2:2-3.

¹⁶ Levina Reimer, “Aganetha Barkman Reimer 1859-1955,” *Preservings* 17 (2000), 102.

¹⁷ Story told by Royden Loewen.

remembered that in 1902 her father and C. T. did not get home from threshing until November. The family was getting ready to butcher pigs to sell when that evening their mother became quite ill. C. T. travelled eleven kilometers by horse and buggy to get the doctor in the cold and dark. The local lay doctor, Johann Warkentin, spent the night but their mother died the next morning. Elisabeth writes that mother's death was heart breaking for all of the family but that life had to go on. They butchered the pigs the following week and after Christmas their father left for the sawmill once again. In June 1903 C. B. remarried and perhaps this brought the biggest changes yet. Their father gave up working away from home and instead decided to attempt to make a living on the farm. Elisabeth wrote that their parents would sometimes even go visiting during the week and that this was very strange to them.¹⁸

Stories that are told about this period of C. T.'s life tell of a youth that was wild and reckless. The stories lend further support to the idea that in Mennonite society, youth was a time of social *laissez-faire*.¹⁹ C. B.'s second wife, Maria, had only one child, a daughter, Maria, from a previous marriage and Maria remembered her mother weeping many times as she adjusted to being a mother to eight step-children, of whom C. T., as the eldest was only nine years younger than her. The five Loewen boys, ages eight to twenty, gained a reputation for shooting guns, both on Main Street to frighten horses and in the house to see how many times the bullet would ricochet off the walls, understandably scaring their step-mother.²⁰ C. T. recalling these events later in life wondered how she put up with them.²¹

There are stories about similar wild behaviour among Steinbach's youth and evidence that it was quite acceptable. Historian of adolescence, Joseph Kett, suggests

¹⁸ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46.

¹⁹ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 35.

²⁰ Lorne Rempel interview.

²¹ Elvira Loewen Toews interview.

that the romanticized idea of boyhood as a time of freedom is actually substantiated by the study of the lived experience of growing up in nineteenth century New England. "It was free," Kett asserts, "not because parents or teachers were indulgent, but because the social institutions which came to bear on youth had a loose and indefinite character."²² In Mennonite Steinbach, young men were expected to sow their wild oats, though there were some behaviours that were not permitted. Sexual promiscuity for instance was not tolerated, while drinking, smoking, cards, and even gun ownership, which would not have been permissible for a church member could be put down to the follies of youth among the unbaptized young men of Steinbach.

This wild behaviour was restrained with the well-defined and often abrupt transformation from youth to man in Mennonite Steinbach. At around age twenty-one a young man entered into baptism, courtship and then marriage within a very short time, sometimes just a few weeks. Youth, then, was the time before this major change when young men were given time to enjoy a certain amount of freedom and male camaraderie before becoming a man, baptized and married, and usually ten months or so later, a father, and breadwinner.

C. T. is an interesting exception to this Mennonite rule. Though he was baptized at age twenty-two into the Kleine Gemeinde church of his father and grandfather, he did not marry shortly thereafter.²³ In fact, he did not marry until 1914 when he was thirty-one years old. Instead he spent the nine years following his conversion and baptism establishing his business. Whether or not this made him less of a man in the eyes of community members is difficult to ascertain. Following the definition of C. T. as a self-made man, defined by work and not by a role as head of a household within a community, it seems that the building of a successful business,

²² Kett, 183.

²³ "Todes Bericht" (C. T. Loewen obituary), *Christlicher Familienfreund*, 4 November 1960, 4-5.

and being a baptized member of the church community, may have been enough to ensure C. T. was a man in the estimation of the residents of Steinbach.

It was not that C. T. was uninterested in getting married. As a young man, he is said to have been in love with Anna H. W. Reimer, a daughter of the Reimer merchant elite of Steinbach. There is a general consensus among community members who recall the romance that this union did not take place because C. T. was not considered to be good enough for Anna.²⁴ There is some debate as to what this actually meant. Some thought that Anna's brothers considered C. T. without sufficient finances or status to marry Anna. Others asserted that it was C. T.'s character which persuaded the Reimer brothers that C. T. was an unsuitable partner for Anna, recalling that C. T. had been considered wild throughout his twenties.²⁵ C. T. was baptized at twenty-two, perhaps hoping to marry shortly thereafter. For whatever reason, marriage did not happen. Anna H. W. Reimer remained a spinster who, as a middle-aged woman, suffered a tragic car accident which left her mentally handicapped for the remainder of her life.²⁶

Business

Throughout his years as a bachelor, and the rest of his life, C. T.'s identity was intimately tied up with his work, and his passion for that work. In the pages of the *Steinbach Post*, the weekly, German-language newspaper, C. T. Loewen was regularly referred to as "our Lumberman," whether the columnist was noting the birth of a child or the installation of a new piece of machinery in the woodworking factory,

²⁴ Anne Hildebrand Loewen, Elvira Loewen Toews, Helen Barkman Loewen, Amanda Reimer interviews.

²⁵ Elvira Loewen Toews interview. Helen Unger Loewen remembered that even when married at thirty-one C. T. was not baptized and that he only became a Christian after the deaths of his first two children. This appears, however, to be a description of C. T.'s younger brother, Jacob T. Loewen.

²⁶ *Steinbach Post*, 24 September 1924. 6.

suggesting that, in the community, C. T. was first and foremost defined by his work. Joy Parr's turn of the century Hanover, Ontario businessman Daniel Knechtel, similarly defined himself, and was defined, by his work. Knechtel believed that work had intrinsic merit, and he was, "in his own mind, a craftsman among craftsmen," who lived his life as an example, "in the pace of his work, his thrift, and his public service."²⁷

That C. T. worked hard during this period is emphasized by all who knew him. His daughter Mary had been told that before he was married, her father went to visit the doctor because he couldn't pick up a fork without shaking, and the doctor had told him to stop doing the work of five men.²⁸ His obituary described him as a man who was "never content until he had exhausted all the possibilities of everything he set his hand to."²⁹ A booklet celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the business expanded on this theme writing that people remember C. T. for his drive, "his willingness to try things he or others had never tried before," and his strong belief that "the one and only way you could determine whether a given course of action would work, was by trying it."³⁰ C. T. employed this proactive mantra even in the financially difficult times of the late 1920s and the 1930s. C. T.'s trip east into Ontario, where he decided to manufacture bee-keeping supplies, his employment of Isaac Plett's invention to improve the waxing procedure, his national distribution of a beekeeper's catalogue, and his decision to paint the storefront on Main Street, have all been described above and all point to an inveterate optimism. Like Daniel Knechtel, in Joy Parr's *Gender of Breadwinners*, C. T. took his position in the community seriously.

²⁷ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 140-141.

²⁸ Mary Loewen Hoepfner interview.

²⁹ "'C. T.' Leaves Deep Mark on Steinbach," *Carillon News*, 28 October 1960, 1.

³⁰ "'75th Anniversary Flashback."

His generosity is recalled by many, particularly by past employees. One employee recalled that he often hired one or two people more than he actually needed, in order to provide work for those who needed and wanted it.³¹ Nora Rieger, C. T.'s bookkeeper from 1937 to 1945, recalls C. T. employing a man who had served a prison term.³² Others remember him moving employees from position to position, giving them a second and even third chance.³³ Two employees, both sons who worked for C. T. during the 1930s (and for many decades after) in order to pay off their fathers' debts, recalled how C. T. helped them build their first house, telling them to start the work with materials from him and then working to pay it off later.³⁴

While C. T.'s generosity as an employer has been noted, previous employees also emphasized his demands on his workers. C. T. was not a "soft touch" and while he may have hired a couple more workers than he actually needed, C. T. expected all his employees to work hard. Employee Ralph Guenther, who started as an accountant at C. T. Loewen's in 1950, remembered that C. T. told employees that they were not only working to earn a dollar a day for themselves, they also needed to earn a dollar for C. T.³⁵ Another employee, William Reimer, recalled that C. T. corrected employees easily and "you knew who was boss." When William was truck driving for C. T. in the 1930s he asked for a heater to be installed in the truck. C. T. called him a "sissy," though, Reimer noted, he did break down and install a heater eventually.³⁶

From his choice of employees, C. T. is remembered by many as an excellent judge of character. His two managers – Frank Friesen, foreman of the factory, and

³¹ Ernie Toews interview.

³² Nora Rieger interview.

³³ Anne Hildebrand Loewen, Ralph Guenther interviews.

³⁴ William Reimer, Ernie Toews interviews.

³⁵ Ralph Guenther interview.

³⁶ William Reimer interview.

Jonas Friesen, in charge of the store – are particularly remembered as extremely competent employees. Nora Rieger noted that C. T. left much of the office work to Frank Friesen, the brother of C. T.'s wife Helen, and Jonas Friesen (no relation to Frank). The presence of these two men, Nora suggested, allowed C. T. to do whatever he felt like doing, and though she saw him at work everyday, he much preferred to be outside in the yard, or to go out debt collecting.³⁷ Employee, and nephew, Dave Loewen, among others, has noted that C. T. was not a person for detail.³⁸ In this respect Frank Friesen is often described in contrast to C. T. Frank was a perfectionist, while C. T. was a lover of action and adventure, a man with big vision, an entrepreneur willing to take risks and wise enough to allow Frank (and Jonas) to run things his way.³⁹ C. T. opened the doors of the main street business every morning before the employees arrived, but the day-to-day running of the business was largely in the hands of his managers.⁴⁰ C. T. recognized this himself and emphasized in his 1951 *Carillon News* interview that “of course, all of this [the business’ success] would not have been possible without competent help.”⁴¹

C. T. was more than a pragmatist, he built rapport with his employees. In the early 1940s C. T. bought a lumberyard in Rosenort, Manitoba, not so much because he needed or wanted it, but because a widow needed to sell it. C. T. offered both of his managers, Frank Friesen and Jonas Friesen, as well as Nora Rieger, his bookkeeper, and another employee shares in this business. He purchased the store for \$2000 and both Jonas and Frank invested \$500 each, later, according to one source,

³⁷ Nora Rieger interview.

³⁸ Dave Loewen interview.

³⁹ Corinne and Frank Klassen , Wilbert Loewen, Ralph Guenther interviews.

⁴⁰ Dave Loewen interview.

⁴¹ “Hard Work & Spunk Needed For Success Says Veteran Businessman,” *Carillon News*, 23 November 1951, 3.

walking away with \$10,000.⁴² It was this money that helped Jonas Friesen leave C. T.'s in the late forties and buy the competition, Steinbach Lumber Yards. The consensus that C. T. was gracious and encouraging to Friesen echoes Joy Parr's discussion of Daniel Knechtel's pride that his employees left his "machine room and cabinet shop to take charge of factories... and run them successfully."⁴³

C. T.'s work defined him, he worked hard, and his success afforded him the opportunity to delegate much of the inside (store and factory) work to his employees. This left C. T. free to do the things he loved. His passion was work-related, C. T. did not have the aptitude for leisure that his sons would display, but it was the outdoor, physical, action- and adventure-packed sawmill camps of the lumber industry which he chose to revisit in his later years. (This is reminiscent of his decision to go debt collecting in the 1930s, and leave the office work to his employees.⁴⁴) C. T.'s daughter-in-law Helen (George's wife) remembers him coming to visit them at the 1940s lumber camps for up to two weeks at a time without even a change of clothes. Even as a sixty year old man, C. T. did not sit around and watch. Stories of his visits often involve him questioning why something was taking so long or could not be done. Remedies which he suggested were not always successful as in the time a truck would not start due to the very cold weather. C. T. made his employees start a fire under it, and when neither oil nor gasoline would work, they used high-test gas which made a fire they could not quickly put out and, at least in one instance, ruined the truck. C. T. reportedly thought it was good that at least they had tried!⁴⁵

In 1948, after he suffered his first heart attack, C. T. seems to have become nostalgic and reflective. Nephew and long-term employee Dave Loewen remembers

⁴² Nora Rieger interview. Nora was also offered the opportunity to buy a \$500 share, but she did not want to spend that much money. She noted in the interview that she had "missed her chance!"

⁴³ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 141.

⁴⁴ Nora Rieger interview.

⁴⁵ Helen Barkman Loewen, Lorne Rempel interviews.

that one day C. T. informed him that he was joining Dave on his sales trip to Pine Falls, Manitoba, and Kenora and Fort Frances, Ontario. As they were driving Dave noticed that C. T. was holding his hand on his chest and so Dave wanted to turn back, but C. T. told him that he would take his pills and they would go on. He told Dave to do his work. After visiting the three centres, they stayed overnight at a little hotel in Piney and then travelled back through Sandilands and Woodridge. C. T. knew the road and at a certain point asked Dave to stop and C. T. showed him where his first sawmill had been. C. T. was very excited and Dave realized why C. T. had wanted to accompany him on the trip.⁴⁶ In his 1951 *Carillon News* interview C. T. concluded that it is not easy to build a large business ““but looking back,”” he said, ““every minute of it has been enjoyable, particularly the instances when there were obstacles to overcome, and when such instances were brought to a successful conclusion.””⁴⁷ As his health failed, C. T. became nostalgic. He visited the site of his first sawmill and reflected on his lifelong work. This was a man who defined himself by his work, and had loved every minute of it.

Family

Of course, as Joy Parr notes in her article on gender history there is an “inherent instability in identities – that being simultaneously a worker, a Baptist, and a father, one is never solely or systematically any of these.”⁴⁸ During his life C. T. was a husband and a father, as well as a businessman, and as described below, a church member and a civic leader.

C. T. and Helena’s relationship appears to have had an uncertain beginning before developing into a close bond during the course of their marriage. Interviewed

⁴⁶ Dave Loewen interview.

⁴⁷ “Hard Work & Spunk Needed” *Carillon News*, 23 November 1951, 3.

⁴⁸ Joy Parr, “Gender History,” 361.

family and friends remembered that C. T. stood up Helena on their wedding day at least once, maybe even two times.⁴⁹ Helena was nine years younger than C. T. and though she was known as a quiet woman, several interviewees thought that perhaps she had pursued him.⁵⁰ People were quick to follow these stories with reassurances that after this difficult beginning, theirs was a good marriage. C. T. and Helena's daughter Mary describes Helena as "gentle," "kind," and "very devout." Mary writes that her mother was a good homemaker who had a large garden which she taught her children to tend. Mary also asserts that her mother, who gave birth to thirteen children but lost six of them in infancy, was able to accept the loss of her children, through her faith in God which prompted her to pray that "if life became too hard for the child, God would take it home."⁵¹

This picture of Helena contrasts somewhat with others' representations of her. Most notably, family members remember that the loss of six children devastated her, perhaps losing the first two of her children was especially hard. Daughter Elvira recalled one of her sisters-in-law telling her that she had talked to Helena about this once:

Father would go out for the day and what have you, and then in the evening he would come back from the bush and mother would have gone out to sit on the steps, and she could not go into the house because the crib was empty. Until Dad would come home and then they would go into the house together.⁵²

Elvira speaks openly about her mother's ill health and her father's response to this. C. T. did not look down on any weakness but understood that it meant the person needed to be protected. And so, Elvira explains, C. T. always hired a maid for Helena, and

⁴⁹ Herman Loewen, Elvira Loewen Toews interviews. Herman Loewen, C. T.'s nephew, remembers that C. T. wanted to back out, but his brothers made sure he went through with his commitment. Elvira Toews, C. T.'s daughter, says that C. T. stood her mother up twice.

⁵⁰ Helen Unger Loewen, Amanda Reimer interviews.

⁵¹ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, "'C. T.' Loewen 1882-1960, Steinbach," *Preservings*, 17 (December 2000): 116.

⁵² Elvira Loewen Toews interview.

tried to make sure she would not have to worry. Elvira remembers that C. T. told her if she ever got tired of living with her parents, she could just go as long as she told them where she was so that mother wouldn't worry. "It was always mother-so that Mother will not worry."⁵³ When Helena died at age 58 in 1950 she had been married to C. T. for more than 36 years. Daughter-in-law, Helen, remembers the tears in C. T.'s eyes at Helena's deathbed.

For a discussion of C. T. as a father, Rotundo's description of the *self-made man* as father is useful. Rotundo posits that he was still the head of the household with the decision-making powers, and the responsibilities of supporting it financially, disciplining the children, and using his influence to get his sons started.⁵⁴ He was also a moral teacher supplementing the wife's role in this education with religious instruction, and teaching "values governing work, achievement, and property...the importance of perseverance and thrift, of diligence and punctuality, of industry and ambition"⁵⁵ Finally he was also encouraged to love and cherish sons and once they were grown a friendship could emerge. Interviews with his children identify many of these values and characteristics in C. T., the father.

Mary, C. T.'s eldest daughter, remembers her father as a religiously-devout man, bringing his children to pray together when their mother was ill in hospital in Winnipeg. She attests to his position as the head of the household, to whom their mother was submissive, and his role as the spiritual head as he led devotional readings every morning before breakfast. She also notes that he participated in weekly Bible studies which were sometimes held at the Loewens' home, and took local children to Sunday School on his sleigh.⁵⁶ His youngest daughter Elvira offers a somewhat

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Rotundo, 26.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁶ Mary Loewen Hoepfner interview.

different picture of her father. She too recalls the time they prayed for their ailing mother, but does not remember him as an especially pious man. She tells of the time he was meant to close a joint church service and he told Helena beforehand that he intended to invite the congregation to sing “God Save the King,”⁵⁷ anathema to most pacifist Mennonite worshippers. It seems that while this would have shocked both Helena and Mary, it greatly amused C. T. and Elvira.

Mary and Elvira do both remember their father’s wisdom similarly, wisdom that heralded the self-made man. Daughter Elvira recalls his three laws: you can’t say I can’t, you can’t complain, and you must pay the consequences (if you say no to trying something). C. T. employed these rules at home as much as at work, and his children, and outside observers, recognized that C. T. let his children learn the lessons by trial and error. There was a freedom as a son or daughter of C. T. that often surprised others. One friend of C. T.’s daughter Anna remembers vividly the time that C. T. allowed Anna to drive herself and the friend, Amanda, to DVBS (Daily Vacation Bible School) across town when she had never driven before.⁵⁸ Elvira illustrates how he put his rules into practice with her story of his advice about driving:

Just take responsibility for your actions. If you get stopped by a cop for speeding, don’t give excuses, just pay the penalty. There’s a law that says that. But it’s not a sin. You see, so often, everything would be made religious. My father would say, Nah, this is a law that gets changed by people. But he said, ‘If you get stopped by a cop, make sure it’s not for driving too slowly.’⁵⁹

Mary recalls his appreciation for his children’s attempts to try something new. When it was the second son George’s turn to milk the family cow, George made a deal with a Mr. Thiessen to exchange the cow for a daily supply of milk for the Loewen family.

⁵⁷ Elvira Loewen Toews interview.

⁵⁸ Amanda Reimer interview.

⁵⁹ Elvira Loewen Toews interview.

According to Mary, C. T. liked the innovative plan and thought it time to get rid of the cow anyway “as it no longer fitted into mid-town.”⁶⁰

While it was work that defined C. T.’s identity, he was also the head of a household, the breadwinner, a protector (particularly of Helena) and an educator of his children. This was a role he appeared to take very seriously, teaching them to think independently, act and then accept the consequences of those actions. He also developed good relationships with his children as they grew. The 1951 *Carillon News* article on C. T. Loewen noted that now 69 years old, C. T. had, due to failing health, been forced to the sidelines of the business which his three sons carried on. Nevertheless, the reporter wrote, the sons regard the advice of their father as law: “There is a fine father-son relationship that could be the envy of many a father.”⁶¹ His daughters equally remember a man who, in Elvira’s words, was “absolutely the wisest man I have ever known...and not just because he was my father. He knew human nature, he knew he had [little] formal education, but he had a lot of wisdom. And he applied it.” C. T. was not only a lumberman, he lived within a family, he was a husband and a father. It is important to recognize this when attempting to understand C. T. as a person and as a man.

Community and Church

Beyond the walls of C. T.’s home and business was the growing service centre of Steinbach, Manitoba. C. T.’s participation in the life and growth of this community is reminiscent of Joy Parr’s description of Daniel Knechtel in Hanover, Ontario. Knechtel was a philanthropist, whose religious convictions provided him with a sense

⁶⁰ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, 114-115.

⁶¹ “Hard Work & Spunk,” *Carillon News*, 23 November 1951, 3.

of manly work which “extended to good works.”⁶² As well, Marguerite Van Die’s account of Charles Colby’s participation in the civic and religious life of his community in the Eastern Townships is also useful. Daniel Knechtel financed the town’s hospital, library, park, and its YMCA. Charles Colby contributed financially to the new church building and helped to found Stanstead College, a Methodist institution for higher education in the Eastern Townships.⁶³ C. T. served on Steinbach’s “village committee” for more than a decade, was president of the first telephone system, fire chief, and chair of the Victory Bonds committee during the Second World War. He was the first president of the Rest Haven senior citizens’ home, a venture undertaken by the *Kleine Gemeinde* Church, of which C. T. was a member. He was also a member of the planning board for the Steinbach Tabernacle, a town-based hall geared for large inter-church gatherings, especially protracted religious revival meetings, and he was one of four men who started the inter-denominational Red Rock Lake Bible Camp, an evangelical-oriented youth camp located in Manitoba’s vacation Whiteshell Provincial Park. He was even personally responsible for the first board sidewalk in Steinbach.⁶⁴

The extent and the nature of C. T.’s involvement in Steinbach civic life are both significant. C. T.’s position as a successful businessman afforded him opportunities to participate in civic affairs and he embraced these opportunities. As fire chief of Steinbach’s volunteer fire brigade, as a member of the “village committee,” Steinbach’s governing council until its incorporation as a town in 1947, and in undertaking the sidewalk project, C. T. demonstrated his belief in community and in “progress.” The establishment of the Rest Haven seniors’ home was evidence

⁶² Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 141.

⁶³ Van Die, 115, 120.

⁶⁴ Much of this community involvement is noted in C. T.’s obituary in the *Carillon News*, “C. T.’ Leaves Deep Mark on Steinbach,” 28 October 1960, 1.

of a fundamental shift in Steinbach society; older family members would no longer age within the family household.

The overtly religious projects – the Tabernacle, and the Red Rock Bible Camp – are also illustrative of new influences and interests in Steinbach. Both are examples of a new evangelical and individualistic culture which was taking hold in Steinbach in the 1940s. C. W., and C. B. for much of his adult life, attended *Bruderschaft* meetings where community concerns were raised, immoralities were admonished, and the “world” was kept at bay. C. T. had attended these meetings in his early adulthood, he had himself been criticized for building such a large house, and allowing his daughter, Mary, to play a musical instrument.⁶⁵ However, by the 1940s C. T. was signalling a religious reorientation. His support for the Tabernacle project suggested an appreciation for personal salvation, evidenced by an emotional religious rebirth experience. One local history suggested that the Tabernacle held “fond memories [for many] as the place where they met God in a new way.”⁶⁶ This was the language of a personal relationship with God which would have been foreign to a member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Red Rock Bible Camp was founded on similar principles, with similar hopes. In this instance, though, the focus was youth and the hope was that the message of personal salvation and personal morality would reach Steinbach’s teenagers long before they became baptized members of the church.

One interviewed employee of C. T. Loewen was quick to point out that C. T. was not an exception in his community service; rather, it was usual for the leading businessmen of Steinbach who had the time and the means to fill these important

⁶⁵ See the full discussion of these criticisms in the “Church” section below.

⁶⁶ Abe Warkentin, ed., 212.

positions and support innovative ideas.⁶⁷ Certainly a number of other men were equally involved in the community's organizations and institutions. Yet a report on C. T. and P. T., the "two partially paralyzed brothers," (C. T. was left paralyzed following a stroke in December 1951, his brother Peter T. suffered a paralyzing stroke the following year, in December 1952), in a 1952 issue of the *Carillon News*, reflected that "the name 'Loewen' symbolizes wholehearted generosity towards fellow-men which has, providentially, been transplanted from father to son, of which we're glad."⁶⁸

Perhaps the generosity spoken of here extends beyond committees and sidewalks. The most popular story of C. T. Loewen must be the one which was told again very recently – this time at the ceremony which awarded the Queen's Jubilee medal to C. T.'s grandson, Charles Loewen, present CEO of Loewen Windows. Steinbach MLA Jim Penner recalled his own father going on a trip with C. T. to collect overdue debts. C. T. took six bags of flour along to give to those who couldn't afford to pay their bill.⁶⁹ This is truly a favourite of Steinbach residents, although other stories of his generosity are also told. Nora Rieger, bookkeeper at C. T.'s during the late 1930s and 1940s, remembers that C. T. would come into the store when somebody he knew needed to go to Winnipeg for a doctor's appointment, for example, to ask Jonas Friesen, the store manager, if there was any little job he could do there so that it looked like he had a 'real' reason to go. Both of these stories prompted the narrators to conclude that C. T. was "hiding his light under a bushel." This biblical reference suggests that, like Parr's Daniel Knechtel, and Van Die's

⁶⁷ Ernie Toews interview.

⁶⁸ *Carillon News*, 5 December 1952, 1; 7 November 1952, 4.

⁶⁹ "Provencher residents honored with medals," *Carillon News*, 14 November 2002, 2A.

Charles Colby, C. T. was an example of “Christian manhood,” a “Christian businessman.”⁷⁰

C. T.’s position in the *Kleine Gemeinde* church in which he was baptized as a twenty-two year old young man is a fascinating one, for this progressive man remained loyal to the old communitarian church even after most of Steinbach’s businessmen had gravitated to the more evangelistic *Bruderthaler*. His youngest daughter Elvira describes him as having “a spirit that was just so big, and so large, and so exuberant that it couldn’t be contained by [a] straitjacket,” and there are several stories which demonstrate this, and suggest that C. T. sought and found a certain independence from the church while remaining an active member.⁷¹ His eldest daughter Mary learned to play the piano as a young girl and when C. T. was taken to task for this act of worldliness in a *Bruderschaft*, ‘Brotherhood,’ meeting, he apparently replied that one day the church, which did not allow musical instruments, would acquire a piano and he was just preparing a player for that time.⁷² C. T. was also criticized for building such a large and ostentatious house, one with oak doors and railings, and judged to be an extravagance unsuitable for a follower of Christ and the simple life that he demanded of his church. Again C. T. had an answer, responding that he didn’t want to have to build two houses and since his boys were so boisterous he wanted to build something solid which could stand up to their antics. The story goes that the boys did in fact manage to break one of those doors. And Mary did become a pianist in the church.⁷³

C. T., then, had definite opinions on these issues, though some family members suspect that he only stated them when he was asked to, that is, in situations

⁷⁰ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 140, Van Die (from the title of her article).

⁷¹ Elvira Loewen Toews interview.

⁷² Mary Loewen Hoepfner, Lorne Rempel interviews.

⁷³ Lorne Rempel interview.

like the *Bruderschaft* meetings. His daughter-in-law Helen felt that he did not pursue divisive issues because he did not want the community to be divided.⁷⁴ Yet it does seem that the independent thinking that he attempted to instill in his children was an important part of his own religious identity. This is surprising to those who remember or study the conservative *Kleine Gemeinde*. It leads C. T.'s daughter Elvira to contemplate why her father was not ousted from the church. One previous employee remembers C. T.'s contributions to the church and asserts that "if you had money, it talked."⁷⁵ Elvira also thinks that her father's generous giving allowed him a certain freedom. She also emphasizes his sensitivity to peoples' needs and beliefs which perhaps allowed him a continued place in the religious community. He told his children "don't be too hard on the ministers,...they are constrained by other people who are conservative, because it's a large conference." Elvira remembers, "he could handle the conservative element as well as the other element. And he respected them. So if he respected them, why would they ask him to leave?"⁷⁶ C. T. found a way to live within this conservative church community, rather than leaving for the *Bruderthaler* Church as many progressive businessmen did. In an ironic way, his own confidence allowed him to feel unrestrained by the conservative and communitarian teachings of the old *Kleine Gemeinde*.

Conclusion

As a boy, C. T. did the farm chores and muddled through school. As a youth, he discovered the bush, and the lumber industry in which he worked for more than forty years. First, however, came a period of social freedom for young people during which time guns, parties, and drinking were tolerated by the conservative community

⁷⁴ Helen Barkman Loewen interview.

⁷⁵ William Reimer interview.

⁷⁶ Elvira Loewen Toews interview.

of Steinbach. Work, marriage, fatherhood, civic and church responsibilities, were the components of adult masculinity, and they occupied much of C. T.'s life. But C. T.'s narrative does not end here, for life is not always taken away from those in their prime. Illness, old age, infirmity, and the accompanying loss of independence, are characteristic of the final years of many lives. C. T.'s time as the self-made man, focused on work, civic responsibility, and independence, came to an abrupt end in November 1951 when he suffered a heart attack followed, a few days later, by a stroke. C. T. was paralyzed on one side and was bedridden for the remaining nine years of his life.

C. T.'s frustration during this last decade illustrates further the extent to which C. T. had been a self-made man in his adult life. Family members and friends recall C. T.'s frustration with his condition, noting that he was, at times, difficult, even violent.⁷⁷ A newspaper article for which C. T. was interviewed only weeks before his debilitating stroke, described C. T. as an "energetic businessman." It is no surprise that a decade spent in and out of his own home, the Steinbach hospital, and the Rest Haven home, having to be transported on a stretcher to view the renovated C. T. Loewen & Sons store, would frustrate such a man. His obituary described him as "a man of phenomenal energy, unlimited vision, and irrepressible drive," noting that a "crippling stroke" had "put an end to his tremendous activity."⁷⁸ C. T. was a self-made man, he had defined himself, and achieved his place in his communities, through his work. The last decade of his life was characterized by a loss of independence, an inability to act, to move, to work. If his youth and adulthood had been expressed in particular masculine identities, his painful experience with elderly

⁷⁷ Elvira Loewen Toews, Wilbert Loewen, Ralph Guenther interviews.

⁷⁸ "C. T. Leaves Deep Mark on Steinbach," *Carillon News*, 28 October 1960, 1.

infirmity was exacerbated by an inability to continue the full expression of the masculinity of the “self-made” man.

C. T. was defined by his work. He loved lumber and winters in the bush. He spent holidays in B. C. looking at sawmills, and stopped on the side of the road in Minnesota to have a photo taken with Paul Bunyan.⁷⁹ He was “our Lumberman” to the people of Steinbach, and in an interview only weeks before his debilitating stroke he reflected on his work, and concluded that “every minute of it had been enjoyable.” Yet he was also a husband, a father, a community leader, and a church member. All these roles defined him. He was Rotundo’s *self-made man*, and resembled Parr’s Daniel Knechtel and Van Die’s Charles Colby who saw good works, inspired by their faith, as a natural extension of their manly responsibilities to provide and protect.

He has been described as a man of action, a he-man, a real man, a man of courage, faith, and enterprise.⁸⁰ These identities were in contrast to being a boisterous boy, a wild youth, and a submissive woman. Being a man was about financially providing for one’s family, teaching one’s children about the world, unknown to women and lesser men, but also in participating in their religious and moral instruction. Being a man meant taking a leadership role – in the home, in a marriage, and, if one was fortunate enough to be a leader in the business world, then this also meant taking on responsibilities in the community as well. Most of all being a man was about work. Boys played, youths sowed wild oats, women cared, nurtured, and existed within the domestic sphere and female networks, and men worked. For C. T. it was a life that carried an exuberant claim, life was adventurous, action-filled, rewarding and enjoyable to the last minute. It was the reward of a self-made man.

⁷⁹ Mary Loewen Hoepfner interview.

⁸⁰ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, Frank Reimer, Wilbert Loewen interviews.

Chapter Five: Making the Image of a Modern Factory

In his comprehensive survey of Canadian business history, Michael Bliss writes that “the decades after 1945 were the age of peace and prosperity that the builders of Canada had dreamed of and the veterans of two wars had fought for.”¹ At the end of the Second World War Canadians had been worried about their economic future as they recalled the “hectic inflation followed by collapse” of 1919-1921.² They also feared a gradual return to the stagnation and unemployment of the 1930s but these fears were unrealized. Bliss writes that the 1940s,

fed by war-delayed consumer demand, fast-moving technological change, and heavy government pump-priming, faded into better and better years in the 1950s – another of those periods when Canada seemed to be the resource cornucopia of the world.³

In the 1960s, Canadians were so sure of Canada’s wealth and future that, Bliss notes, they found it difficult to believe that there was any limit to their northern economy.⁴ Of course there were limits and during the recession of the 1980s there was, in the words of a Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada 1985 report, “less and less place to hide.”⁵ The inflation mentality which prevailed during the 1970s as much as it had in any other boom period in Canada’s history, was founded on the belief that prices were only going to rise. Consequently business people spent and borrowed heavily, basing these risks directly on the premise that prices would continue to increase. They did not. Bliss, writing in 1987, could only consider what the next chapter in Canadian business history might include.

¹ Bliss, 481.

² *Ibid.*, 454.

³ *Ibid.*, 460-461.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 477.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 551.

This study ends at a similar point, with the sudden death of C. P. Loewen in 1985, only weeks after the official sodturning for a \$2.75 million plant expansion.

The plant expansion was at Loewen Millwork, the sash and door factory of C. T. Loewen & Sons which Cornie, C. T.'s youngest son, took control of in 1971 when the eldest, Edward, sold his interest in the family business, and George kept the retail store. From 1951 to 1971 the business had been one concern in which all three sons were actively involved. In 1971, the business which began as C. B. Loewen's sawmill and evolved into a variety of partnerships led by son C. T. Loewen – Loewen & Toews, Loewen & Boely, Loewen Bros. – and eventually into C. T. Loewen & Sons, ended up as two different Steinbach businesses, C. T. Loewen & Sons and Loewen Millwork, known after 1985 as Loewen Windows. Many changes took place during these forty-four years; the booms, 'blips,' and recessions which Bliss describes in his survey of Canadian business were evident even in the southeastern corner of Manitoba.

The business developments and the wider economic context were reported in the pages of the *Carillon News*, which continued to play its role as a booster paper, celebrating business, progress and everything "modern" and providing a forum for the increasing number of advertisements and promotions with which Steinbach's businessmen bombarded their customers during the second half of the twentieth century. Popular sales promotions included the celebration of anniversaries, beginning with the Golden Jubilee anniversary of C. T. Loewen & Sons in 1955. The 1955 event was marked with a brief history in the *Carillon News*, and later anniversaries were commemorated with the publication of history booklets all beginning with C. T. taking his father's sawmill into the bush in 1905 and guiding the reader through the tremendous growth of the business: the heady days of the First

World War and its immediate aftermath; the difficult 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s marked for C. T., not by financial difficulty, according to the histories, but by the success of the beekeeping supply business; the Second World War's lumber shortage which sent C. T. to northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and B. C. where he, with the help of his sons and employees, established lumber camps; the church pews and Hydro crosspoles which provided work during the late 1940s; and in 1951 the sale of the business to C. T.'s three sons, Edward, George, and Corrie.

The message in the 1950s was that growth would continue, C. T. Loewen & Sons would continue to serve the community, the new, the "modern" would be brought to Steinbachers by "C. T.'s," and the millwork it manufactured would go from Steinbach to the outside world, building a reputation of quality and service for the whole community. Progress was the watchword for the community; the "modern" was embraced. The *Carillon News* happily reported the comments of a Mr. Peter Sankey, now of Chicago, but formerly Peter Senkiw, a Ukrainian from the Sarto district (south of Steinbach), in a July 1951 issue. The piece entitled "Visitor Amazed At Local Progress," quoted Mr. Sankey at length:

Not even in our wildest dreams did we imagine that a highway like the No. 12 would ever cross our farm...I seemed to always think of the teams of oxen or horses, the poor trails and straw thatched homes. Now,...there are no more ox teams, not even horses. The neighbours all have cars, modern homes, and seem content and happy. It's more than we ever hoped for.⁶

Mr. Sankey's comments made the front page and there would be nothing the residents of Steinbach and area would have liked to read more.

Steinbach grew in various ways. The population of Steinbach almost doubled from 1945 to 1960 and, as one historian has noted, in 1951 Southeastern Manitoba "spent over 13 million dollars in the retail sector, six times the amount spent in 1941

⁶ "Visitor Amazed At Local Progress," *Carillon News*, 13 July 1951, 1.

and half of this money was spent in Steinbach.”⁷ C. T. Loewen’s no longer reported postwar shortages of building materials, coal, or household appliances, there was much to buy and the residents of Southeastern Manitoba, it seems, were buying.

This shift in consumerism, it has been asserted, was led by the car dealers of Steinbach.⁸ However, while Steinbach’s car salesmen may have taken the lead in “relentless advertising and unrelenting hyperbole,” “sales promotions, car give-aways,...[and] sales pitches using the ‘direct dial’ long-distance service to Winnipeg,”⁹ other businesses, including C. T. Loewen & Sons, went along for the ride, offering similar gimmicks through large and frequent advertisements.

In May of 1952 the foundation was poured for a building to house a new planing and resaw mill and by July the mill was ready. The *Carillon News* noted that the planing mill cost \$24,000 and when considered with developments at the Post Office and Barkman Hardware, the newspaper concluded that “all in all, it looks as if the business men are still on the alert to improve their concerns in order to serve their customers better.” Certainly this was the message which the Loewen brothers wanted to convey. A large advertisement with two photos, one with the caption “new planer of English manufacture installed at cost of \$20,000,” announced that the mill was now in operation and that it did the job faster and ensured that only a minimum handling of the lumber was required. “C. T. Loewen & Sons Ltd. are again keeping abreast with the area they serve by offering these improved services,” and, they noted, there would be no increase in prices. While service had always been valued in Steinbach, this advertisement-announcement with large photos and the price of the new machinery

⁷ Loewen, “Poultrymen, Car Dealers and Football Stars,” 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

announced to all, was a new approach to advertising which became popular in 1950s Steinbach and was embraced by C. T.'s sons.

Perhaps the biggest advertising and marketing event of the 1950s at C. T. Loewen & Sons was the Golden Jubilee Celebration in June of 1955. As early as April, an advertisement in the *Carillon News* 10th Anniversary issue told readers of the forthcoming celebration which would revolve around the opening of the newly renovated store. The April advertisement carried many photos, including that of C. T. Loewen, each of the three brothers – Edward, General Manager; George, Yard Manager; and Cornie, who was recently returned from the Rosenort lumberyard and now Sales Manager – and of the factory, earlier office building, and recent completed projects. The brothers introduced a new slogan, “Serving Each New Generation,” outlined the history of the company, described recent growth and present services, and vaunted its number of employees and annual payroll.¹⁰ The “modern,” was emphasized, growth was celebrated, and good service was guaranteed.

The past was narrated, but it was the “modern” that received the most attention. The beginning of the company was dated as 1905 when C. T., “then an enterprising young man of 22, left the family farm with his father’s sawmill to go into the lumber business.”¹¹ There is no recognition of C. B. Loewen’s earlier sawmill operation where C. T. got his first exposure to the bush and experience with a sawmill. The sons associated the business solely with their father who had made it into a successful business on Steinbach’s Main Street. After the changes of 1905 to 1955 had been narrated, the firm’s present business activities were described, including the “‘Loewen-Bilt Bungalow’ project” which had been launched several years earlier and which by 1955 found “these neat little houses” in Manitoba

¹⁰ *Carillon News*, 29 April 1955, 44-45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

communities as far away as Morris, Altona, Gretna, St. Vital, Portage la Prairie, as well as in Steinbach.¹² Nor had C. T. Loewen & Sons forgotten the growing family, the ad reassured readers, and the National Housing Act meant that “even families with moderate incomes can build beautiful and modern homes.” The factory was also featured and Frank Friesen, Factory Manager, was recognized for his role in the growth of the manufacturing side of the business. In 1955 twenty-five men were employed year round, and with the store and lumberyard this made a total of sixty employees with an annual payroll of about \$180,000. Pews were still being manufactured, while pre-fit windows were the newest addition to the millwork factory, popular because they fit better and they “more than repay their extra cost by the saving in labour when installed.”¹³ The earlier “first class” planer had been replaced “with the most modern planer available,” and the “modern” hardware store featured “a complete line of hand and power tools, builder’s hardware and paint.”¹⁴

The actual Jubilee Anniversary celebrations in June of 1955 were exemplary in the use of new advertising and marketing methods. An advertisement placed on 27 May 1955 in the usual weekly spot on page three, did not advertise special prices or services offered as happened most weeks, instead it instructed readers to “watch for” and keep open the dates of the Golden Jubilee Celebration to be held 16, 17, and 18 June. It announced that there were going to be “free gifts for young and old” at the three-day open house.¹⁵ Another ad appeared later in this issue which advertised Stephens’ paints, newly introduced to the paint department, but the main thrust of the week’s advertising was the coming open house and anniversary celebration. The advertisement placed the week of the celebration was, like the April feature, two full

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Carillon News*, 27 May 1955, 3.

pages in length and while it contained a few details of special prices it mostly focused on the free give-aways and the “door opening ceremony.”¹⁶

The business was open Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily and all were invited to “come and see the most modern home building centre in rural Manitoba.” Free coffee and donuts were served every afternoon from 3-5, and a free paring knife was given to every lady and a free balloon to every “kiddie” who came to the open house. There were free paint brushes with paint purchases, and door prizes including 18-piece 22 Karat Golden Jubilee dinnersets, mirrors, enough tiles or paint to do any room of a house, and, for the farmers, “enough red barn paint to do your barn, regardless of size.”¹⁷ There were free films for “do-it-yourself fans” playing continuously through the afternoons and evenings, tours of the factory, a fully furnished and equipped Loewen-Bilt model bungalow on display (at the building site, at the north end of Steinbach), a home building materials show, and the “modern conveniences” of a “ladies’ wash and powder room” and drinking fountain, which people were invited to use whenever they were shopping in Steinbach.¹⁸ Perhaps the crowning of it all, however, was the ceremony to be held at 11 a.m. on the Thursday, when the Hon. R. D. Turner, Minister of Industry and Commerce, would cut the ribbon and Rev P. D. Friesen of the Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Church, Mayor K. R. Barkman, and John D. Penner, one of the town’s flamboyant car salesmen and president of the Steinbach Chamber of Commerce, would all be present and say a few words.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Carillon News*, 10 June 1955, 12-13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The anniversary celebrations made the front page of the *Carillon News* on 17 June 1955 under the heading “Turner Opens Anniversary Events.”²⁰ Ed Loewen welcomed the guests and called upon Rev. P. D. Friesen to dedicate the building. The minister had chosen Colossians 3:17: “And whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” John D. Penner and K. R. Barkman offered words of congratulation, during which Barkman paid tribute to Jonas Friesen, long-time manager who since 1950 was the owner of the competition, Steinbach Lumber Yards, and Frank Friesen, factory foreman. The building was dedicated as a “living monument” to C. T. who was in hospital having been paralysed by a stroke in 1951. Edward spoke on behalf of the brothers stating that:

we would like to give this testimony to the founder of this business that he taught his sons and staff always to give full measure and full value for every item sold and most precious of all to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for Salvation and that all our blessings are received from Him. It is our earnest desire to follow this teaching and serve this community to the best of our ability.²¹

Speakers looked back to the foundation and then forward to the future. Turner told the crowd that a misconception had arisen that the development of Manitoba required outside capital. Whereas the government’s philosophy, he explained, had always been that the province’s future development depended mostly on Manitobans. “Of this,” he said, “the Loewen enterprise is an outstanding example.” He identified the virtues of hard work, thrift, integrity, and foresight which “have developed a business this province can be proud of.”²²

And Steinbachers were proud. They were proud of their businesses and their businessmen. Royden Loewen asserts that during the 1950s, “the businessman was

²⁰ “Turner Opens Anniversary Events,” *Carillon News*, 17 June 1955.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

the epitome of masculinity” in Steinbach. And that while these businessmen spoke of traditional values such as “self-reliance, family unity and ‘puritan’ values,” each time, Loewen argues, “it entailed a look to the future, not to the past.”²³ Loewen uses the example of an “automobile extravaganza” ad, which celebrated the fact that the railroad had bypassed the town, since it had taught the pioneers that “there was only one thing you could rely on and that was yourself.”²⁴ Of course, Loewen notes, this was not a call for a return to an isolated, self-sufficient community, but for the sale of cars, a completely “modern” innovation, which facilitated travel, made some Steinbachers wealthy, and in many forms brought “the world” to Steinbach and area. The values that the Hon. R. D. Turner identified – hard work, thrift, integrity, and foresight – were old ideas for Mennonite Steinbach, but they were being spoken in a “modern” hardware store amongst a myriad of floor coverings, tiles, paint selection, do-it-yourself films, and a ladies’ powder room. The E. M. C. minister was there, giving his blessing to a business venture which the *Kleine Gemeinde* would have warned against, and a politician, the Minister of Industry and Commerce, had the last word.

The focus of the 1950s was not only expansion in Southeastern Manitoba. In 1952 and 1953 C. T. Loewen & Sons won contracts to build ready-to-move homes for the Canadian National Railroad, and the sweet irony that the town which had been bypassed by the railroad had been contracted to build homes for C. N. R. section foremen was not lost on C. T. Loewen & Sons, nor, it is likely, Steinbachers. A 75th anniversary flashback series later noted that “a town without a railway was the scene for the construction of thirty houses for C.N.R. employees in various parts of

²³ Loewen, “Poultrymen, Car Dealers, and Football Stars,” 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Canada.”²⁵ The first contract, in 1952, which the firm subcontracted to Albert Reimer, was worth \$92,000 and was for 30 houses “complete in every detail” including kitchen cabinets, shelves, coat hooks, and two coats of paint, inside and out.²⁶ In January 1953 the *Carillon News* reported that the “new year started brisk and business-like for the C. T. Loewen & Sons lumber firm and their subcontractor Albert F. Reimer” when the C.N.R. awarded them a second contract for thirty-four homes. The houses had to be finished by the middle of February which meant building just over a house a day! All the homes were destined for the community of Lynn Lake in Northern Manitoba.²⁷ It was these contracts which prompted C. T. Loewen & Sons to begin construction of ready-to-move, “Loewen-Bilt” homes for the local market.

The housing construction boom strengthened throughout the 1950s, and from 1957 the *Carillon News* frequently featured articles which charted the ever-increasing robustness of the industry. In April 1957 the newspaper reported “Steinbach Facing Boom this Season,” in April 1959 it was “Builders Gearing for All-Time Big Boom,” six months later, the *Carillon News* announced that the “Unprecedented Building Boom Continues in Southeast Manitoba,” and two months after that, in November 1959, came “Steinbach’s Biggest Building Boom.”²⁸ In 1958 C. T. Loewen & Sons led the field when they invited people to build a new home in Steinbach’s first housing subdivision, Woodlawn Park, which featured “lots of all sizes,” “crescents — no through traffic,” “sewer and water,” “gas heat,” and was only three blocks from downtown Steinbach.²⁹ The sewer and water systems ensured that Woodlawn Park would be eligible for National Housing approval, and, in April 1958, C. T. Loewen &

²⁵ “75th Anniversary Flashback,” 18.

²⁶ “\$92,000 Housing Project Now In Full Swing,” *Carillon News*, 18 January 1952, 1.

²⁷ “House-A-Day New Contract for C. T. Loewen & Sons,” *Carillon News*, 16 January 1953, 1.

²⁸ *Carillon News*, 12 April 1957, 1; 3 April 1959, 1; 4 September 1959, 1; 27 November 1959, 19.

²⁹ *Carillon News*, 25 April 1958, 3.

Sons' application to incorporate the subdivision block into the town proper was approved by the Department of Municipal Affairs. The *Carillon News* informed its readers that Woodlawn Park was "a modern city housing development with parks, school, and playground reservation."³⁰ There can be little doubt that, with this development, C. T. Loewen's sons were making their own impact on Steinbach.

C. T. Loewen & Sons were only a part of the massive changes which were taking place in the Steinbach of the 1950s. In 1959 the *Carillon News* reported the growth of Steinbach with its description of "the roar of bulldozers, the gnirling 'grubble-slop, grubble-slop' of cement mixers, and the incessant pounding of carpenters' hammers," which had echoed in "just about every street and back alley in town, as foundations, walls and superstructures have arisen where nothing stood before."³¹ However, C. T. Loewen & Sons were often implicated in *Carillon News* reports of progress and the "modern". They were one of ten Steinbach firms to get a direct phone line to Winnipeg in October 1957.³² In 1959 they placed the lowest bid for the contract to build the "modern design[ed]" Steinbach branch of the Toronto Dominion bank,³³ and, in the same year, they were the general contractor for the Steinbach Invalid Home to be built at a cost of \$127,000, and for a three-room school with auditorium in the community of Sprague, which at a cost of \$75,000 was, according to the *Carillon News*, the biggest out-of-town contract for the year.³⁴

The largest building project of all, however, was solely created by C. T. Loewen & Sons. The factory which manufactured the beekeeping supplies, windows and doors, church pews, and hydro crosspoles, had, like the very first workshop, been

³⁰ "Loewen Block Incorporates," *Carillon News*, 25 April 1958, 1.

³¹ "Steinbach's Biggest Building Boom," *Carillon News*, 27 November 1959, 19.

³² "Ten Private Firms Get Direct Lines to City," *Carillon News*, 4 October 1957, 1.

³³ "Tenders Open For New Bank," *Carillon News*, 24 July 1959, 1.

³⁴ "C. T. Loewen To Build \$127,000 Invalid Home," *Carillon News*, 28 August 1959, 1;
"Unprecedented Building Boom Continues in Southeast Manitoba," *Carillon News*, 4 September 1959, 1.

located behind the Main Street office, and retail store. As noted in the Golden Jubilee advertisement, the Loewen-Bilt bungalows were built on a site at the north end of Steinbach. However, until the late 1950s the business was still concentrated on Steinbach's Main Street, complete with its neon-signs, and window displays. This changed in 1959 when the Loewen boys decided to build a new 60,000 square feet millwork factory on the north-west outskirts of Steinbach.³⁵ Some concern was raised during the late summer of 1959 that this project would be stalled because of the sudden tight money situation in Canada which, it was thought, might affect loans from the Industrial Development Bank, upon which the Loewen project was dependent.³⁶ In September Cornie Loewen informed the *Carillon News* that the steel beams had been ordered but that approval from the Industrial Development Bank was still pending, meaning that the project might have to be put off until the Spring of 1960.³⁷ Construction was begun in October, however, although more time was spent "pumping out water, digging out caved-in excavations, and pulling machinery out of the mud," than actual building during much of the month. The pouring of the foundation was only completed on 19 November 1959 and because of the delay the base had to be kept under heated tarpaulins in order for it to harden properly.³⁸

Reports of boom, progress, and the increasing modernity of Steinbach continued into the 1960s. Bliss's description of the 1960s as a decade when "Canadians became so confident of their country's wonderful wealth and boundless future that they had trouble understanding that there were limits to the capacity of the northern economy,"³⁹ seems to accurately depict the attitudes of Steinbachers, as seen

³⁵ "Builders Gearing For All-Time Big Boom," *Carillon News*, 3 April 1959, 1.

³⁶ "Tight Money Situation May Stop Expansion," *Carillon News*, 28 August 1959, 1.

³⁷ "Unprecedented Building Boom Continues in Southeastern Manitoba," *Carillon News*, 4 September 1959, 1.

³⁸ "Steinbach's Biggest Building Boom," *Carillon News*, 27 November 1959, 19.

³⁹ Bliss, 477.

in the pages of the *Carillon News*. In April 1960 the newspaper, on behalf of the citizens of Steinbach, welcomed delegates of the 11th annual meeting of the Urban Association of Municipalities to their growing town. The journalist apologized for the lack of accommodation, but, he explained, “the fact is, we’ve been a pretty busy bunch of people...there were so many things that needed doing that we hardly knew what to do first.”⁴⁰ The writer went on to list the many projects completed since Steinbach’s incorporation as a town in 1947. “As you will notice,” the author expands, “most of Steinbach’s buildings along Main Street are new, and their owners bursting with enthusiasm about the future of Canada and Steinbach.”⁴¹

Similar to the car dealers with their “Automobile Extravaganza” advertisement, the *Carillon News* journalist linked the growth of the town to the history of the Mennonites, a people who have retained “some old-fashioned notions of work.”⁴² Work may have been integral to the vast changes which took place in the Steinbach of the 1950s, but it was a very different kind of work to that valued by the pioneers. In the words of one study of postwar Hanover, it was men who wore “Sunday clothes” and sold consumer goods who were doing men’s work in 1950s Steinbach,⁴³ a far cry from the pioneer farmers and millers who lived in a Steinbach where there were “no public accolades, no pulling ahead of other men, and where Mennonites were “the quiet in the land,”⁴⁴ not, as in 1960, publicly voicing confidence in the economic future of Canada, and their own place within it.

In 1960 progress in Steinbach was measured in terms of employment. The *Carillon News* conducted their own survey which found that 1,078 people were

⁴⁰ “Welcome Delegates,” *Carillon News*, 29 April 1960, 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Loewen, “Poultrymen, Car Dealers, and Football Stars,” 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

employed full-time by Steinbach's businesses.⁴⁵ Of these 598 were male and 408 were female. C. T.'s was "by far the largest employer of male labour," employing 95 men, and 10 female employees, in addition to a managerial staff of three. The highly gendered work sites of 1950s Steinbach have been identified as further evidence of the disparity between Steinbach before 1945 and postwar Steinbach.⁴⁶ No longer were men and women partners in the upkeep of a farm household; most men, and many women, went to work away from the home, and in different workplaces, in the 1950s and 1960s.

In June 1961 a celebration that rivalled the 1955 open house at C. T. Loewen & Sons was held. This time, however, residents of Southeastern Manitoba were invited to attend two different "important events."⁴⁷ On 23 and 24 June, the retail store celebrated the grand opening of its new floor covering department which had involved the addition of 1700 feet of floor space. Less than a week later on Thursday 29 June, the firm also held an open house at their new millwork factory west of Steinbach. The factory had been in operation for some time but "various small details kept the firm from extending this invitation to the public any sooner."⁴⁸ The factory was to be officially opened with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 2 p.m., coffee and sweets would be served all afternoon, and tours of the factory to see how "Loewen-Bilt' window units are manufactured" were scheduled in the evening from 7 to 9 p.m.⁴⁹ "In extending this invitation to you," the Loewen brothers wrote in their announcement of the open house, "we are not unmindful of the fact that over fifty years of community and district support have been instrumental in making our growth possible." The open house was a "small token of appreciation."

⁴⁵ "Over 1000 Gainfully Employed in Steinbach," *Carillon News*, 5 August 1960, 1.

⁴⁶ Loewen, "Poultrymen, Car Dealers, Football Stars," 6.

⁴⁷ "C. T.'s To Sponsor Important Events," *Carillon News*, 23 June 1961, 1:1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Carillon News*, 23 June 1961, 1:3.

The appreciation was mutual. Other Steinbach businesses placed their congratulations in the pages of the *Carillon News*. A. D. Penner, the Blumenort farm boy who became Steinbach's "most flamboyant" car dealer and was "at the helm of creating a new place for businessmen...[by] cutting ties with an agrarian past,"⁵⁰ registered his "sincere congratulations on your vision and industry, Cornie, George and Edward," for the new Loewen factory which meant that "every week more than one hundred employees are sure of a pay check, regardless of whether or not any profits are shown for that week's work."⁵¹ The *Carillon News*, Steinbach's bastion of boosterism, featured the opening under the heading "The Loewen Millwork Plant Is Western Canada's Largest." In 1955 the Jubilee celebration report was titled "Turner Opens Anniversary Events," but six years later it was no longer Steinbach's privilege to welcome a government official, according to the paper, it was the official's:

when Deputy Minister of Industry and Commerce Rex Grose cuts the ribbon at the C. T. Loewen millwork plant Thursday afternoon, he will have the distinction of opening not only the largest plant of its kind in Steinbach, or even in the province of Manitoba, but the largest millwork plant in the prairie province.⁵²

And while the Loewen brothers "like to pay tribute to a corps of key men" including Frank Friesen, Dave Loewen, and Bill Reimer, all long-time employees, the *Carillon News* felt certain that

in seeing them at work, and studying their logical approach to a problem, one cannot help realizing that it is the three Loewen brothers' brains, determination and industry which have built this huge new plant rearing its bulwark against the prairie horizon.⁵³

The brothers' "brains, determination and industry" were evident in other ventures besides the "huge new plant" during this era. Advertising and marketing techniques which had been introduced in the 1950s were nuanced throughout the

⁵⁰ Loewen, "Poultrymen, Car Dealers, Football Stars," 9.

⁵¹ *Carillon News*, 30 June 1961, 3:2.

⁵² "The Loewen Millwork Plant Is Western Canada's Largest," *Carillon News*, 30 June 1961, 3:1.

⁵³ Ibid.

following decade. Building on the Jubilee celebrations in 1955 when do-it-yourself films were shown, in January 1961 C. T. Loewen & Sons advertised a series of eight weekly clinics for “Mr. Do-It-Yourself.”⁵⁴ Attendance was free, door prizes were given away, and coffee and donuts were served. The clinics offered instruction on the building of “rumpus rooms,” garages, and on painting, floor covering, drywall, and power tools.⁵⁵ Ads before the 1950s had been addressed, if they addressed anyone, to farmers or beekeepers. Here, then was a new customer, “Mr. Do-It-Yourself.”

But he was not the only new potential client. In June 1955 C. T. Loewen & Sons had installed a ladies’ powder room and given a gift to each woman who walked in the door, reflecting Joy Parr’s observation that household consumerism in postwar Canada focused almost exclusively on women.⁵⁶ C. T. Loewen & Sons appear to have recognized this development and in February 1961 “Ladies” were particularly invited to the painting and decorating clinic where “expert painters and decorators will be on hand to answer your questions.”⁵⁷ Women were not invited to the other “Mr. Do-It-Yourself” clinics, presumably they would not be interested in construction or power tools. But they had emerged as a new potential client base in certain departments of C. T. Loewen & Sons in the 1950s and early 1960s. So much so that in June of 1960 the firm placed an ad specifically for a female clerk for the paint department.⁵⁸ And at the opening of the newly renovated store in June 1961 each lady again received a free utility knife.⁵⁹ By 1968 women seemed more firmly entrenched as customers rather than “visitors,”⁶⁰ when, at the “Do It Now Sale” in February a set of mixing bowls was given to women making a purchase or who were with husbands

⁵⁴ *Carillon News*, 13 January 1961, 1:3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Parr, *Domestic Goods*, 84.

⁵⁷ *Carillon News*, 10 February 1961, 1:3.

⁵⁸ *Carillon News*, 24 June 1960, 1:6.

⁵⁹ *Carillon News*, 23 June 1961, 2:4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* This ad stated that a free utility knife would be “presented to every lady visiting the store.”

making a purchase.⁶¹ In September of the same year an ad addressed “Ladies” exclusively informing them of a new custom drapery service,⁶² and in May 1969, an advertisement placed in the *Carillon News*’s bride supplement, complete with photos of a young couple, recognized a woman’s role in house planning.⁶³

These new categories of clients did not replace the more traditional customers. It is true that the Chamber of Commerce reconsidered their support for the local Agricultural Fair in 1957 with Chamber of Commerce President John D. Penner noting that “although ‘15 years ago business people in Steinbach developed largely on agriculture,’...now in 1957 they were playing in a larger league, with ‘neighbouring cities, including Winnipeg.’”⁶⁴ However, while this may have been true of some Steinbach businessmen, C. T. Loewen & Sons continued to target farmers with their advertisements. In March 1959 the weekly advertisement described the services available in the planning department for farm buildings and remodelling.⁶⁵ In April 1960 C. T.’s announced the “Good News For Our Farm Customers” that two of their staff had just completed a “farm structure course sponsored by the Western Retail Lumber Men’s Association.”⁶⁶ In June 1962 an advertisement for farm buildings quoted farmer Bill Hiebert who “would not hesitate to recommend this firm,” and in June of 1963 another farmer, Mr. Heinz Peters also praised the service he had experienced with C. T. Loewen & Sons.⁶⁷ As late as 1969 a C. T. Loewen & Sons’ advertisement saluted farming, recognizing it as “Southeastern Manitoba’s Fastest Growing Industry.”⁶⁸ And in March of 1971 C. T. Loewen & Sons became “exclusive

⁶¹ *Carillon News*, 15 February 1968, 1:3.

⁶² *Carillon News*, 19 September 1968, 1:3

⁶³ *Carillon News*, 29 May 1969, Bride Edition, 9.

⁶⁴ Loewen, “Poultrymen, Car Dealers, Football Stars,” 9.

⁶⁵ *Carillon News*, 6 March 1959, 3.

⁶⁶ *Carillon News*, 1 April 1960, 3.

⁶⁷ *Carillon News*, 22 June 1962, 2:8; 21 June 1963, 1:3.

⁶⁸ *Carillon News*, 7 August 1969, 4:7.

Jamesway power choring distributors for Southeastern Manitoba” and hired a salesman to manage the new farm equipment line.⁶⁹

While farmers continued to be valued customers, at least by C. T. Loewen & Sons, other client bases were lost as aspects of the business were sold off or simply discontinued in response to changing economic conditions. In 1951, the year the boys bought the business from their father, they announced that “due to other interests” the ice business was for sale.⁷⁰ Cornie had got his start in the family business as an eleven year old delivering ice,⁷¹ but by the early 1950s C. T.’s had shifted their focus to the more modern “Frigidaire.” Just over a decade later, in 1963, the firm sold their beekeeping supplies business – “a manufacturing industry which helped Steinbach lift itself out of the depression” – to the Manitoba Honey Co-op.⁷² The *Carillon News* reported that the firm was quitting the business because “other demands in the plant have become so large that it had become almost impossible to make the necessary change-overs for the comparatively short bee supply runs,”⁷³ that is, it was no longer profitable. In 1964 the firm announced that “due to modernization in heating methods” it was ending the coal business, another long-time venture which had served the Southeast and proved successful for C. T. Loewen & Sons for decades. The coal sheds would now be used to house building supplies.⁷⁴ There was no time for ice, the bee supplies industry was not profitable (compared to doors and windows), and coal was no longer needed. Instead “Mr. Do-It-Yourself,” “Ladies,” and farmers were the focus of the future in the retail store.

⁶⁹ *Carillon News*, 24 March 1971, 1:3.

⁷⁰ *Carillon News*, 16 November 1951, 7.

⁷¹ “You’ve got to start somewhere,” *Carillon News*, 4 July 1984, 6A.

⁷² “C. T. Loewen Co. Quits Bee Supply Business,” *Carillon News*, 18 January 1963, 1:1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Carillon News*, 6 March 1964, 1:3.

Meanwhile the millwork factory adopted a national focus. In 1948 a change in marketing policy had moved the emphasis from direct selling to the distribution of windows through lumberyards and this resulted in a “rapid increase in sales volume.”⁷⁵ In 1965 the firm opened a branch in Edmonton “to facilitate the distribution of products in Alberta and the interior of B. C.”⁷⁶ This branch was initially just a warehouse, though by the mid-1970s it was also set up to assemble interior door units.⁷⁷ In 1970 a division was opened in Kitchener, Ontario. This was considered a particular achievement for the company since “while eastern manufacturing companies frequently look to the West to expand their business, Loewen Millwork did just the opposite.”⁷⁸ Market and location surveys completed in 1969 had suggested the suitability of Kitchener since it was central to the retail lumberyards with which C. T. Loewen & Sons did business, for example, Windsor, Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, and Niagara Falls.⁷⁹ It had also been decided that a warehouse would not be sufficient in the populated province; an assembly plant would allow better delivery control and faster service. Initially the most popular window was assembled there but over the next few years more and more products were assembled on site.⁸⁰

The 1960s had been good years for C. T. Loewen & Sons. Their subdivision had proved incredibly popular, the building boom from the 1950s had continued into the 1960s. The millwork factory, and the windows and doors which were manufactured there, was so successful that during the June 1961 open house, the Loewen brothers were already announcing plans for an expansion. This did not mean,

⁷⁵ Loewen Windows, *Loewen Millwork: Our History and Progress, 1905-1974*, 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ “Edmonton Branch: Serving dealers from Pincher Creek to Inuvik,” *Loewen Behold*, 1:3 (September 1975), 1.

⁷⁸ “Service enhanced by Ontario Division,” *Loewen Behold*, 1:2 (June 1975), 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

the *Carillon News* reassured its readers, that “the original plans were wrong or skimpy. Rather it underlines the fact that the original thinking for a new plant was correct.”⁸¹ And it was not unexpected; the factory had been built “with an eye to the future...in such a way that enlargements could be easily made.”⁸² The factory was expanded from 60,000 square feet to 100,000 square feet in 1964 and was further enlarged in 1973, 1978, and 1985.⁸³

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s C. T. Loewen & Sons were recognized for these various advances beyond the pages of the *Carillon News*. In 1959 the firm was one of five to win a merit award from the Manitoba Department of Industry and Commerce for a new improvement on an existing product, a Loewen-Bilt window unit.⁸⁴ In July 1963 the firm was named “Building Supply Dealer of the Year,” by the magazine, *Building Supply Dealer*. The award was given to the “firm considered to have done the most to stimulate full employment and business prosperity in its area during the year.”⁸⁵ In July 1964 twenty Canadian “foreign trade commissioners,” delegates being sent to promote Canadian products abroad, visited the C. T. Loewen factory on their tour to “familiarize themselves with the various items for export manufactured in Canada.” The delegates were leaving shortly for destinations as close to home as Winnipeg, Chicago, Ottawa, New York City, and Boston, and locations as exotic as Melbourne, Australia; Singapore; Santiago, Chile; Glasgow, Scotland; and Copenhagen, Denmark.⁸⁶ By the end of the 1960s the retail store and the millwork factory were well-established as integral to the economy and growth of

⁸¹ “The Loewen Millwork Plant Is Western Canada’s Largest,” *Carillon News*, 30 June 1961, 3:1.

⁸² C. T. Loewen & Sons, *Sixty years of Progress, 1905-1965: “Serving Each New Generation.”*

⁸³ “Loewen Factory Will Double Floor Space,” *Carillon News*, 8 May 1964, 1:1; “\$¾ million expansion for Loewen Millwork,” *Carillon News*, 7 February 1973, 1:1; “Millwork plant begins \$1.4 million expansion,” *Carillon News*, 11 October 1978, 1:1; “Loewen Windows launches large factory expansion,” *Carillon News*, 16 October 1985, 1A.

⁸⁴ *Carillon News*, 26 June 1959, 1.

⁸⁵ “C. T. Loewens Win National Award,” *Carillon News*, 5 July 1963, 1:7.

⁸⁶ *Carillon News*, 3 July 1964, 1:1.

Southeastern Manitoba, and were recognized well beyond their rural, and once isolated, location.

In 1971 Ed Loewen was named “Lumberman of the Year” by the 800-member Western Retail Lumbermen’s Association, “one of the oldest trade organizations in Canada” which was open to lumbermen from the Lakehead to B. C.⁸⁷ “It might as well have been called ‘Steinbach night,’” the *Carillon News* boasted in typical fashion. Held at the Fort Garry Hotel in Winnipeg, it was the Steinbach girls’ youth choir, the Treble Teens, who had been asked to provide the entertainment and “they even sang a song in honor of Mr. Loewen.”⁸⁸ Edward accepted the award on behalf of the company, the newspaper reported. “Much credit, he said, was due to the company’s founder, the late C. T. Loewen.”⁸⁹

The year 1971, however, saw a significant restructuring at Loewen’s, reflecting the beginning of yet another generational succession. Ed Loewen, who had suffered with heart problems since a heart attack in 1955⁹⁰ retired at the end of 1971 selling his shares in the business to his two younger brothers, George and Cornie. Effective 1 January 1972, George took over the retail operation with his own three sons, Gary, Roger, and Curt, while Cornie assumed control of the Steinbach millwork factory and the Edmonton and Kitchener branches.⁹¹ Edward could not be reached for comment before the *Carillon News*’s press deadline on the day of the announcement but George told the newspaper that no major changes in operation would take place immediately. He went on to describe the split: “We are dividing the operation

⁸⁷ “Ed Loewen named lumberman of the year,” *Carillon News*, 10 February 1971, 1:1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Ralph Guenther interview, C. T. Loewen Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba. From the background [of the tape] Marlene Guenther (Ralph’s wife and sister of Edward’s wife Anna) dated it exactly as 17 October 1955.

⁹¹ “Ed Loewen stepping down at C. T.’s,” *Carillon News*, 15 December 1971, 1:1.

amiably and satisfactorily, just as we have been working together for so many years.”⁹²

Bliss describes the 1970s as a decade of “soaring energy costs, rampant inflation, and apparently high unemployment, producing a popular (and constantly media-fed) sense of unsatisfactory economic performance. But,” he points out, “output and total employment regularly rose year after year.”⁹³

The world wanted Canadian products; foreigners and Canadians rushed to invest in Canada; high levels of consumer confidence and spending kept domestic markets thriving; technological improvements in products from diapers to space stations fed consumer aspirations, revolutionized production and communications methods, and began to knit the world into Marshall McLuhan’s ‘global village.’⁹⁴

These developments, like the world wars, the Depression, and the postwar booms before them, were felt in the Loewen lumber businesses based in Steinbach, Manitoba. And they were experienced most keenly by Loewen Millwork, the name chosen for the door and window manufacturing division, as it increasingly moved beyond its local and provincial boundaries. The firm remained very much a part of Southeast Manitoba, the area which provided the employee base for its main branch in Steinbach, at the same time becoming an increasingly national company in scope.

C. T. Loewen & Sons (the retail store and lumberyard) and Loewen Millwork (which was often referred to locally as Loewen Windows, but did not adopt that name until 1985⁹⁵) both became increasingly professional during the 1970s. When C. T. Loewen & Sons advertised their new “while you wait blueprinting” service in 1972 they featured two employees, noting that both had drafting certificates from Red River Community College, one spoke English, German, and Low German, the other

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Bliss, 481.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “Loewen Windows – The New Company Name That Says It All,” *Loewen Behold*, 11:3 (October 1985), 1.

spoke French, plans would be drawn to national building standards, and registered engineers would be consulted “for structural design approval.”⁹⁶ Education, not just experience had become important; experts were to be consulted; government standards were to be upheld; even multilingualism was a selling feature.

During the 1970s Loewen Millwork job ads took on a new look and language of professionalism. In July 1973 a position was open for “an aggressive person to develop into a quality control supervisor, with an expanding company.” Experience in either the building trade or in millwork were “desirable” and salary would be “commensurate with qualifications and experience.”⁹⁷ Earlier ads had required experience and/or education, but the position was a new one, “quality control supervisor,” as was the adjective “aggressive” and the description of an “expanding company.” By June 1975 the company was using a logo in all its advertising, job ads increased in size and frequency, and “good company benefits plus excellent working conditions” were emphasized.⁹⁸ The confidentiality of applications was assured and some positions, for example, purchasing assistant and layout artists, were described as excellent career opportunities.⁹⁹

Apart from the almost weekly job ads, Loewen Millwork, with their distribution network to dealers across five provinces, no longer advertised in the *Carillon News*. They did, however, aggressively promote their products during the 1970s and early 1980s, with several different campaigns which they introduced to their dealers in a company publication, begun in 1975, called *Loewen Behold*. The 1978 campaign was in response to the “soaring energy costs” of the 1970s.¹⁰⁰ On the front page of the March/April issue of *Loewen Behold*, the company announced “look

⁹⁶ *Carillon News*, 26 January 1972, 1:3.

⁹⁷ *Carillon News*, 25 July 1973, 1:17.

⁹⁸ *Carillon News*, 16 July 1975, 1:1.

⁹⁹ *Carillon News*, 23 July 1975, 1:9; 30 July 1975, 1:11.

¹⁰⁰ Bliss, 481.

out marketplace...we've 'energized' our approach." Dealers were informed that new product brochures were "zeroing in on" the energy conservation values of Loewen doors and windows... "values which will mean a great deal to your customers being hit with soaring heating bills."¹⁰¹ With an "attention grabbing slogan" designed as a "thought-provoking statement which means the exact opposite of what it may first appear" – "Close your windows (and doors) on the energy problem with Loewen Windows" – and "strong visuals" to "double the sales impact," the company felt they had "achieved an effect that will encourage consumers to identify with our promotional material and thus utilize it in their buying decision."¹⁰² "The slogan," "the visual impact," the promotional package," *Loewen Behold*, these were new ventures for Loewen millwork, ones which both reflected and advanced the expansion of the business.

The 1970s marked a decade of significant and previously unsurpassed expansion at Loewen Millwork. Bliss describes the 1970s as a boom period during which an "inflation mentality" prompted businesses to risk increased spending and borrowing with the belief that prices would continue to increase.¹⁰³ The Loewens' list of expansions during this period suggests that this mentality was prevalent in the Steinbach-based business. In 1973, Loewen Millwork, still the largest millwork factory in Western Canada, announced a "\$¾ million" expansion on the Steinbach plant, creating thirty new jobs and bringing the total area of the building to 160,000 square feet, making it the largest building in Steinbach, "surpassing even the recently-completed regional school complex."¹⁰⁴ A federal government grant of \$141,400 from the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) accounted for 20 per

¹⁰¹ "Look out marketplace... We've 'energized' our approach," *Loewen Behold*, 4:1 (March/April 1978), 1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁰³ Bliss, 551.

¹⁰⁴ "\$¾ million expansion for Loewen Millwork," *Carillon News*, 7 February 1973, 1:1.

cent of the \$707,000 capital investment.¹⁰⁵ The expansion included a new wood treatment area and general offices and was, the *Carillon News* thought, part of another boom. “A record number of residential and commercial building construction projects,” it reported, “may give the Town of Steinbach a boom year in 1973 such as it has never seen before.”¹⁰⁶ Here was the “inflation mentality” at its best; things just kept getting better and better.

In October 1973 front page fears were actually of employment shortages. Cornie Loewen was interviewed and reportedly told the paper that Loewen Millwork could hire twelve additional people on the spot and by winter would need another thirty. “There is no unemployment in this area,” Cornie stated emphatically, “for anyone even remotely interested in a job there’s lots of work.”¹⁰⁷ C. T. Loewen & Sons had also reported shortages in building labour over the summer. George Loewen said that the firm was only now catching up on building projects “because of a manpower shortage during the summer construction peak.”¹⁰⁸ Things were going well for both firms. C. T.’s opened their newly-remodelled store on Main Street in January 1974, but the big news was the official opening of the Loewen Millwork expansion in June of the same year.

Another Manitoba Industry Minister spoke at the opening. Len Evans told 350 invited guests and employees that “expansions such as this were indicative of a generally booming economy which was providing an ever-increasing number of jobs.”¹⁰⁹ In noting inflation trends, Evans pointed out that “years ago you could buy much more for five cents, but sometimes there were no jobs to earn even such a small amount.” He was, he said, particularly proud of Loewen Millwork, a Manitoba

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “It looks like another boom,” *Carillon News*, 4 April 1973, 2:1.

¹⁰⁷ “If you want a job, it’s waiting for you,” *Carillon News*, 31, October 1973, 1:1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “\$¼ million expansion opened,” *Carillon News*, 12 June 1974, 1:1.

industry, “which was selling the bulk (78 per cent) of its product outside the province.”¹¹⁰ Cornie Loewen gave a brief tribute to his father, and then outlined the company’s present size: 150 employees; an annual payroll of more than \$1 million; and six carloads of lumber and glass used in production every week.¹¹¹ A. D. Penner, now Steinbach’s mayor, congratulated Cornie for choosing to expand the company and increase local employment when he could have been satisfied with a good living from a smaller operation. (This was praise for something which would have been admonished in the Steinbach of fifty years earlier.) Other platform speakers were MP Jake Epp, Gray Gillespie, a federal Department of Industry, Trade, and Commerce representative, and Rev. Arnold Fast, pastor of the Evangelical Mennonite Church.¹¹² Rev. Fast was only one of several guests who spoke, and was not even quoted in the *Carillon News*. His presence, like that of Rev. P. D. Friesen in 1955, suggests that the Mennonite Church that once warned against business activity now blessed its very success; Rev. Fast’s absence from the *Carillon News* report suggests that it was politicians who were now given pride of place at business openings in Steinbach.

The 1970s were also years of expansion at Loewen Millwork’s Canadian branches in Edmonton and Kitchener. In addition, two more branches were opened. In 1976 a 14,600 square feet warehouse with a limited assembly operation opened in Saskatoon.¹¹³ Cornie’s two eldest sons, Paul and Charles, were named as Branch Manager and Warehouse Manager, respectively. Paul had previously been Manager of Personnel in Steinbach, and Charles had been responsible for Transportation.¹¹⁴ In a similar way that C. T. sent Edward and then Cornie to Rosenort, and Edward and George to the lumber camps, Cornie was preparing his own sons for the top positions

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Saskatoon in full operation,” *Loewen Behold*, 2:2 (June 1976), 2.

¹¹⁴ “Personnel announced for Saskatchewan Branch,” *Loewen Behold*, 2:1 (March 1976), 1.

in the company. In the summer of the same year the company announced its own fleet of trucks to transport their products, saving freight charges and ensuring “safer handling of our products and much better regular contact with out dealers.”¹¹⁵

Operating out of the four main centres – Steinbach, Kitchener, Edmonton, and Saskatoon – the new transportation allowed the majority of dealers to be serviced “at least once a week.”¹¹⁶

In 1977 the Saskatoon plant was expanded from the original 14,600 square feet to 57,360 square feet.¹¹⁷ In 1979 Loewen Millwork opened a branch in Calgary, and announced the closure of their Ontario division in Kitchener.¹¹⁸ In an interview with the *Carillon News*, Cornie Loewen reportedly said that “Ontario has several good; established window manufacturers selling to building supply companies,” and so Loewen Millwork had “just not been able to crack the Ontario market.”¹¹⁹ The earlier period of elation that “while eastern manufacturing companies frequently look to the West to expand their business, Loewen Millwork did just the opposite”¹²⁰ was muted. “Despite the decision to close the Kitchener operation, the company is having its biggest sales year ever across Canada, Mr. Loewen indicated,”¹²¹ but, at least for the rest of Cornie’s time at Loewen Millwork, Eastern Canada remained a market which they could not “crack.”

In Steinbach C. T. Loewen & Sons continued to introduce new services, and to renovate their store, hold annual store-wide sales, and, in the 1970s, they also joined a building supply centre buying group, “Tim-Br-Mart” which allowed the independent

¹¹⁵ “Direct to dealers – Loewen hits the road!” *Loewen Behold*, 2:2 (July 1976), 1.

¹¹⁶ “Delivery Success,” *Loewen Behold*, 3:2 (October/November 1977), 2.

¹¹⁷ “Saskatchewan branch continues to grow,” *Loewen Behold*, 3:2 (October/November 1977), 3.

¹¹⁸ “Good news, bad news,” *Loewen Behold*, 5:3 (October 1979), 4.

¹¹⁹ “Firm closing branch plant,” *Carillon News*, 3 October 1979, 1:3.

¹²⁰ “Service enhanced by Ontario Division,” *Loewen Behold*, 1:2 (June 1975), 1.

¹²¹ “Firm closing branch plant,” *Carillon News*, 3 October 1979, 1:3.

members to buy their stocks at reduced prices.¹²² In December 1976 they introduced a new interior design service and a new employee, Joanne Gregorchuk, who had a degree in the field.¹²³ They offered lots for sale in communities around Steinbach as well as in Steinbach itself, where, in 1975, they had opened a new subdivision, the “Meadows,” on the town’s southwestern corner, well “away from downtown bustle.”¹²⁴ In 1980, the year of the 75th anniversary, C. T. Loewen & Sons’ *Carillon News* advertisements each carried a page of a flashback booklet which could be cut out and then stapled together and which told the history of the company. In the anniversary year they also opened their newly renovated “Home Centre” with a three-day open house, complete with live radio broadcast, and the requisite door prizes.¹²⁵ It was estimated that about 2500 people attended over the three days.¹²⁶

Loewen Millwork also staged an open house for the 75th anniversary celebrations. It was a two-day long event. On the first day dealers and suppliers were given tours and an opening ceremony was held.¹²⁷ On the second day residents of Steinbach and area were welcomed to the plant for conducted tours and refreshments.¹²⁸ Several special guests attended the ceremony including Rev. Abe Neufeld, Mayor A. D. Penner, Art Friesen, President of the Chamber of Commerce, Mrs. Lydia Epp representing her husband Jake Epp, MP for Provencher, Bob Banman, MLA for Hanover, and J. Frank Johnston, Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. These were the usual honoured guests, the new addition to the group was the fictional character of the company’s newest marketing campaign, L. Porteous Fenster. “A touch of the past and a benchmark for the future,” he epitomized “the

¹²² *Carillon News*, 22 September 1971, 1:3.

¹²³ *Carillon News*, 8 December 1976, 1:3.

¹²⁴ *Carillon News*, 1 October 1975, 1:3.

¹²⁵ *Carillon News*, 23 April 1980, 8A.

¹²⁶ “Renovated C. T. Loewen store geared for do-it-yourselfer,” *Carillon News*, 30 April 1980, 2A.

¹²⁷ “Anniversary open house a great success,” *Loewen Behold*, 6:3 (August 1980), 1.

¹²⁸ *Carillon News*, 4 June 1980, 7A.

wood craftsman who then and now added loving care to the plying of his tools.” Two long-time employees dressed up as Mr. Fenster (whose name was taken from the French for door and the German for window), a smiling old man, with a mustache and glasses, wearing overalls with a pencil and a ruler in his top pocket, to represent “the old-fashioned quality of craftsmanship that goes into each Loewen product.” The slogan stated it simply, “Traditionally crafted for our Canadian climate. Since 1905.”¹²⁹ Of course, this is not strictly true, C. T. was only sawing lumber in the bush, as his father had before him, in 1905, but it worked in 1980 to instill confidence in Loewen products. Cornie Loewen again made a special dedication to C. T., and interpreted the growth of the last seventy-five years as the result of “hard work, dedication, and faith.”¹³⁰ Here again were words that previous generations would have used, but with very different meanings.

The growth of the Loewens’ businesses during the 1970s is evidence of the extent to which they were integrated into the Canadian economy. And one of the issues facing business in Canada and in Steinbach in the 1970s was labour unrest. Although Cornie Loewen’s son Charles, later CEO of Loewen Windows, does not recall attempts to unionize at Loewen Millwork in Steinbach, the *Carillon News* reported widely on discussions in Steinbach on unionization.¹³¹ From January 1975 to February 1976 five articles appeared in the pages of the *Carillon News* discussing the Mennonite church’s stance on labour union membership and the increasing antagonism between employers and employees in urban, industrial Canada. In an interview for a television program featuring the Manitoba Mennonites aired on 22 December 1974, Cornie Loewen was asked why they were not any unions in Steinbach. Cornie replied that unions had always been “discouraged by churches.

¹²⁹ “75 years of progress,” *Loewen Behold*, 6:1 (March 1980), 1.

¹³⁰ “Anniversary open house a great success,” *Loewen Behold*, 6:3 (August 1980), 1.

¹³¹ Conversation with Charles Loewen, November 2002.

Self-sufficiency has been a strong factor in the development of the business community.”¹³² Two weeks later the *Carillon News* noted religious leaders’ argument that “a person should also have the right not to join a labor union,”¹³³ and that Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) (Manitoba) was in discussion with the government to guarantee the rights of “conscientious objectors” who, on religious principle, did not want to join a union.¹³⁴ The problem of unionization continued to concern some Steinbach Mennonites, however. In January 1976 a Mennonite minister in Steinbach told the *Carillon News* that while Mennonites had not wanted to become members of labour unions “because there’s something about the power strategy that we didn’t like, urbanization has simply demanded involvement.”¹³⁵

In answer to that concern, MCC held a labour-management seminar in Steinbach, and in two other Manitoba centres in January 1976. There had been no reports of union issues in Steinbach, but struggles in the Mennonite towns of Altona and Winkler, Manitoba, 120 kilometers west of Steinbach, were, no doubt, known in Steinbach.¹³⁶ At the MCC seminar in Steinbach, speakers Professor John H. Redekopp, from the Political Science department at Wilrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, and Gerald Vandezande, executive director of the Committee for Justice and Liberty, suggested that the problem was that in modern, urban, industrial society, “materialism was the god, consumption the goal and routine production or

¹³² “TV program relates story of Mennonites,” *Carillon News*, 2 January 1975, 1:2.

¹³³ “A person should also have the right not to join a labor union,” *Carillon News*, 15 January 1975, 1:4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ “Labor, Management, meeting at Steinbach,” *Carillon News*, 21 January 1976, 1:1. Pastor P. G. Sawatzky of the Grace Mennonite Church, Steinbach was quoted.

¹³⁶ “Mennonites struggle with union membership issue,” *Carillon News*, 26 November 1975, 2:1. In Winkler, eight nurses refused to join the Bethel Hospital Nurses Association as they did not want to strike and abandon those in need of care, and they also felt that biblical Scripture called them to be content with their wages, and not to “render evil for evil or to exercise vengeance.” This rationale was in keeping with traditional Mennonite beliefs in non-resistance. In her M. A. thesis on Friesens Corporation in Altona, Janis Thiessen notes that “the conflict of Friesens’ corporate values with the atmosphere of labour unrest prevalent in Canadian society manifested itself in the 1972 efforts to organize the pressroom.” Janis Thiessen, “Friesens Corporation: Printers in Mennonite Manitoba, 1951-1995,” M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1997, 103.

service the means to the end.” They proposed the Christian Labor Association, a government-certified, independent Christian labour movement with locals in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia as an alternative to adversarial unionism.¹³⁷ Both the MCC seminar, and *Carillon News* reports indicate that Mennonite businesses’ involvement in the wider Canadian economy challenged traditional Anabaptist Mennonite beliefs and practices, and created a demand for discussion of relationships between employer and employees.

And as the businesses experienced growth with the economy in the 1970s, so they were also affected by the sudden recession of the early 1980s. In the light of Bliss’s examples of Canadian business giants Massey, Dome and Canadair, which were in Bliss’s words reduced to “corporate basket cases,” the Loewens appear to have come through the period well.¹³⁸ Yet they were not immune. “All of Canadian business suffered hard punishment in the deep international recession of 1981-82, the worst downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s.”¹³⁹

The first effects appear to have been felt in 1977. In October Loewen Millwork laid off fifty employees, and Cornie Loewen told the *Carillon News* that the company had “experienced a sluggish year all year.” Loewen predicted that the market would recover somewhat the following year.¹⁴⁰ He seems to have been correct. In October 1978, Loewen announced an expansion which had been planned eighteen months earlier but had to be put on hold “because of economic uncertainties last year.”¹⁴¹ In 1977 the company had been offered a federal government DREE loan for approximately \$300,000. However, the offer was withdrawn when the company reapplied in 1978. “They told us we were a viable business and could undertake the

¹³⁷ “Christians may have to pay high price,” *Carillon News*, 4 February 1976, 1:1.

¹³⁸ Bliss, 550.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ “Millwork firm lays off 50 employees,” *Carillon News*, 26 October 1977,

¹⁴¹ “Millwork plant begins \$1.4 million expansion,” *Carillon News*, 11 October 1978, 1:1.

expansion without their help,” Loewen told the *Carillon News*. Loewen Millwork consequently reduced the size of the project from \$1.7 million to a still significant \$1.4 million.¹⁴²

By 1983 many Steinbach businesses were feeling the effects of the depressed economy. The *Carillon News* reported that “Main Street property owners in Steinbach overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to rebuild utilities, sidewalks and boulevards along the thoroughfare at an estimated cost of well over \$1 million.”¹⁴³ “We can’t afford it,” George Loewen was quoted as saying, “we’ll need several profitable business years just to recoup our losses from the past three years.”¹⁴⁴ However, in March of the same year Loewen Millwork hired more employees due to “an encouraging number of orders” in recent weeks.¹⁴⁵ It does appear that the firm, like other businesses, had felt the effects of the recession. The newspaper sought to explain the increase in orders, wondering if it could be “due to a rejuvenation of the housing industry.”¹⁴⁶ The forty new workers were only hired on an indefinite basis and Charles Loewen, production manager, said they “should be retained at least through the summer.”¹⁴⁷ In November 1984, in order to avoid more lay-offs, Loewen Millwork introduced a work-sharing program which had employees working a three-day week and receiving unemployment insurance for the other two days. Loewen said that the program, the first of its kind in the firm’s history, had been implemented “in the face of greater-than-expected reductions in winter demand for the company’s products.”¹⁴⁸ In January 1985 workers were back to full-time, Loewen Millwork

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ “Merchants say no to Main Street proposal,” *Carillon News*, 12 January 1983, 1A.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ “Loewen plant adding workers,” *Carillon News*, 9 March 1983, 1A.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “Millwork workers begin work-sharing program,” *Carillon News*, 21 November 1984, 1A.

“was currently embarking on a mid-winter promotion,” and were hopeful that with the approach of the 1985 building season, the “upward trend would continue.”¹⁴⁹

Things certainly seemed to improve. In March 1985 the company made several hundred employees recipients of the company’s first profit-sharing payout. Bonuses ranged from \$500 to \$1500 and were paid to all employees who had been with the firm for at least twelve months of the past two years.¹⁵⁰ The bonus was more a reward than an incentive, Paul Loewen, now company president explained. Though sales had been down slightly in 1984, the company had actually “improved its cost-effectiveness through better advertising strategies, work sharing during the winter, automation and introduction of a new line of metal clad windows.” In May of 1985 a branch plant was opened in Regina, and in October the company, now officially named Loewen Windows, began its “largest and most costly” expansion project.¹⁵¹

At a cost of \$3 million and “without any form of government assistance,” the expansion was planned to increase the size of the plant to about eight acres, “alleviate congestion in the machining, assembling and loading dock areas,” and allow the addition of new product lines. Cornie Loewen, now company chairman, again credited his father, and, on this occasion, his mother. His parents, had, Loewen said, “taught the children to work hard and be good stewards of whatever was entrusted to them.”¹⁵² A *Carillon News* editorial announced “Plant expansion shows faith,” and proclaimed that

If, as Peter Neuman [sic] said in a recent issue of *Macleans*, Canada needs more Harrison McCains (the New Brunswick based frozen food magnate) then the country, and particularly rural communities, need many more people of Cornie Loewen’s vision and grasp.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ “Millwork employees back to full time,” *Carillon News*, 9 January 1985, 1A.

¹⁵⁰ “Loewen employees get profit-sharing bonus,” *Carillon News*, 27 March 1985, 1A.

¹⁵¹ “Window firm opens Regina branch plant,” *Carillon News*, 8 May 1985, 5A. “Loewen Windows launches large factory expansion,” *Carillon News*, 16 October 1985, 1A.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ “Plant expansion shows faith,” *Carillon News*, 16 October 1985, 4A.

This turned out to be a final tribute to Cornie, who died suddenly four days later on 20 October 1985, ten days after the expansion project was announced.¹⁵⁴

This account of the Loewen lumber businesses in Steinbach, Manitoba has been a booster history viewed mostly through the eyes of the *Carillon News*, Steinbach's newspaper, which had a vested interest in the success of Steinbach's local businesses. Absent from this narrative are company records that would have provided more precise details of the growth of the company and strategies it employed in order to establish a large, non-unionized work force.¹⁵⁵ Company records would also have facilitated a study of new materials and machinery which were purchased, and new techniques which were employed, in order to compete with other wood manufacturers in Canada. This has been a history of the public face of a growing corporation.

But in the way that the company portrayed itself in public was an important message of cultural change. The company's lingua franca changed from German to English, its region of activity increased from southeastern Manitoba to a full anchoring in Western Canada and forays beyond; its management culture had changed from a paternalism rooted in communitarian values to a professionalism informed by a national business culture; its consumer focus had shifted from serving the needs of local agriculture to satisfying the consumer wants of Canadian suburbia. These changes did not leave the firms' managers unaffected. Their sense of being Mennonite, in both ethnic and religious terms, and their sense of what was required of a "man" changed to reflect the new corporate culture. The life of Cornie Loewen, the fourth Cornelius, reflects this changed identity.

¹⁵⁴ "Cornie Loewen dies at age 59," 23 October 1985, 1A.

¹⁵⁵ I did not have access to the company records for this study.

It may seem arbitrary to focus on the fourth Cornelius alone and overlook his older brothers, Edward and George. For the sake of space, because it was Cornie who attracted the most community attention with his leadership of Loewen Millwork, and because his worldview echoed that of his brothers, the final chapter of this thesis examines Cornie. Cornie Loewen was representative of a new post-war Mennonite businessman.

Chapter Six: Cornelius Paul Loewen, Passionate Man

C. T. Loewen is best understood as the *self-made man*. C. T. was Steinbach's lumberman, as his brothers were "Oil Trader Isaac T. Loewen," "our Chevy-Mann" Peter T. Loewen, "our Undertaker" Abraham T. Loewen, and "House mover" Jacob T. Loewen.¹ C. T.'s work was his passion and it defined him. His work achievements gave him his place in society apart from the status his family had always had. C. T. failed to marry into Steinbach's merchant elite but he made for himself a place in any list of Steinbach's wealthiest businessmen. With financial success came church and civic responsibility which C. T. embraced. Involved in much of Steinbach's early development, C. T. was successful in all aspects of his life and was much admired by his communities which valued hard work, action, wealth, strong leadership and simple taste as the defining features of a manly man.

Meanings of Manhood

C. T.'s three sons, Edward, George, and, the focus of this chapter, Cornie, were brought up in the same community as their father. They attended the *Kleine Gemeinde* church and, from an early age, they were given increasing responsibilities within the family business. Yet Steinbach and the church were very different places than they had been when C. T. was a child. In the 1890s Steinbach's Main Street was lined with the Mennonite agrarian architecture of housebarns; by the 1920s large residences, retail stores, and businesses had replaced the earlier farmyards. As noted in the chapter on C. T. Loewen, the family still kept a milking cow when the children were young. The cattle were picked up every morning to be taken to the community

¹ *Steinbach Post* 19 June 1929, 8; 29 May 1935, 4; 14 October 1936, 8; 19 May 1932, 8; 24 May 1944, 4.

pasture and brought back every night by a village cowherd. As noted above, when the milking became middle son George's responsibility, he decided to make a deal with a Mr. Thiessen to exchange the cow for a daily supply of milk for the family, a deal which allowed C. T. to get rid of the cow.² Al Reimer, a Steinbach boy in the 1930s and 1940s, remembered awaking to two very different sounds on summer mornings in the 1930s: the cowherd's horn against the "industrial hum coming from C. T. Loewen's bee supply factory a block away on Main."³ Steinbach had changed, and was continuing to change, from a small Mennonite farm village to an important service and retail centre. Reimer interpreted the horn as "the last defiant squawk of the old Darp against the smoothly efficient technology of the developing business town."⁴

The church had also changed despite early attempts by church leaders to maintain the status quo. Ältester Peter R. Dueck fought to keep all innovations out of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church community, and he was concerned particularly with the introduction of cars, telephones, big business, Sunday School instruction, and the decision to turn Steinbach's parochial, German-language school into a public school.⁵ Church historians noted at the sesquicentennial anniversary of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in 1962 that World War One and the death of Ältester Dueck in 1919 marked "the end of an era in which we had practically no changes in the practices and customs of the church."⁶ They discussed the controversy over automobiles in some detail concluding that

² Mary Loewen Hoepfner, 114-115.

³ Al Reimer, "Growing Up and Down in Steinbach in the 30s and 40s," Speech presented at the HSHS AGM, January 18, 1997, *Preservings*, 21 (December 2002): 109.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ P. J. B. Reimer, and David P. Reimer, eds., *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1812-1962*, (Steinbach, MB: The Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), 29, and Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 245-250.

⁶ Reimer and Reimer, *Sesquicentennial Jubilee*, 29.

if we compare them [the cars of the 1910s] with the streamlined powerful luxurious models driven now, half a century later, even by members of the ministry in the *Kleine Gemeinde*, we are amazed at how much a church can change in fifty years and yet proclaim the same gospel.⁷

This change did not take fifty years, however, and the nature of the “proclaimed gospel” changed significantly during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

A Sunday School program was approved in 1926, choral singing in 1927, cathedral style seating in 1931, missionary work by 1937.⁸ In 1946 lay members of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, under the leadership of minister Ben D. Reimer, established their own missionary organization, the Western Gospel Mission, which, though not supported by all the *Kleine Gemeinde* churches, was sanctioned by the ministry.⁹ Six years later, in 1952, the *Kleine Gemeinde* church became the Evangelical Mennonite Church, reflecting its new ideology and identity which had begun to be developed in the 1920s.¹⁰

This was the church in which Edward and Cornie were baptized and were active members throughout their adult lives. George joined the majority of Steinbach business families in the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, which, when introduced to Steinbach by American missionaries in 1897 as the *Bruderthaler* church, had first attracted younger, more educated, and poorer citizens of Steinbach, but by the 1940s appealed particularly to the “upper class.”¹¹ The extent of the change which the *Kleine Gemeinde* underwent during the 1920s and 1930s is evidenced by the similar church work with which the three Loewen brothers were involved during their adult lives, though they attended different congregations.

⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁸ Reimer and Reimer, *Sesquicentennial Jubilee*, 12, 32-36; Schellenberg, in Abe Warkentin, ed., 206-207.

⁹ Ibid. See also Sue Barkman, *Ever-Widening Circles: EMC Missions Silver Jubilee, 1953-1978* (Steinbach: EMC Board of Missions, 1978), 21.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 263.

The church in which C. T.'s sons worshipped was arguably less concerned with the encroachment of the "world." There were fewer *Bruderschaft* meetings monitoring the actions and behaviour of church members. Thus when Cornie was interviewed for a television program featuring the story of Mennonites in Manitoba in 1963 and asked if there were still Mennonite churches that discouraged their young people from entering business, he responded that only one or two of the more conservative Mennonite churches would prefer their young people not to go into business. When questioned whether Mennonite churches would rather their members not have too much wealth, Cornie noted that it is the "pattern of living," the lifestyle, that was important. He felt that as long as the churches see that their members practicing good stewardship with their finances, "they're quite happy."¹² Cornie apparently did not experience the criticism of big houses, oak doors, and piano lessons that his father endured.

As the community developed from a farm village to a service centre, and the church shifted its emphasis from a communal, simple lifestyle to an evangelical, mainstream Protestant, personal faith, meanings of manhood also changed further. The revision of what it meant to "be a man," similarly did not occur overnight, and as C. B. Loewen displayed aspects of communal and self-made manhood, so C. T.'s sons embraced the values of their father's self-made masculine identity, while adopting some of the emerging facets of masculinity. Rotundo calls this new manhood, *passionate manhood*, a masculinity which asserted that sports were no longer just for boys, nor were leisure and consumerism any longer the marks of womanhood, but were appropriate behaviour for the *passionate man*. This phase of manhood, the product of the twentieth century, retained its emphasis on work and a man's ability to

¹² Cornie Loewen interviewed for CBC's "Eye to Eye" program aired 22 and 29 October 1963, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, F3673-F3674 CBC Can No. A13; F3675-F3676 CBC Can No. A14.

determine his own status through his work. However, a man's identity was also developed through extra-curricular activities.¹³ A man's aggressive nature was no longer viewed as destructive to society and something to be controlled, but, due in part to the popularity of Social Darwinism, was seen as essential to a healthy civilization. Competitive sports provided a venue for these "manly animal instincts."¹⁴ Games had previously been viewed as childish, but now games, and boyhood, were no longer things to leave behind in order to become a man. Men and boys were no longer opposites, they were simply different stages of the same masculine identity.¹⁵ In fact, women became the only and essential opposite to manhood.¹⁶ And as women entered the "world" of men – the marketplace, the workplace, and the political arena – men moved the boundaries, defining themselves once again as essentially different to women.

While aspects of Rotundo are useful to a discussion of the last generation (in this study) of Loewen lumbermen, Mennonite society was significantly different from the nineteenth century Northern United States culture. The religious nature of Mennonite Steinbach is particularly important to consider. The Mennonite lumbermen continued to define their manhood with reference to leadership and activity in the church. They had their own sense of moral values and, as Cornie Loewen's discussion of stewardship and lifestyle in the 1963 television interview suggests, their religious beliefs influenced their business practices. Then, too, the focus on war and violence which Rotundo describes, was largely absent from the pacifist Mennonite consciousness. Mark Moss, in his recent work *Manliness and Militarism*, discusses the place of conflict and war in boyhood culture in late nineteenth and early twentieth

¹³ Rotundo. This discussion begins on page 222.

¹⁴ Ibid., 240-243.

¹⁵ Ibid., 259.

¹⁶ Ibid., 262.

century Ontario.¹⁷ Moss writes that, in the face of modernization – in particular industrialization and urbanization – men feared that they would become superfluous and so they “tried desperately to hang on to their traditional roles of breadwinners, providers, and citizen-soldiers.”¹⁸ Sports, nature, adventure novels, cheering for sports teams, bonding at the pub, and especially war, became sites where men could “recapture a particular ideal of what real men were about.”¹⁹ Though some young Steinbach men did enter the armed forces during the Second World War, the Mennonite emphasis on non-resistance since the Reformation prevented conflict from becoming a general site where manhood could be tested or affirmed.

The sons of C. T. Loewen defined their manhood within their evangelical faith and the inherited practice of pacifism. Edward, born in 1919, George, two years younger, and Cornie, born in 1926, grew up in the era commonly identified with a new acceptance of manly aggression, manifesting itself partly as a renewed emphasis on war and violence. Yet the three Loewen boys were brought up in a church and community which preached non-resistance, even discouraging the ownership of guns. When the Second World War began, the three sons opted for alternative service work for their father in lumber camps he established during the same period, in Roblin (Manitoba), Hudson Bay Junction (Saskatchewan), and Rock Creek (BC).²⁰ Without the “ultimate forum for the exercise of masculinity,”²¹ how did the Loewen brothers prove themselves as men?

As has already been shown, C. T. Loewen valued work and he achieved his own status through that work. However, C. T.’s sons felt passion was acceptable,

¹⁷ Moss.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ A photograph of the three boys at one of the camps just after the war in 1947 can be found in *Sixty Years of Progress*.

²¹ Moss, 15.

even desired, if channelled correctly. C. T. felt that hockey was unnecessary and George, who was heralded as a hockey player skillful enough to play professionally, was told that his time would be better spent working in the family lumber business.²² C. T.'s sons continued to enjoy sports, hobbies, and taking vacations, even while working, to a much greater extent than their father ever had. Physical work was still emphasized but Parr's assertion is correct that "money could trump muscle in the ranking of manly prowess,"²³ and that "the new captain of industry was to be judged successful not by his capacity to work but by his capacity to secure leisure time for himself by hiring others."²⁴ True, the Loewen boys worked in lumber camps, and as a young man Cornie made truck deliveries to Winnipeg, but they soon left the "work" to others, employing their neighbours, for which they were most often viewed as serving the community, rather than reaping rewards.²⁵ The Loewens joined the rest of Steinbach's business elite vacationing in Florida, California, and Hawaii, wearing suits, travelling for business, and chairing and sitting on various church and civic committees.

C. P. "Cornie" Loewen

Descriptions of Cornie as a "man of accomplishment," a "man of vision," a true leader of people, whose aggression "was channelled to always doing things for the better and for the human side of business," are reminiscent of the remembered attributes of C. T.,²⁶ yet, Cornie lived a very different life from his father. Even Cornie's work in the "lower levels" of the business, as the ice delivery boy during his

²² C. Wilbert Loewen interview, C. T. Loewen Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB.

²³ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 155.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Loewen, "Poultrymen, Car Dealers, and Football Stars," 11.

²⁶ "In Memoriam: A Man of Accomplishment," *Loewen Behold*, 11:4 (December 1985), 3.

school years, the delivery truck driver to Winnipeg, a job which another employee, who sometimes accompanied Cornie, noted “didn’t feel like work,”²⁷ and, from the age of twenty-three, as the manager of the Loewen Lumber Co., the lumberyard the Loewens had acquired in the small centre of Rosenort, Manitoba, were far from the physical work of the bush sawmills where C. T. had started out. When Cornie returned to Steinbach after five years in Rosenort, he became General Manager by 1958, at the age of thirty-two.²⁸

Though a member of the same church as his father, Cornie’s involvement in the church was also significantly different than C. T.’s had been. Cornie seems to have been even more involved in church work than his father. At various times Cornie was active in the Sunday School department, and sat on (and chairing in some instances) the Trustee committee, Mission Board, Church Board, the nominating committee and the New Church Congregation Planning Committee.²⁹ Not only was his involvement greater than his father’s, it was also significantly different in content. As already noted, the *Kleine Gemeinde* became the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC) in 1952 after having gradually adopted an evangelical theology in response to other churches in Steinbach, and a larger North American movement. This new theology brought with it a focus on personal salvation away from communal faith and simple lifestyle. A particular consequence was the explosion of interest in evangelistic missions, both at home and abroad. Cornie sat on the Mission Board for the EMC Conference from 1962-1971, chairing the committee in that final year,³⁰ and in this capacity he travelled widely. The *Carillon News* carried reports of mission-

²⁷ Al Reimer, “C. P. Loewen, 1926-85: A personal tribute,” *Mennonite Mirror* (November 1985), 15.

²⁸ The first advertisement recognizing Cornie as General Manager appears in the *Carillon News* in June 1958.

²⁹ EMC Year End Reports, EMC Archives, Steinbach, Manitoba.

³⁰ Barkman, 46-7.

related trips to South America mission stations in January 1963,³¹ and to the Congo in March 1965 with his cousin Melvin Loewen.³² Cornie's interest in the missionary work of the church continued after he stepped down from the Missions Board in 1971. In 1974 Cornie travelled to Paraguay to discuss the possibility of setting up a radio station there to serve largely as an evangelism tool.³³ He travelled to Paraguay for a second time in November 1980,³⁴ and then, in February 1982, went on a three and a half week tour of African Inter-Mennonite Mission stations.³⁵

Beyond Steinbach

Cornie also travelled extensively with his business associates. From the late 1950s to 1985, the year of Cornie's sudden death, the *Carillon News* reported six business trips that Cornie took, as well as five conventions that he attended. Business took him to Saskatoon in 1959, Edmonton in 1960, Toronto in 1963, and Europe in 1973.³⁶ In 1979 Cornie went to Japan on business. In 1984 the *Carillon News* simply reported that he went "overseas."³⁷ Cornie's world, and the market for Loewen products, had expanded greatly. In the 1950s and 1960s he attended conventions in Winnipeg, Chicago, BC, Europe, and Texas. In 1969 when the Lumberman's Convention was held in Houston, Texas he flew the company's private plane there himself.³⁸ This was a very different life than his father's.

The greatest number of trips, by far, were those that he and his wife Annie took together, sometimes with Steinbach friends, sometimes with their children,

³¹ *Carillon News*, 18 January 1963, 1:3.

³² "Returning To Congo To Judge Situation," *Carillon News*, 19 March 1965, 1:1.

³³ Barkman, 105-9. An article about the Paraguay radio station ZP-30 appeared in the Mennonite Economic Development Associates publication *Marketplace*, May/June 2001.

³⁴ *Carillon News*, 26 November 1980, 16B.

³⁵ *Carillon News*, 24 February 1982, 7A.

³⁶ *Carillon News*, 6 March 1959, 4; 26 February 1960, 4; 29 November 1963, 1:3; 21 March 1973, 1:2.

³⁷ *Carillon News*, 11 April 1979, 1:4; 11 July 1984, 11A; 10 October 1984, 2B.

³⁸ *Carillon News*, 15 April 1955, 5; 25 January 1957, 3; 7 December 1962, 1:3; 14 May 1965, 1:3; 9 January 1969, 2:3.

sometimes leaving their family at home with aunts and uncles. The family, joined by Edward and/or George and their families, annually went to Clear Lake, Manitoba for the Labour Day weekend for a period during the 1950s and 1960s.³⁹ During these same years, Cornie and family would try to get away during the winter to warmer climates. In 1953 they travelled to Florida, in 1956 they visited family and friends in Nebraska and Kansas, and in 1957 they spent five weeks in Arizona, Mexico, and California.⁴⁰ The family enjoyed skiing and in 1960 they went to Banff with Ralph and Marlene Guenther (Ralph was the accountant and then Assistant Manager of the Retail Division at C. T. Loewen & Sons).⁴¹ In the 1960s Cornie and Annie also holidayed with Steinbach businessman Peter Barkman and his wife, travelling on various occasions to Phoenix, as well as skiing at Falcon Lake and in Minnesota.⁴² In December 1967 Cornie and Annie skied with Annie's brother and his wife, "Dr. and Mrs. Henry Hildebrand" of Vancouver, at Sunshine Village, Banff. In 1975 Cornie took his sons Stuart and Clyde, with two of their friends, to Banff and Lake Louise for ten days of skiing over Easter. The stark contrast between C. T. taking his family to visit sawmills in British Columbia and Cornie accompanying his two sons and their friends to a ski resort in Alberta is illustrative of the differences between the two generations of Loewen lumbermen.

Besides these travels in North America, Cornie and Annie also went further afield. In March 1983 the *Carillon News* reported that Cornie and Annie were on the Fiji islands, returning from an extended trip, where they experienced the aftermath of a devastating hurricane.⁴³ Two years later, in March 1985, the local news column

³⁹ *Carillon News*, 6 September 1957, 4; 11 September 1959, 4; 9 September 1960, 1-4; 8 September 1961, 1-2.

⁴⁰ *Carillon News*, 16 January 1953, 4; 13 April 1956, 4; 1 February 1957, 4.

⁴¹ *Carillon News*, 11 March 1960, 4.

⁴² *Carillon News*, 16 March 1962, 1-5; 27 March 1964, 1-3; 23 December 1965, 1-3.

⁴³ *Carillon News*, 16 March 1983, 5B.

informed Steinbachers that the “Cornie Loewens” were leaving for an extended trip of various countries, first stop Hawaii.⁴⁴ In May the column announced that Mr. and Mrs. Cornie Loewen and Mr. and Mrs. Wes Reimer recently flew to China.⁴⁵

It was not only his own business that provided him with opportunities to travel as his father never had. Cornie was involved in other organizations, in addition to his mission interests, and was named to various government and industry committees. In early 1971 Cornie travelled to the Soviet Union with fellow Steinbachers Peter and Edwin Barkman (of Barkman Concrete), as part of a Canadian delegation jointly sponsored by the Canadian Branch of the National Precast Concrete Association and the federal Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, to learn more about the precast concrete industry there. The three men were later interviewed for the *Carillon News* and they described their trip as one which took them into “a whole new world.”⁴⁶ Cornie described one factory they visited which employed 5000 people. “It was fantastic!” he was quoted as saying, “there is nothing like it anywhere in North America.”⁴⁷ Cornie was clearly impressed by what he saw; nine-storey, 200 suite apartments were being built in Moscow in 28 days and now they hoped to reduce that to 20 days. Cornie and the Barkmans had seen a whole new world. Ironically they had seen it in the land from which their ancestors had emigrated one hundred years before, but it was a place their great-grandparents would not have recognized and one which their fathers had never seen.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Cornie accepted appointments to many different committees that took him far beyond Steinbach’s boundaries. In February 1976 Cornie was asked to sit on a 12-member forest products consultative committee

⁴⁴ *Carillon News*, 20 March 1985, 15B.

⁴⁵ *Carillon News*, 8 May 1985, 13B.

⁴⁶ “Local visitors impressed with Russia technology,” *Carillon News*, 17 February 1971, 1-1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

as the sole representative from the prairie provinces. The committee was to provide a link between the industry and Ottawa and included top executives from some of Canada's largest companies.⁴⁸ In January 1978 Cornie was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Manitoba Development Corporation. He was also on the boards of the Lumberman's Insurance Company and Golden West Broadcasting Ltd., of which he became president in November 1980.⁴⁹ In July 1985, only months before he passed away, he was named to the 13-member board of directors at Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. This last position would have required Loewen to travel to Ottawa about once a month.⁵⁰ The other commitments also involved some travelling and all took Cornie away from Steinbach in actuality and beyond Steinbach in terms of influence and experience.

Steinbach's New Mennonite Man

Cornie always remained a Steinbacher, though his wealth and success did set him apart from other residents. Despite his other commitments as a successful Canadian businessman, Cornie remained involved in his church community, as well as Steinbach's business community and other civic organizations, an involvement that began early and continued throughout his lifetime. Childhood friend Al Reimer noted that soon after Cornie left school because "his talents [were] already required in the family business," they already had little in common since while Al thought about girls, books and his secret desire to be an artist, he recognized that Cornie was focused on "business and other serious matters like religion and the church." Reimer "couldn't wait to get away from Steinbach, while Cornie accepted it and couldn't wait

⁴⁸ "Loewen appointed to Federal committee," *Carillon News*, 11 February 1976, 1-1.

⁴⁹ "Loewen named to MDC Board," *Carillon News*, 4 January 1978, 1-1; "Loewen named radio president," *Carillon News*, 5 November 1980, 6A.

⁵⁰ "C. P. Loewen named to atomic board," *Carillon News*, 3 July 1985, 1A.

to begin his inherited business role in it.”⁵¹ At the age of 34 Cornie was elected President of the Steinbach Chamber of Commerce and described in the *Carillon News* as “one of their most energetic hard headed business men.”⁵² He served in this capacity for only a year but remained a member of the Chamber for many years. Cornie and Annie remained resident in Steinbach, though their move in the mid-1970s from “town” to a very large house that they had built on “vast homegrounds...[of] park-like beauty” on the outskirts of town set them apart from the community.⁵³

The “real men” in Steinbach were wealthy and successful. They travelled often and far, they led the community, they provided jobs for others, and while they worked hard, they also played hard, enjoying the leisure time that their success allowed. There was no doubt that Cornie was, in the estimation of the community, one of these men, perhaps even one of the best. Al Reimer’s tribute to Cornie after his death remembered that “although he was a hard worker, he was anything but a prisoner of his own success, a workaholic condemning himself to a life sentence in his office.” Instead, Cornie “carried his boyhood love of active sports into middle age,” remained a good golfer (in 1967 Cornie was part of a ten-man syndicate formed to build a fly-in golf course in Steinbach) and skier, and enjoyed flying until a heart condition forced him to give up his license.⁵⁴

Though wealth and success certainly determined rank in the community, the tremendous respect which Cornie was shown was continually explained as a result of his strongly held beliefs by which he always lived. Reimer wrote that

above all, Cornie was a humane Christian who never lost sight of the essentials in life. Born to privilege, command and money he certainly

⁵¹ Reimer, “C. P. Loewen, 1926-85,” 15.

⁵² “Chamber of Commerce Elects Cornie Loewen,” *Carillon News*, 3 February 1961, 1-1.

⁵³ *Carillon News*, 30 May 1979, 3-8. This entry reported that Cornie’s eldest son Paul was building a house quite near to Cornie and Annie’s whose “vast homegrounds are really beginning to shape up into park-like beauty by now.”

⁵⁴ Reimer, “C. P. Loewen, 1926-85,” 15.

was, but none of that ever went to his head. When C. P. Loewen spoke of the family business (and his own) as a stewardship held in trust from God nobody who knew the man and his beliefs was sceptical or suspected hypocrisy....He was a Christian businessman and he proved it every day of his life.⁵⁵

His obituary focused on his “unusual foresight and integrity,” “wise counsel,” and his desire to be a good steward, to live by Biblical values, and to have good relations with his employees.⁵⁶ The front page announcement of his sudden death noted his “fervent belief that business should be conducted by a code of ethics based on biblical teachings and compassion for his fellow man,” and his frequent lament that as the business grew he was finding it impossible to know each employee personally.⁵⁷ Two months after his death, the *Carillon News* printed an open letter to the C. P. Loewen family from the wife of a Loewen employee. Cathleen Gerus of Winnipeg wrote that Cornie Loewen “was a true Christian employer par excellance [sic].” She fondly remembered his “deep concern” for employees and their families, his encouragement of “wholesome attitudes, Christian conduct,” and his courageous presentation of “Christian doctrine, music, entertainment, atmosphere to the workplace and to celebrations alike.” She offered “fervent prayers of thanksgiving to God for the privilege of having known him.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

These hagiographic accounts of Cornie’s life were not simply an outpouring of fondness at a time of grief. Write-ups of Cornie’s work and other activities during his life had concluded similarly that he was a spiritual man with strong convictions who “practiced what he believed.” A 1978 article about Loewen Millwork in the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “C. P. Loewen” Obituary, *Carillon News*, 23 October 1985, 13A.

⁵⁷ “Cornie Loewen dies at age 59,” *Carillon News*, 23 October 1985, 1A.

⁵⁸ *Carillon News*, 31 December 1985, 4A.

Mennonite Mirror, a Winnipeg-based literary magazine offering critical analysis of Mennonite society, featured an interview with Cornie and Annie's eldest son Paul who told the interviewer that "in terms of long-term planning his father won't hesitate to also wonder how he might best serve God." The writer of the article perceived a link with the previous generation, writing that Cornie tied in the principles of "acting as good stewards, paying fair wages, giving an honest measure and yet making a good profit," and that C. T. Loewen had also lived by those principles.⁵⁹ Cornie's self-perception was linked to a public profile of the new ideal Mennonite man who was successful and benevolent at the same time. Cornie himself spoke of these aims when interviewed for the CBC "Eye to Eye" program in the early 1960s. He remarked that their company policy was set in response to a sense that "God has blessed our business, [and] we are stewards of it and we want to be faithful."⁶⁰

The way Cornie lived this out was different from his father. They were different men. Not only in the sense that they were individuals but also that they were from different generations who understood differently what it meant to be a man. When C. T. reflected on his life just weeks before he suffered a stroke which left him bed-ridden for the remaining nine years of his life, he told the *Carillon News* interviewer that it was not easy to build a large business,

but looking back, every minute of it has been enjoyable, particularly the instances when there were obstacles to overcome, and when such instances were brought to a successful conclusion.⁶¹

In Cornie's obituary, it was his "great capacity to enjoy life," which the family noted. "He loved every bit of it," they wrote, "his work, people, travel, even his many meetings and extra-curricular activities...flying, sailing, skiing though he had little

⁵⁹ Hilda Matsuo, "A long way from lumberyard to millworks," *Mennonite Mirror* (Summer 1978), 10.

⁶⁰ CBC "Eye to Eye," 29 October 1963.

⁶¹ "Hard Work & Spunk Needed For Success Says Veteran Businessman," *Carillon News*, 23 November 1951, 3.

time for it.”⁶² Work was still important to Cornie but there was much else which made him who he was, which made him a man. A new cultural milieu had given expression to a “passionate man,” a man who consumed the profits of his enterprise, extended an evangelistic gospel to the wider world, enjoyed “playing” throughout the whole of his adult life, and venerated ambition when it was balanced with benevolence, and an evangelical Christian sense of “good stewardship.”

⁶² “C. P. Loewen,” Obituary, *Carillon News*, 23 October 1985, 13A.

Conclusion

This study details the lives of four generations of Mennonite, Christian men in Steinbach, Manitoba from 1877 to 1985: Cornelius Wiens (C. W.) Loewen, 1827-1893; Cornelius Bartel (C. B.) Loewen, 1863-1928; Cornelius Toews (C. T.) Loewen, 1883-1960; and Cornelius Paul (C. P.) Loewen, 1926-1985, and argues that as Steinbach grew from a farm village to a regional service centre, and as the Loewens participated in this growth, transforming their economic venture over four generations from agrarian household to national manufacturing enterprise, the Loewens' ethnic, religious, and gender identities and social behaviours changed.

Sociologist David Morgan has suggested that rather than attempting to understand masculinity in the obvious arenas of violence and sports, we should focus on the formation of masculine identities in the "more everyday or routine areas of life," for example, the workplace.¹ The work lives of the four Loewen men represent four different phases of economic activity: C. W.'s farm household unit in which man and woman worked together to reproduce the household for the next generation; C. B.'s part farm household, part seasonal sawmill employing kin and wage labourers; C. T.'s town-based business with a regional, and largely agricultural, focus; and C. P.'s retail store geared to post-war suburban consumerism, and the factory producing specialized goods for the national market, employing a large impersonal labour force, and relentless advertising. In each generation the Loewens' enterprise became increasingly modernized and commercialized.² Concomitant with these developments were changing identities and social behaviours.

¹ David H. J. Morgan, *Discovering Men*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

² T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 171-172. Regehr uses a sociological model of modernity, identifying the three facets of specialization, rationalization, and individualization. These three characteristics are increasingly evident in the communities and lives of the Loewen men in the twentieth century.

Joy Parr contends that “the history of the rise of industry is not comprehensible though the accumulation of capital and the recruitment of labour alone,”³ nor is a man (or a woman) “solely or systematically” an employee or employer; rather, each individual has multiple and simultaneous identities.⁴ This study attempts to understand the multiple, and changing, identities of four Mennonite, Christian men as they lived their daily lives, on the farm, at work, in the home, and in their communities. The Cornelius Loewens were Mennonites, Christians, and men, though each generation understood and lived these identities differently than the generations before.

The work of Anthony Rotundo proffers a three-phase model of masculinity in the Northern United States useful to the discussion of four generations of Loewen men. The categories of *communal*, *self-made*, and *passionate* manhood fit well with my study of four Mennonite men.⁵ However, masculinity as a social construction is constructed differently over time and in space. From ethnic group to ethnic group, and from class to class, “being a man” carries different meanings. While many historians have noted the importance of war and conflict to the meaning of manhood, for example, this forum has been largely unavailable to Mennonite men because of a traditional belief in non-resistance. Marguerite Van Die’s study of a “Christian Businessman,” and Joy Parr’s discussion of a German, pietist furniture manufacturer, both nuance Rotundo’s discussion, highlighting the role of religion in the life of a businessman.⁶

As well as being Christian men, each Loewen man considered himself to be ethnically Mennonite, though what this meant to each generation clearly differed

³ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 3.

⁴ Parr, “Gender History,” 361.

⁵ Rotundo, 2-5.

⁶ Van Die; Joy Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*.

greatly. Mark McGowan, in his study of the processes of integration, invention, and negotiation among the Irish Catholic population of Toronto from the late 1880s to 1922, counters examples of acculturation, such as inter-faith marriages, increased political participation, and adoption of Canadian nation-building ideals, with the claim that Canadian Catholics “still retained their distinctive creed, although they found ways to adapt it and shape it according to their needs.”⁷ Each Loewen man understood himself to be a Mennonite, though what being a Mennonite meant, as well as what being a man and a Christian meant, was reinvented by each generation.

The late nineteenth century Steinbach in which C. W. Loewen lived, was an agrarian, communal, and patriarchal village, in which the man was head of the farm household, and the representative of the family in village and church institutions. The *Kleine Gemeinde* church of C. W. Loewen taught its members to be humble, non-resistant, and to lead a God-fearing life as communitarian agriculturists, deemed the best way to ensure “the preservation of genuine simplicity in Christ.”⁸ Though these Mennonite farmers participated in the primitive but expanding Manitoba economy, they were “to a considerable extent segregated from the large society.”⁹ Nineteenth century Mennonites were easily identified in southeastern Manitoba by their plain dress, everyday use of Low German, an oral dialect, and close-knit villages and kinship networks.¹⁰

C. B. Loewen, the eldest son of C. W. Loewen, grew up in this agricultural, communitarian milieu, first in Russia, and then, after participating in the migration to Manitoba as a ten year old boy, in the familiar surroundings of Gruenfeld, and the

⁷ McGowan, 9-10.

⁸ Robert Friedmann, ed. and trans., 91. Friedmann translated and edited Heinrich Balzer’s *Verstand und Vernunft: Einfaeltige und nach der Lehre des Evangeliums erlaeuterte Ansichten ueber der Unterschied des Verstandes und der Vernunft eines Menschen*, 1833 (Quakertown, PA, 1886).

⁹ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 160.

¹⁰ High German was used in the church context, and for keeping written records and for correspondence.

unfamiliar setting of Steinbach. Whereas C. W.'s world represents that of a communal man, C. B.'s life is best conceptualized as a transitional one. His status was determined by his family, and he lived within a tight network of kinship ties, yet he worked off the farm, away from his traditional community. C. W. had been a partner with his wife in the Mennonite farm household, but C. B. left his wife and children to go to work, in order to support his family. C. B. later returned to the farm, but his agricultural venture was a more technologized and commercialized enterprise than his father's had been. Illustrative of this difference is C. B.'s bankruptcy, a disaster which would never have befallen a communal, Mennonite farm villager of earlier generations. C. B. also left the church of his forebears, exchanging the strict *Bruderschaft* which monitored the social behaviour of its members, for the evangelical, individualistic *Abendlichter*. His church experience especially demonstrates that C. B. lived between communitarian and individualistic worlds, but also that he was a non-conformist, a "black sheep." Other "progressive" Mennonites of C. B.'s generation left the *Kleine Gemeinde* for the Mennonite *Bruderthaler*, whereas C. B. joined a small, obscure church group.

While C. B. lived in two worlds, his son C. T. Loewen was more firmly planted in the world of the "self-made man." Work defined C. T.'s life. He was Steinbach's lumberman, and while he failed to marry into Steinbach's merchant elite as a young man, through his work he became one of Steinbach's wealthiest, most successful, and venerated, businessmen. Every individual has multiple identities, however, and C. T. was a father, husband, Christian, Mennonite, and man, as well as a lumber dealer. Yet C. T. brought his entrepreneurial values to his family, as he did to his business, encouraging and praising resourcefulness, independent thinking, and initiative. His children, others in the community noted, were given a freedom to try,

fail, and learn. These were C. T.'s own guidelines for life, ones to which his business success has been attributed. C. T. also lived with his church community and while he grew up in the communal *Kleine Gemeinde*, he readily embraced the developing evangelical and evangelistic emphases in the wider community and propelled his conservative church in that direction. He was involved in many religious and civic projects and committees and, like Joy Parr's Daniel Knechtel, understood his good works as an extension of his sense of manly work.¹¹ He still thought of himself as a Mennonite, as did his community, after all, he spoke Low German, wrote High German, ate traditional foods, and embraced the religious dimensions of Mennonitism – non-resistance, frugality, and participation in the *Bruderschaft*. And yet, C. T. wore a suit to work, used English with his non-Mennonite contacts, and spent his life as the owner of an ever-expanding business, enjoying “every minute of it.”¹²

C. T.'s son Cornie (C. P.) Loewen enjoyed work, but took it in new directions in the suburban-oriented retailing and the national oriented window manufacturing enterprise. Cornie was in a sense a “passionate man,” unrestrained by communitarian values, seeking adventure and joy, and accepting of influence and power, well beyond the boundaries of Steinbach. He guided the family business through unsurpassed expansion, including the opening of four divisions across Canada, and expanding the Steinbach factory to a point of employing 390 people by 1985. And he consumed the profits of the business in a more conspicuous way than the generation before. He embraced opportunities for leisure, taking his sons skiing with friends, as well as giving them opportunities to work in the family business. He built a grand house, with “park-like” grounds and an impressive approach, on the outskirts of town, flew the company airplane himself, and was part of the ten-man syndicate which built

¹¹ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 141.

¹² “Hard Work & Spunk Needed For Success Says Veteran Businessman,” *Carillon*, 23 November 1951, 3.

Steinbach's fly-in golf course. C. P. was also an outward-looking Steinbacher in a way his father had not been. Cornie sat on national committees, and travelled internationally with his involvement in missions projects of the newly-named Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC) (the name given to the *Kleine Gemeinde* in 1952). Yet, he too considered himself to be a Christian, Mennonite man. For Cornie, this meant speaking Low German with his workers, being involved in the evangelistic work of the EMC, and advertising his commitment to producing products of quality, as his father had before him, with "the wood craftsman who then and now added loving care to the plying of his tools."¹³ Continuity was emphasized, but the change was striking.

While a model of modernization, with its link to specialization, rationalization, and individualization, is useful to frame the development of Steinbach, the Loewens' enterprise, and the Loewens' changing identities, no individual, family, or community, fits perfectly into any model. C. W.'s decade in Borosenko Colony, New Russia, is incongruous with the pattern of increased inter-ethnic interaction, identified as a feature of modernization in Mennonite society. While the Molotschna colony in which first generation C. W. Loewen was raised was an exclusively Mennonite settlement, and C. W.'s diary in Manitoba indicates a strictly Mennonite milieu, the 1860s migration to Borosenko appears to have precipitated unprecedented interaction with non-Mennonites. C. W.'s village of Gruenfeld was part-Mennonite, part-Russian, complete with a Russian name, "Zelyonoye,"¹⁴ and C. W. hired Russian workers during his decade in Borosenko, and traded with a soldier, and Jewish peddlers. Incongruities can be identified in the lives of each of the Loewen generations: C. B. Loewen joined an obscure non-Mennonite church group and

¹³ "75 years of progress," *Loewen Behold*, 6:1 (March 1980), 1.

¹⁴ Plett, *Saints and Sinners*, 115.

advocated for the adoption of the English language among the Mennonites, yet he remained deeply rooted in traditional Mennonite kinship networks throughout his life; C. T. was both a *Kleine Gemeinde* member, attending *Bruderschaft*, and an evangelical, exemplifying aspects of communitarian Anabaptism, and personal, emotional, evangelicalism; C. P. was a public, passionate, and national-oriented figure, and yet he continued to speak Low German, and remained an active member of the Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Church.

These examples are important in reminding us that while models are useful in our attempts to understand historical times and places, people do not always neatly fit into patterns. Individuals, families, and communities are complex entities, and as historians we must “battle ‘between the impulse and desire to impose order and a tolerance for ambiguity’” in order to attempt to understand life “in the ordinariness of [its] multiplicity.”¹⁵ Yet, the sum of the Loewens’ multiplicities suggests certain patterns. Business is not merely a matter of commercial exchange, it is set in a culture shaped by inherited, reinvented, and envisioned social behaviours and identities. And these social and cultural factors in turn change as the nature of business changes. As the Loewens increasingly interacted with Manitoban and Canadian business, and middle-class society, their gender, ethnic, and religious identities came to reflect this interaction.

¹⁵ Parr, “Gender History,” 361.

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