

“Recruits and Comrades” in “a War of Ambition”: Mennonite Immigrants in Late 19th
Century Manitoba Newspapers
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Abstract

In August 1874 Mennonites began to arrive in Manitoba, a province in the midst of transition from an Indigenous and Métis space to an agricultural centre for the Canadian nation. During this transition, Mennonites were considered priority immigrants by the government of Canada, and the newspapers of Manitoba documented Mennonite communities, families, and farming practices. Manitoba, fitting with its diverse population in the 1870s and 1880s, was home to many English-language newspapers as well as French-language newspapers, both Métis and Franco-Manitoban, which are the main primary sources for this thesis. These newspapers reveal how each of these groups viewed immigration to the province and how they understood themselves in relation to their Mennonite neighbours.

The central argument of this thesis is the culture of observation that accompanied the nation-building project of the Mennonite immigration reserves. Through the newspapers, governments and other residents of Manitoba were able to monitor the successes and failings of the Mennonites, telling stories about their arrival and adjustment. These stories, generally told by the English newspapers, placed the Mennonites in the role of “outsiders” in order to avoid examining their own position as outsiders in the new province. In contrast the Métis and Franco-Manitoban newspapers usually wrote about any common ground they had with the Mennonites, but did not focus on the Mennonite role in the colonial project of Manitoba.

Through these newspapers, the tensions around the re-making of Manitoba into a Canadian province are evident, and debates about immigration were often centred on the Mennonites. While Mennonites themselves may or may not have been aware of their role in the colonial project, they were, nevertheless, recruits and participants in the larger national and provincial ambitions for the future success of Manitoba as part of the nation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Newspapers as Sources and Historical Context

In the newspapers of the late nineteenth century, Manitobans worked through their feelings and anxieties about immigration and the re-making of Manitoba into a so-called civilized addition to the British and Canadian empire. The Mennonites were some of the earliest settlers to arrive after the creation of the new province in 1870, and the first to arrive in such large numbers. They arrived as families complete with wives, children, and the elderly to a predominantly Indigenous space with an established and politically organized Métis population. Along with their families, they also brought a new language and strict religious practices to the new province. This departure from the homosocial male environment of the typical frontier, and the way that Mennonites appeared so different from the British or French-Canadian immigrants to the region, meant that they received considerable scrutiny and discussion in the newspapers of that time. They also had the benefit of settler experience in Russia, and came with many skills that the newspapers praised, saying that it made them the perfect settlers to make the province fit for other settlers. Mennonites had their identities critiqued, praised, and examined through the lens of non-Mennonite observers, who used the Mennonites to demonstrate their own sense of belonging and place in the frontier space.

This thesis uses Manitoban newspapers from 1874 until 1894 as its main primary source. This time period was chosen because the Mennonites established their settlements in 1874, and by the late 1890s discussions of Mennonites in newspapers had shifted to focus on school and language debates. There are approximately fifteen papers, thirteen English newspapers and two French-language newspapers, used in this analysis. A table has been attached at the end of this chapter to provide information about the newspapers in the province at the time and their

readership. These papers were predominately based around Winnipeg, so the analysis of rural immigrant groups catered to an urban audience. As settlement increased, towns with English-speaking settlers located close to the Mennonites provided observations about the Mennonites when they were in town. The settlers wrote their observations about the Mennonites and sent them (by mail or telegraph) to the Winnipeg-based newspapers, who published regional reports from across the province. The *Manitoba Free Press* was a long-running newspaper during this period, and so it can reveal a lot about the changing nature of the province. This newspaper started in 1872, only two years after Manitoba joined Confederation, with “the first power printing press ever brought northwest of St. Paul Minnesota.”¹

Newspapers were incredibly important in the spread of ideas in Canada, particularly on the prairies. Paul Rutherford, in *The Making of Canadian Media*, writes that “Nothing, not the pamphlet, the book, or the magazine could compare in significance with the newspaper.”² The *Manitoba Free Press* appears to be a disorganized collection of news, personal stories, and humorous anecdotes. This was not atypical in nineteenth century Canadian newspapers. According to Rutherford, the Canadian newspaper was called by Susannah Moodie “a strange mélange of politics, religion, abuse, and general information.”³ Because colonial newspaper editors had few staff, and little supervision, the editor “could easily stamp his image upon the whole newspaper.”⁴ He also described their technique, saying that editors “practiced an extraordinary kind of scissors and paste journalism, borrowing or plagiarising large chunks of each other’s prose.”⁵ This explains why so many of the stories, especially the short updates,

¹ Manitoba. *Manitoba Free Press*. Accessed March 10, 2015.

<http://manitoba.ca/content/en/newspapers/Manitoba%20Free%20Press>.

² Paul Rutherford, *The Making of the Canadian Media* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), 5.

³ Rutherford, 13.

⁴ Rutherford, 13.

⁵ Rutherford, 13.

appear identical in many of the newspapers, or why direct excerpts from other Canadian newspapers sometimes appear in the *Manitoba Free Press*.

Humour was a large part of the colonial newspapers, as journalists “took their duty to educate their readers as seriously as the need to entertain them.”⁶ This often meant that the editors would do their best to present news in the form of entertainment, or as a running commentary on the local happenings, with their sense of humour making an appearance as seen in several jokes discussed throughout this thesis. Newspapers at this time reflected the bias and personality of the editor, but also a less professional type of journalism that passed judgement and presented ideas without the guise of impartiality, creating a unique environment for the observation of the transition of Manitoba into a British colony.

Newspapers also factored into important discussions of nationalism and community, as shown through the work of Benedict Anderson and Gerald Friesen. In *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada*, Friesen examines the relationship between print culture and nationalism in Canada. Anderson, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, takes a more global approach to the study of the role of the newspaper and national identity.⁷ Anderson compares newspapers, with their daily, ritualistic, yet private consumption, to a modern-secular version of morning prayers.⁸ Newspapers provided a sense of community in the modern colonial age because they were a common experience for everyone living in a given area. While the inhabitants of an area may have little else in common, they consumed the same news at the same time each day. For this reason, the stories published in the newspapers of the nineteenth-century were more significant than purely their subject matter,

⁶ Rutherford, 16.

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 34-35.

⁸ Anderson, 35.

and the Manitoban press coverage of Mennonite immigration was part of the larger impact of the daily newspaper in the colonial era.

To examine how this occurred in the Canadian context, Friesen's *Citizens and Nation* is helpful. He argues that newspapers were one medium through which the new nation of Canada began to understand itself, writing that these early post-Confederation newspapers "helped to shape people's awareness of boundaries."⁹ These newspapers were responsible for informing the general public, as well as for communicating a sense of community to Canadians living in a given area. Although many newspapers were printed daily in cities, at the end of the nineteenth century, weekly and monthly community-based rural papers also found an audience. These newspapers "defined by ethnicity, faith, or place imagined the world not in terms of consumption or politics but as networks of families and acquaintances."¹⁰ This focus on the familiar provided a sense of comfort for Canadians, who could read the papers and be reassured that the regular patterns of life, the festivals, church functions, and weddings continued to happen in an ever changing world.¹¹ Friesen also comments upon the difference between the daily urban newspapers and the more rural weekly or monthly newspapers, saying that:

Both types of journal imagined worlds that were believable and complete in themselves. The fact that the two worlds differed utterly, and seemed to operate within different dimensions of time and space, seemed not to disorient the reader. The contradictions represented the varieties of ways in which readers adjusted to the changing- and overlapping- dimensions within which they lived.¹²

Manitoba's newspapers in the 1870s until the end of the nineteenth century operated as both urban and community-based newspapers. The daily *Manitoba Free Press* was produced out of

⁹ Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 148.

¹⁰ Friesen, *Citizens and Nation*, 150.

¹¹ Friesen, *Citizens and Nation*, 150.

¹² Friesen, *Citizens and Nation*, 150.

Winnipeg, by W.F. Luxton beginning in 1872, but was specifically targeted at the local Anglo-Canadian population, as evidenced by the personal anecdotes and jokes included alongside the news, while *Le Métis* and *Le Manitoba* were each specifically targeted to their respective Métis and Franco-Manitoban communities.¹³ The discussions about Mennonite arrival were, therefore, sometimes under the guise of objective reporting, while in other cases, specifically targeted to inform the readership of something that could perhaps affect their lives on a personal scale.

Language and literacy also factor into this discussion of media in Manitoba during this period. Friesen makes the connection between Canadian newspapers and the push for education and literacy, relating them to political engagement in the early twentieth century.¹⁴ However, in the 1870s and 1880s in Manitoba, it cannot be assumed that everyone was literate, and it appears that the newspapers were aware of this, as they frequently included jokes in their “general news” sections that would not be considered funny unless read aloud. The general news was also written in one or two sentence segments worded in a witty and concise manner, conducive for holding the attention of a listening audience. An example of this is a comment about Mennonites which went “The female individuals of the Mennonites are all titled ladies, being, of course, women o’Knights.”¹⁵ Another example of humour in early newspapers began “Mr Hespeler is in possession of a fine large specimen of the sandhill crane, lately captured at the Mennonite reserve. His size is so great that it is proposed to hitch him to a buggy, and then we shall have a fine specimen of *crayon* drawing.”¹⁶ This type of humour was typical in nearly every edition of the *Manitoba Free Press*, in the 1870s, but does not appear in the 1880s, suggesting that at some point the audiences of the newspapers no longer received their news in the same fashion. In this

¹³ Ramsay Cook, *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 11.

¹⁴ Friesen, *Citizens and Nation*, 151.

¹⁵ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 8, 1874, “Local and Provincial.”

¹⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 22, 1874. Emphasis added.

era, newspapers served as both print and oral sources because of the complex nature of the frontier culture in which they were located.

Newspapers from Manitoba have been used by other scholars to tell the stories of Mennonites. John Warkentin writes that the Winnipeg and Morden newspapers published many stories about the Mennonite reserves, which were useful because in these early years of settlement, Mennonites had no newspapers of their own.¹⁷ Warkentin explained that these stories were “particularly useful for geographers because the editors were not interested in the Mennonites as individuals but rather as a farming group.”¹⁸ Newspapers also helped find dates for things that Mennonites had written about in letters or diaries, without specifics. While these Manitoban newspapers are used in a different context for this study, the theme of Mennonites being observed as a group and not as individuals carries through the analysis of this thesis. However, this was not always so simple, and in many cases by the 1880s Mennonites were discussed by name, at least in some instances.

This prompts the question about the residents of Manitoba during this time. Manitoba in the early 1870s was a new province formed through racial and cultural conflict. However, as a new addition to the nation of Canada, many people in the province of Manitoba were adamantly trying to mold the province into a respectable space that would attract the “right kind” of people. There were considerable efforts made by the governments of Canada and Manitoba to recruit settlers who could transform the land into productive farms. They were looking for immigrants who were not French-speaking or Catholic, in order to shift the power of the province away from

¹⁷ John H. Warkentin, “The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1960), xiii.

¹⁸ Warkentin, “The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba,” xiii.

the Métis and more in favour of the British residents. This was because settler societies were supposed to act as an “extension of Britain itself.”¹⁹

It was not that agriculture was absent from Manitoba prior to 1870, as there was extensive Métis settlement and agriculture in various parts of the province, particularly along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers.²⁰ Along with agriculture, buffalo hunting continued to be an important, but controversial, part of the local economy until the late 1870s, after the majority of the Mennonites had arrived.²¹ The residents of Manitoba at the time of the earliest Mennonite arrival in 1874 were not the same as the residents of Manitoba in 1884, as many of the actions of the government of Canada had effectively forced Métis and Indigenous peoples out of agriculture and into the Northwest Territories by the early 1880s.²² The movement on behalf of the Euro-Canadians to dispossess Métis people of their land in the years following the Manitoba Act was based on the idea that this style of agriculture and buffalo hunting was not using the land to its full potential, which could only be achieved through Euro-Canadian settlement.²³

In the years prior to Manitoba joining Canada, the people at Red River had considered alternatives, such as becoming American citizens, and so when Manitoba did become Canadian, many felt that it was important to try to keep it that way.²⁴ Building up Winnipeg was the initial step in that process, as Winnipeg “became the gateway to the interior, and virtually everything and everyone going to or from the region passing through the city.”²⁵ While this thesis is focused on the rural settlement of the Mennonites on their reserves, Winnipeg remains important to this

¹⁹ Kurt Korneski, “Reform and Empire: The Case of Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1870s-1910s,” *Urban History Review* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Fall 2008): 52.

²⁰ Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 71-72.

²¹ Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 81

²² Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 136-137.

²³ Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 81-82.

²⁴ Korneski, 50.

²⁵ Korneski, 50.

research, because as Korneski writes “Winnipeg firms supplied settlers with the products and equipment they needed for farming and processed settlers’ grain and livestock.”²⁶ As well, the newspapers used in this project were largely based in Winnipeg, making it the source of the “gaze” that was projected on the new arrivals to the province. The people living in Winnipeg, though striving for British acceptance through an out-of-place performance of identity, were ultimately living in a place with “homosocial relations (as opposed to nuclear families), and a fair amount of drinking, fighting, gambling, and prostitution” which was typical of the frontier throughout the late nineteenth century.²⁷ Kurt Korneski’s essay, “Reform and Empire: The Case of Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1870s-1910s,” speaks to the concerns that many social reformers felt about the state of cities, and their desire to make Winnipeg (and Manitoba) into a fine example of the British empire, while being “woefully aware that life in the territory they inhabited differed markedly from the one implied in prevailing standards of Britishness.”²⁸ This argument is helpful in understanding the concerns raised in newspapers about the Mennonites, who were seen as desirable “respectable settlers,” but were also distinctly not British. As much as the reality of Winnipeg did not measure up to the idea of what the reformers wanted it to be, they were optimistic that by bringing in the right sort of immigrants they would be able to shift the balance of the province.

Winnipeg was also at the heart of debates around western sectionalism, and the rejection of the idea that the west was simply a “hinterland in a state of permanent inferiority” to the East.²⁹ John Dafoe, who was working for the *Manitoba Free Press*, “enthusiastically identified himself with the Western cause,” participating in a local movement to break up the C.P.R.

²⁶Korneski, 50.

²⁷ Korneski, 53.

²⁸ Korneski, 53.

²⁹ Cook, 11.

monopoly in 1888, which allowed Manitoba greater economic independence from Eastern Canada, and the opportunity to develop into a business-friendly province.³⁰ Dafoe's political engagement reveals the struggle of Manitoba to model itself after the "civilized" provinces in Eastern Canada, while asserting itself as independent from them. The newspaper was actively involved in promoting Manitoba as a respectable part of Canada, and telling the stories of the Mennonite immigrants was part of asserting the province's strengths in drawing immigration on a national scale.

As will become clear in the following chapters, the Mennonites were under observation, through formal government agencies as well as informal day-to-day observations by the public. This was not new to the province, as Manitoba and western Canada had been the subjects of both formal and informal observation before their arrival. R. Cole Harris and John Warkentin, in their study *Canada Before Confederation: A Study in Historical Geography*, write that the Hudson's Bay Company officers were "genuinely skeptical about the possibilities for agriculture" on the prairie.³¹ By the 1850s, British and Canadian expeditions were underway and producing their own commentary on the land and peoples of western Canada. These two different groups were praised as scientific, but despite their years studying the land, their reports produced nothing but caricatures and generalizations about the land.³² Local inhabitants of western Canada (largely Indigenous peoples, but not exclusively) "hardly seemed to have been aware of the two exploring expeditions" and the reports did not affect how they viewed themselves or their own land, despite the considerable affect of the reports on eastern readers.³³

³⁰ Cook, 11.

³¹ R. Cole Harris and John Warkentin, *Canada Before Confederation: A Study in Historical Geography* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 280.

³² Harris, 281.

³³ Harris, 281-282.

The Métis had a long history of living around the Red River, and their community had grown in people and strength in the mid-nineteenth century and the creation of Red River into the province of Manitoba. In 1870, a census of Red River reported 12,228 residents, which did not include people who lived away from the Red River settlement. Of those 12,228 people at Red River, 9,840 were English and French Métis, making up 80% of the total population, while white residents only made up around 13% of Manitoba's population.³⁴ Most of these white residents would have also been connected to Métis families through marriage, kinship networks, or trade. While the Red River resistance and the Manitoba Act of 1870 created the province of Manitoba, by the mid-1880s the demographic of the province had shifted, as is clear from the ending of *Le Métis*, and the creation of the Franco-Manitoban newspaper *Le Manitoba*, in the early 1880s.³⁵ Immigration to the province directly affected the balance of power in Manitoba, and so it is important to discuss how the shift occurred, as it influenced the type of discussions being had by both English and French language newspapers.

Gerhard Ens' *Homeland to Hinterland* presents a long history of the Métis community at Red River and discusses how they were displaced into the surrounding territory, mostly into what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta. He writes that “the future of the Métis in the new province was, to a large extent, decided in the two decades following the creation of Manitoba.”³⁶ It is in this period, those two decades after the 1870 Manitoba Act, that the Mennonites arrived to southern Manitoba and established successful farming communities, aided by the provincial government, and their extensive work on improving the drainage in certain

³⁴ Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 140.

³⁵ “Newspaper List,” Manitobia.ca, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://manitobia.ca/content/en/newspaperslist>.

³⁶ Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 139.

communities.³⁷ The Mennonite arrivals were given aid as many Métis lost their land. Because of the delays in the land grant system and the influx of settlers from Ontario who quickly took power, many Métis saw their homeland become an unfamiliar and hostile place.³⁸ As the province's economy shifted to one based in agriculture, the delays in land grants and the lack of aid in drainage and improving the land had shifted the balance of power. Many Métis who had stayed in the province until the 1880s, trying to build up successful farms, found themselves selling their land and moving west to join their relatives who had left in earlier political disputes in the 1870s.³⁹

D.N. Sprague writes that beginning as early as the 1850s, Eastern Canadian observers of the Red River settlement made observations of the Métis living there with the intention of expanding into the territory and replacing them. He said that "by depicting the Red River settlement as a parody of proper colonization, Hind [the leader of an exploratory expedition] was telling his Canadian readers that the real development of the North West was yet to begin."⁴⁰ The Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald "predicted rather optimistically that the first wave of new settlers could accomplish the informal work of establishing Canadian sovereignty."⁴¹ The population changes that occurred in the early years of Mennonite settlement were not simply by chance. There were concentrated efforts to deny Métis the rights to their land, and by 1873 "it had become clear that the entire question of land claims under the Manitoba Act was in total chaos."⁴² After three years of promises, "not one of the 1.4 million acres was allotted."⁴³ The

³⁷ Shannon Stundt Bower, *Wet Prairie: People, Land, and Water in Agricultural Manitoba* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 39-40.

³⁸ Gerhard Ens, 139.

³⁹ Gerhard Ens, 170-171.

⁴⁰ D.N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988), 23.

⁴¹ Sprague, 30.

⁴² Sprague, 106.

⁴³ Sprague, 106.

Métis presence was actively being removed from the Red River settlement during the time that the Mennonites were being brought into the province of Manitoba.

The attention of governments and social reformers turned to the Mennonites, at a time in history when the Mennonites were looking for a way out of Russia, and for a new place to establish settlements. The Russian and Prussian Mennonites were struggling to avoid conscription, and many of the leaders felt that “emigration might now be the only option to deal with the military conscription dilemma.”⁴⁴ Mennonites began to look at Canada as a viable option, thanks to the work of two Canadian immigrant agents, Jacob Y. Shantz, a Canadian Mennonite, and William Hespeler, a Canadian immigrant from Germany.⁴⁵ Plans were made and committees were formed, and the first Mennonite families arrived at Fort Garry on July 31, 1874.⁴⁶ Mennonite immigration continued until about 1880, and there were around 1200 families, or 7000 Mennonites who had arrived by that time.⁴⁷ Other Mennonites left Russia for the United States, but those who remained in Russia faced continued struggles to avoid military conscription.⁴⁸

At this time, Mennonites were already living as rural settlers in Russia, and so had obtained the skills to occupy the role of “settler” in Manitoba. Rural Mennonite family dynamics and gender roles were distinctly different in many ways, which may not have been clear to the reformers and observers of the Mennonites. Marlene Epp writes that many Mennonite scholars insist that while women’s voices may not have been heard formally, their role in ensuring the success of the family farm gave their voices more value within the home and community.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Lawrence Klippenstein, “Broken Promises or National Progress: Mennonites and the Russian State in the 1870s,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* Vol. 18 (2000): 99.

⁴⁵ Klippenstein, 103.

⁴⁶ Klippenstein, 106.

⁴⁷ Klippenstein, 106.

⁴⁸ Klippenstein, 106-7.

⁴⁹ Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 250.

Women like Ruth Reesor insisted that “country wives actually had a better chance of equality between the sexes than their city counterparts.”⁵⁰ Rural Mennonite women, like those who would settle in Manitoba, were expected to work hard alongside the men in their lives, but also to bear the burden of household labour and the care of children and other dependents.⁵¹ Any notion of “separate spheres” did not apply, at least regarding labour. Women were limited from certain positions within religious or community leadership, but at the same time were not limited where work and other tasks were concerned, as shown in Epp’s description of a woman “running the drill press, sharpening scythes [or] putting spokes in buggy wheels.”⁵² This different understanding of gender roles and labour was only part of what newspapers struggled to understand about Mennonite communities.

Manitoban observers were interested in how the Mennonites engaged in agrarian economy, because they did so in a culturally distinct way, with communal villages instead of single-family properties. Scholar Frank Epp argued that the Mennonites had chosen Canada because unlike America, it had a monarch, whom they felt could guarantee their rights as a distinct group.⁵³ The Canadian government also promised the Mennonite settlers a large block of land where they would be free to settle and live how they liked, and so could preserve their own customs.⁵⁴ These Mennonites who came to Manitoba were from the more conservative of the settlements in Russia, who were poorer and simpler than the Mennonites who went to the United States from Russia at the same time.⁵⁵ They had also not been as quick to embrace the educational and agricultural reform taking place amongst the Mennonites in early nineteenth

⁵⁰ Marlene Epp, 250.

⁵¹ Marlene Epp, 250.

⁵² Marlene Epp, 251.

⁵³ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 188.

⁵⁴ Frank Epp, 189.

⁵⁵ Frank Epp, 195.

century Russia.⁵⁶ Despite that, Royden Loewen writes that the Mennonites in Manitoba “were bent on adapting their crops and farm methods to their respective physical and economic environments.”⁵⁷ There was a shortage of labour on Mennonite farms in Manitoba, compared to in Russia, but to combat this, “by 1883 one out of every ten [Mennonite] households [...] owned a \$700 threshing machine.”⁵⁸ Even the families who were unable to afford their own machines were paying those who owned the machines for their use.⁵⁹ The expansion of farms meant that by the late 1880s there were no longer enough family and community members for farm labour, and most successful farms had hired Eastern European and Ukrainian immigrant men and women who wanted to farm, but did not have the capital (or federal aid) to purchase their own homesteads.⁶⁰ This meant that the Mennonites were not completely isolated on their reserves, but the majority of their interactions were non-Anglo immigrants. Because of this, the Mennonites were not easily observable by those writing the newspapers and remained a mystery for quite a long time.

This thesis relies on several areas of secondary scholarship to provide context and analysis in the discussion of Manitoban newspapers. Some of the secondary sources used in this thesis, written by Royden Loewen, William Janzen, Marlene Epp and others, inform this analysis of Mennonite immigration.⁶¹ Scholars such as D.N. Sprague, Norma Hall, and Gerhard Ens have written about the history of Red River and the Métis community in Manitoba. This thesis also

⁵⁶ Frank Epp, 195.

⁵⁷ Royden Loewen, *Family Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 126.

⁵⁸ Loewen, 130.

⁵⁹ Loewen, 130.

⁶⁰ Loewen, 140.

⁶¹ For those interested in reading more about Indigenous displacement and Mennonites, see C. Redekop, “Mennonite Displacement of indigenous peoples,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, v., no. 2 (1982); Leo Driedger, “Native Rebellion and Mennonite Invasion,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* v. 46, 1972; John Warkentin, “Going on Foot: Revisiting the Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (F2000).

contributes to larger histories of the role of government intervention on the prairies, as examined by Ryan Eyford and Sarah Carter. This thesis uses newspapers as a primary source to examine the intersections of Mennonite history, Métis history, and the history of government intervention to build upon the existing histories of Manitoba. These intersections reveal a unique understanding of Manitoba as a place that was not as separate or segregated as it may often appear in primary and secondary sources. By examining the Mennonites through the lens of non-Mennonite observers, their role in the colonial project of Manitoba becomes increasingly clear, which builds upon the work of many other historians of the region.

Many of the newspapers examined praised the Mennonites for being the “right kind” of settlers, which had a lot to do with the presence of women, and the fact that the Mennonites immigrated as families. In *Family, Church, and Market*, Royden Loewen writes that Mennonites often travelled in extended families, which complicated the gendered portrayal of the immigration of the Mennonites. While the presence of entire families may have helped the Mennonites appear free from the vices of male dominated migration, it also meant that this process included “the disabled, the ill, and the elderly.”⁶² Kinship ties and the significance of family ensured the success of the Mennonite villages when they were new arrivals in the prairies, and personal diaries and letters from these years “reveal that instead of weakening the cohesiveness of the family unit, migration strengthened it.”⁶³ Particularly important in this gender analysis of the migration is the way that the relationships and networks between women were maintained, both through letters and correspondence, as well as settling patterns, explaining “why men often settled in villages in which they had no close relatives.”⁶⁴ This gendered kinship

⁶² Loewen, 93.

⁶³ Loewen, 95.

⁶⁴ Loewen, 99.

network and its influence on patterns of settlement as well as the success of the Mennonite villages may not have been understood or directly acknowledged by the non-Mennonite observers of their communities, but it is important to recognize the inner workings of the culture being observed.

As the Mennonites were the subjects of observation by other people in Manitoba, settlers used these observations to differentiate themselves from the newest immigrants- the Mennonites. Despite the settlers also being new to the largely Indigenous space, Mennonites were critiqued as “foreign” to the province of Manitoba. This “foreignness” was often seen as the reason for their success as settlers, but was also a barrier to the Mennonites being seen as full “Canadians.” Mennonites were part of the colonial project of Manitoba, although their presence complicated the creation of Manitoba into an Anglo-Canadian space.

The three chapters that follow this introductory chapter focus on some of the themes that emerged in the observation of Mennonites during the 1870s to 1890s. The second chapter focuses on how the Mennonites were observed as foreign to their new home, despite being part of the earliest wave of immigration to the predominately Indigenous space. Although they were no more foreign to the province than most of the people observing them (with the exception of the Métis observers), they were held up as being particularly foreign because of their difference to Anglo-Canadians. The third chapter addresses the many themes surrounding the economy and land use observed by the newspapers. This was where Mennonites were portrayed most positively, and were held up as the standard of success for other settlers. They were also part of many conflicts in land use that are discussed in this chapter. The fourth and final chapter examines the ways in which the personal family lives of Mennonites were observed in the newspapers. The gender roles of the Mennonites were simultaneously critiqued and praised for

being different than other settlers, and their religion and church also became the subject of commentary as more mainline Protestant churches became established in the province.

The purpose of these chapters is to understand what the Anglo-Canadian, Métis, and Franco-Manitoban newspapers determined as significant or important for their readership as they made distinct editorial choices about what became news for public consumption. During this time the government was actively trying to displace the Métis living at Red River with Euro-Canadian immigration, and the newspapers reflect this. Mennonites had their own reasons for immigrating to Manitoba, and in doing so became part of the larger colonial project of the Canadian nation. Mennonites became the example newspapers could use to praise the success of Manitoba as a colony. Observers could see the Mennonites as the newest and most foreign to the province, while ignoring that as Anglo-Canadians, the observers were just as new and foreign to the province. Observations made about Mennonites provide commentary about the debates on immigration and nationalism that were part of the early years of the formation of Manitoba from a frontier into a more “civilized” part of the Canadian nation.

Appendix: Newspapers in Manitoba During the 1870s and 1880s⁶⁵

Newspaper	Years Published	Language	Frequency	Readership
Brandon Daily Sun	January 1, 1882- December 31, 1960	English	Daily until hiatus in 1884, then daily in 1897 until 1960	Brandon and Southwestern Manitoba
Brandon Sun Weekly	January 19, 1882- July 1, 1897	English	Weekly	Brandon
Le Manitoba	October 13, 1881-1925	French	Weekly and semi-weekly sporadically until January 10, 1884, then weekly.	Franco-Manitoban community (takes over from <i>Le Métis</i>)
Le Métis	May 27, 1871- September 29, 1881	French	Weekly	Conservative paper, defending Métis land rights, French-Canadian immigration, federalism, and the French-Catholic cause
Manitoba Free Press	November 30, 1872- May 18, 1878	English	Weekly	Circulated throughout the province- after 1878 called the <i>Manitoba Weekly Free Press</i>
Manitoba Gazette	October 12, 1878- March 15, 1879	English	Weekly	Liberal-Conservative, and opposed provincial government. Sued for libel and ceased publication.
Manitoba Herald	October 12. 1878- March 15, 1879	English	Daily	Defended interests of Manitoba- monitored province's representatives
Manitoban and Northwest Herald	October 15, 1870- November 21, 1874	English	Weekly	Manitoba and the Northwest Territories
Minnedosa Tribune	March 31, 1883- present	English	Weekly	Rural area around Minnedosa
Portage La Prairie Weekly	September 9, 1881- September 6, 1916	English	Weekly, with two short stints of semi-weekly or thrice weekly issues	Portage La Prairie and the surrounding area
Standard	November 28, 1874- August 30, 1879	English	Weekly	Previously the <i>Manitoban and Northwest Herald</i> - wrote mostly about the route of the CPR and Métis land grants
Winnipeg Daily Sun	August 17, 1881- July 4, 1885	English	Six times a week	Winnipeg
The Winnipeg Tribune	1890-1980	English	Unknown	Rival to <i>Winnipeg Free Press</i>

⁶⁵ Manitoba, “Newspaper List,” accessed April 28, 2016, <http://manitoba.ca/content/en/newspaperslist>.

Chapter 2

Foreignness and Belonging: Mennonites in the Settler Narrative

This chapter will examine the relationship between foreignness and belonging, and how the newspapers positioned the Mennonites in terms of both the familiar and the foreign. Despite the majority of English-speaking Canadians being new arrivals to Manitoba as well, there was considerable discussion about how the Mennonites were the new arrivals. Concern was also expressed over how well they would be able to adapt to their new homes, and these discussions and judgements were happening before the immigration arrangements were made. By the time of Mennonite arrival, newspapers had already been publishing information about this group that intended to settle large sections of the southern part of the small province. Unsurprisingly, once the Mennonites arrived, the newspapers continued to publish information and observations about the group that intended to settle large sections of the southern part of the small province. The more they learned about their new neighbours, the more aspects of Mennonite culture were available to critique. Many of the newspaper stories about the Mennonites focused on their foreignness to their new home and the ways that they were out of place. However, at the same time, Mennonite characteristics that aligned with Anglo-Canadian ways of life were emphasised to show that the Mennonites could belong. This chapter aims to facilitate this discussion between signs of belonging and signs of difference, and how the newspapers portrayed these aspects of Mennonite culture and life. Many of the initial observations about the Mennonites centred on the obvious cultural differences that were easily evident to others, such as their language, the way they behaved in public, and the way they dressed.

Before the Mennonites had arrived, or were even certain about their move to Manitoba, the *Manitoba Free Press* and *Le Métis*, the two main newspapers in the province, were providing

their own opinions on the potential Mennonite immigration. The first mention of Mennonites in Manitoban newspapers appears to be on January 11, 1873, when the *Manitoba Free Press* published an article entitled “The Mennonites,” which gave background knowledge on the group. The article suggested that all Mennonites were “narrow and prejudiced” as a result of persecution, “but though outraged, belied, and outlawed, they have been steadfast in their faith, and have never raised their hand against the oppressor.”¹ This description of the Mennonites primarily focused on the religious aspects of the culture, and the ways in which it differed from Protestant Christianity, such as the rejection of infant baptism and religious or political authorities, as well as their lack of “magnificent churches.”² The article was written based on the descriptions of M. Michel, who seemed particularly interested in the marriage customs of the Mennonites, which involved re-enacting the biblical story of Isaac’s search for a wife.³ Part of this marriage process was sending a third party to the home of the girl to ask for her hand in marriage, on behalf of the potential groom. In telling this story, the consent of both the girl and her family were emphasized, despite the strangeness of the custom, as if to assure the readers that, though foreign, the Mennonites were not altogether different.

Funeral practices were also discussed in detail, specifically the lack of grave markers and memorials that accompanied Mennonite burials, though Michel said that:

It is not neglect or forgetfulness of the dead. It is rather a conviction of the nothingness of all earthly things, a desire to turn the thoughts away from the decaying body to the spirit which has burst the bonds that held it down to the earth.⁴

That same flowery language is used to describe the politics and principles of all aspects of Mennonite life, including their commitment to peace, both amongst themselves and with other

¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, January 11, 1873, “The Mennonites.”

² *Manitoba Free Press*, January 11, 1873, “The Mennonites.”

³ *Manitoba Free Press*, January 11, 1873, “The Mennonites.”

⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, January 11, 1873, “The Mennonites.”

people. This article appeared to have the purpose of providing both background knowledge but also familiarity with the Mennonites, as it portrayed all aspects of their culture through a lens of observing, but also appreciating the values of peace and hard work seen throughout their lives. Considering that the Mennonites were being considered as immigrants to Manitoba, a new province birthed in conflict and plagued with racialized misunderstandings about what constituted “hard work,” it seems as though the Mennonites were being portrayed as a solution to the problems of the conflicted province.

After this initial ethnographic examination of Mennonite culture, the newspapers were largely silent on the topic, instead addressing the number of townships potentially granted to them, and the visit of the Mennonite delegates to the province in June and July of 1873. On June 21, 1873, the week of the arrival of the Mennonite delegates, *Le Métis* wrote their background piece on the Mennonites. The first portion of this article seemed more concerned with the Manitoba land that would be granted to the Mennonites, and specifically compared Anabaptism to Catholicism.⁵ Rather than addressing Mennonite culture in any way, this article was much more interested in what land they would be taking up, and their religious background, even comparing the pacifism of the Mennonites and the Moravian monks, saying that “a cette [...] classe appartiennent les Frères Moraves et les Mennonites.”⁶ This demonstrated a very different way of understanding and thinking about the immigration of the Mennonites. While both papers were concerned with the religious background of the Mennonites, *Le Métis* seemed to focus more on the Manitoba concerns, such as land use, as well as trying to find some level of familiarity (comparing them to the Moravians), rather than trying to establish them as foreign. It

⁵ *Le Métis*, June 21, 1873, “Les Mennonites.”

⁶ *Le Métis*, June 21, 1873, “Les Mennonites.”

is important to understand that neither of the newspapers had any personal knowledge or impression of the Mennonites, and were forming these opinions without having met them.

The concern about Mennonite marriage and its foreignness was not unprecedented, and the Mennonites were not the only immigrants causing anxieties on the prairies. Sarah Carter writes about marriage in western Canada in her book *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, and the lengths that the various colonial governing bodies went to in order to enforce monogamy. Carter examines the ways that marriage was connected to nation-building, stating that “marriage served as a metaphor for voluntary allegiance and permanent union, the foundation for national morality.”⁷ Because of this connection, marriage practices and “civilizing” them were an essential part of transforming the frontier into a civilized space. While Carter’s work generally analyses various forms of marriage involving Aboriginal peoples, there was also pressure on immigrant groups to adhere to the norms missionaries and governments were trying to enforce. Carter writes that “After the arrival of the Mormons in southern Alberta in the late 1880s, attention was drawn to the persistence of polygamy in Aboriginal communities,” and while the Mennonites arrived earlier than the Mormons, it is possible that they faced similar pressure, as a distinct religious group that may not have been clearly understood by the French or English authorities.⁸ The early newspaper coverage by the *Manitoba Free Press* would have alleviated the concerns of people who may have wondered about the wisdom of encouraging the migration of an entirely new and distinct religious community. The thorough coverage of marriage practices confirmed that while some of the traditions and customs were different, lifelong monogamous marriage based on consent was practiced, which was in line with national visions

⁷ Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 4.

⁸ Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, 13.

of the prairies. English newspapers were concerned with whether or not the Mennonites would fit into the mould of the “ideal Canadian” that they were trying to create and promote in Manitoba, while the Métis newspaper did not address any of that, instead addressing religion and the potential land Mennonites would claim.

Once the Mennonites arrived in Manitoba, references to them in newspapers became much more frequent, but it was extremely rare for any Mennonites to be referred to by name or community. In the 1870s and 1880s, any references about the Mennonites were generally made about them as a monolithic group, without distinction. Initial reporting centred on the idea that the Mennonites were foreign and did not “belong” on the prairies, the implication being that the people writing about them did belong. Because of how the newspapers generally reported on the Mennonites, it is difficult to analyse the perceptions of gender held by the observers, although it was clear through the language used that the Mennonites were not seen as equal to the Canadians already living in Manitoba. One example of this is found in the report from September 19, 1874, which does not list the Mennonites as passengers, but rather in the section where supplies were recorded: “The Cheyenne arrived at the same time, bringing 350 tons of freight, 5 cars of lumber and 150 Mennonites.”⁹

Other instances of the Mennonites being seen as foreign involved comments about their language. On August 8, 1874, only a few weeks after Mennonite immigration began, the *Manitoba Free Press* made a comment about the new arrivals, saying:

Upon investigation the only thing we find against the Mennonites is that they won’t patronize the little Daily [the newspaper]. Upon being asked to do so one of them replied “XnslrAea omiaCgsdabaeg igyf1hathrrt Noto sDdiroahuci coet0iofilyeot a\$ist filr ltckt.”¹⁰

⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 19, 1874, “Local and Provincial.”

¹⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 8, 1874, “Local and Provincial.”

Clearly this comment was intended to be a humorous observation of how the Mennonites did not understand English, which is also an interesting point of difference, considering the multi-lingual nature of Manitoba at the time, as demonstrated by the observations of Lady Dufferin in 1877.¹¹ She wrote in her diary about her Métis guide through Manitoba, a member of the “local Parliament” who could speak three languages, but she added that “I believe he talks Indian at home.”¹² At this point in Manitoba’s history, it was not uncommon for English to be a second or additional language for many of the groups living in the province, which may be why the Métis newspapers never commented on the language of the Mennonites.

The Mennonite use of German as their primary language was commented upon a few other times, one of which was in February of 1875, when the *Manitoba Free Press* wrote:

German is held by Richard Grant White to be “the most horrible combination of sounds with which the human ear can be tormented.” Some of our merchants are not like R[ichard] G[rant] W[hite], and the pleasure they derive from the conversation of the Mennonite is only surpassed by a subsequent counting of his “Gelt.”¹³

In this observation, the *Free Press* published a gentleman’s critique of the German language spoken by the Mennonites, but also defended it, due to the economic significance of the Mennonites. Referencing the “Gelt” or “money” that the Mennonite settlers had brought to the local merchants, allowed their differences to be overlooked in this instance.

Mennonite difference regarding language continued to be a periodic issue, as evidenced in an 1890 article about crop bulletins, which were initially only printed in “the dial [sp.]

¹¹ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal, 1872-8: Extracts from my Letters Home Written While Lord Dufferin was Governor-General* (London: John Murray, 1891), 336.

¹² Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 336.

¹³ *Manitoba Free Press*, February 20, 1875.

language” of French and English.¹⁴ While the Mennonites were not the only group in Manitoba who could not read French or English, during discussions the following point was raised:

We have to consider that the Cree and Sioux Indians have instructors paid by the government who can translate for them the bulletins issued by the Minister of Agriculture, but the Mennonites have no instructor. They are well educated but they do not speak English, and unless you intend to obliterate their language you should have these bulletins published in the Mennonite tongue.¹⁵

This concern that efforts be taken to communicate with the Mennonites, particularly when discussing agricultural regulations, demonstrated that even in 1890, the Mennonites were still seen as having a foreign language.

The French-language newspapers did not comment on Mennonite language, which is an important distinction to make between the papers. When language is mentioned, it is not with humour or critique, but just included where relevant in the story. When a Mennonite correspondence was published, their text was accompanied by the simple remark that it was “Traduite de l’Allemande,” or “Translated from German.”¹⁶ This was unsurprising, as the French-language newspaper catered to an audience with complex linguistic backgrounds. Métis communities often operated in a multitude of languages, based on trade networks and kinship ties that extended and stretched beyond strict cultural boundaries.¹⁷ Unlike the English newspapers, which represented more of the colonial British or “Canadian” voice, there was no insistence from the Métis community for the Mennonites to assimilate and to speak like everyone else.

¹⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 21, 1890, “The Crop Bulletins: Should be Printed in More than the Dual Language.”

¹⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 21, 1890, “The Crop Bulletins.”

¹⁶ *Le Métis*, March 7, 1878, “Les Mennonites- Correspondance.”

¹⁷ Brenda Macdougall, Carolyn Podruchny, and Nicole St-Onge, “Introduction: Cultural Mobility and the Contours of Difference,” in *Contours of a People*, ed. Nicole St-Onge, et. Al (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 9-10.

English newspapers were also interested establishing the foreignness of the Mennonites in other ways, such as how their food and clothes differed from what they found to be familiar. One *Free Press* report from 1874 made this observation: “Couldn’t say that they all do so; but one Mennonite was observed Monday putting grasshoppers to the ordinary use of shrimps.”¹⁸ Another, longer article entitled “What Grasshoppers are good for” from June 26, 1875, was reprinted from the *London (Ontario) Advertiser*. It credited the Mennonite immigrants with teaching the inhabitants of a Missouri town about eating grasshoppers, saying that “the people of that town, following the example of the newcomers, take their grasshoppers regularly, stewed, roasted, grilled, or raw, and find them delicious eating.”¹⁹ The article also explained that “Arabs and Africans take great delight in their large and ugly looking locusts” and discussed how grasshoppers were not dissimilar to locusts. This both normalized and “otherized” the practice of eating grasshoppers as it was not seen as a thing that “normal” Canadians or Americans did, but they were taught about it through those they identified as foreign.

Other commentary was made about Mennonites’ clothing, specifically on their outer clothing which was most visible to the public. The *Free Press* reported in September of 1874, shortly after the immigration began, that “The Mennonites, judging from the heat-retaining qualities of their fur-lined overcoats, evidently came from a cold country, or thought they were coming to one.”²⁰ A few months later, the *Free Press* humorously commented that “The Mennonites wear their fur greatcoats with the hairy side in. This may be an improvement on nature, but we are inclined to think that the latter knows most about it.”²¹ This commentary on Mennonite attire also showed up in descriptions of new Mennonite arrivals in 1891, when this

¹⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 5, 1874.

¹⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, June 26, 1875.

²⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 19, 1874.

²¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, March 6, 1875.

statement was published: “The many young men of the city who are wearing the new style yachting cap will be interested in the fact that a large number of Mennonite immigrants who arrived in the city Saturday wore the same sort of headgear.”²² In this particular comment it is unclear whether the Mennonites mentioned were new arrivals to Canada, or just visiting the city, and it is also possible that this situation was made up in an attempt to mock the youth of Winnipeg who were participating in a trend that the older generation did not understand. Regardless of whether this is an informal joke or an actual reported fact, there still needs to be the element of the young men finding the comparison to Mennonites insulting. Part of the joke was that Mennonite men could not possibly understand what was trendy, as they were foreign and did not belong to this space.

Other than discussing the ways in which Mennonites were noticeably foreign, there were also efforts to discuss the ways in which they were adapting successfully to their new homes. This was most evident in the observations about how Mennonites were establishing themselves on the land and with livestock. Further examination of Mennonite engagement in the economy and with land will be covered in the next chapter, but there were a few instances that were less about their success in the economy, and more about commenting on their successes and failures as “otherized” immigrants. One of these instances occurred on September 26, 1874, when the *Free Press* wrote that a Mennonite “who did not understand a word of English, engrossed the attention and tried the temper of a citizen all yesterday afternoon” while trying to purchase a team of horses.²³ This story served two purposes, as it showed the willingness of the Mennonites to engage in the economy, but also pointed out the language difference, while drawing the distinction between the “Mennonite” and the “citizen.”

²² *Manitoba Free Press*, October 19, 1891.

²³ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 26, 1874.

Another livestock-related incident was from October 10, 1874. In this story, a Mennonite man purchased a bull, cow, and calf, and tied the tail of each animal to the horns or neck of the animal behind it, to create a row of cattle which he could lead. This prompted the following observation: “The scene was intensely ludicrous to spectators, but the proprietor of the cattle seemed to think it was all correct.”²⁴ A similar incident was reported with the title of “A New Moron” in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, in July of 1875, when a Mennonite purchased a cow that would not move, and a police officer applied something from a drug store to the “top end of the cow’s tail” which prompted the cow to take off running. The story ended with the statement: “The last seen of the Mennonite he was hanging on the end of a rope, taking steps twenty-two feet long, and yelling the German for “whoa” at the top of his voice.”²⁵

The cattle-based observations continued with observations with a story about one Mennonite living in Winnipeg in 1874 who had a cow that produced a large amount of milk, but that “the man has not been sufficiently Anglicized to put water in his milk yet.”²⁶ A few years later, in May of 1878, further observations were made about Mennonites and cattle, when a Mennonite tried to cross the Red River with his cattle on the ferry. Ten cattle were left behind on one side of the river because they did not fit on the ferry. These cattle followed the rest of their herd and swam across the river, surprising everyone. The story ends with the statement that “Both parties [Mennonite and ferryman] will know better next time.”²⁷ These observations served to comment on the adjustments the Mennonites were making to the landscapes and livestock in their new homes, and make clear that they were still seen as newcomers. In contrast to this is a brief statement by the *Manitoba and Northwest Herald* from June, 1884, which

²⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, October 10, 1874.

²⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 24, 1875.

²⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 17, 1874.

²⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 18, 1878.

included the name of a Mennonite man, August Guinter, and his village, Gortitzt (Chortitz) in a report about how he was kicked in the eye by a cow, which included no attempt to define him as foreign.²⁸

Another important aspect of establishing the Mennonites as both foreign and familiar involved ranking them against the other immigrants arriving in Manitoba. This next section will examine how the French and English newspapers compared the Mennonites to other immigrants, and how this served to try and include them as part of the colonial narrative of the province, even though they were excluded from belonging in other ways. Long before the Mennonites arrived in Manitoba the idea of this new group of immigrants was being sold in the papers to their readership. In May of 1874, the *Manitoba Free Press* reported that the Mennonites would be arriving shortly from Russia, but that previously the Russian authorities had found it to their advantage to encourage them to come and settle in their country.²⁹ By 1875 the comparisons of Mennonites to other immigrant groups had escalated and these debates continued until the end of the nineteenth century.

Part of the newspaper discussion of the Mennonites and their position in Manitoba included the important role they were seen as playing in the colonization of the province. One *Free Press* story, devoted to giving several columns of context and background on the Mennonites, began with the statement that they had previously reported information “deemed reliable at the time” but that “we have not always succeeded in getting reliable facts.”³⁰ The article then says that “The important part which the Mennonites are likely to take in the material development of Manitoba and some of the Western States, lends much interest to their history.”³¹

²⁸ *Manitoba and Northwest Herald*, June 27, 1884.

²⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 23, 1874, “Mennonites in Canada.”

³⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 4, 1875 “More about the Mennonites”

³¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 4, 1875 “More about the Mennonites”

This shift from earlier stages of reporting hearsay to trying to tell an accurate story of the Mennonites because it mattered to the history of Manitoba, shows the shift from the Mennonites as being seen as outsiders to insiders who belonged in their new homes. This also prompted many debates about who else should be joining the Mennonites in Manitoba.

One of these first debates occurred in March of 1875, and was one of the only stories about the Mennonites to be included in both the French and English newspapers. In debates about the government spending on the encouragement of Mennonite immigration, several people expressed concern that similar aid was not being offered for French Canadians in the United States. A Mr. Masson, mentioned in an article in the *Manitoba Free Press*, “informed the House that he was constantly receiving enquiries from his countrymen on this matter,” or whether the government would offer money “towards the repatriation of a people whom he described as a class equally as worthy and valuable as the Mennonites.”³² Also brought up in this debate was the problem that if people from Canada wanted to emigrate to the United States, they would have their expenses compensated, while at the time this was not the case in the Canadian North-West.³³ The article concluded that Masson’s idea of French-Canadian immigration to Manitoba would be nice, “but the plan of settling them in antagonistic groups is, we are sure, inimical and unwise.”³⁴ *Le Métis* also provided an examination of the immigration debate and concerns expressed by Mr. Masson, writing that he had asked that half of the amount set aside for the Mennonites be reallocated to the French Canadians. *Le Métis* wrote that if this happened, they should take advantage of this within the next year (presumably because of the 1877 election), because it would be good to have the votes of “d’une somme plus considerable.”³⁵ This is an

³² *Manitoba Free Press*, March 6, 1875. “Intermigration.”

³³ *Manitoba Free Press*, March 6, 1875. “Intermigration.”

³⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, March 6, 1875. “Intermigration.”

³⁵ *Le Métis*, March 20, 1875.

interesting discussion of the Mennonites, as they were seen by the English press as a more desirable group of immigrants than even French Canadians. There were no concerns about the Mennonites allying themselves of the Métis, compared to the French press suggesting that the French Canadians would be religiously and politically allied with the Métis.

Stories about immigration continued to surface, and the *Manitoba Free Press* shared a story from a Boston newspaper warning about “indiscriminate immigration,” a problem that had emerged in eastern Canada and the United States, where immigrants were moving to cities, raising concerns about employment and social services. The article suggested that only immigrants like the Mennonites, and others who would move west and be able to support themselves, should be permitted.³⁶ A few months later, the *Free Press* printed a similar discussion from the *Montreal Herald*, praising the Mennonites as the highest calibre of settlers. Their work ethic and the success of their villages were commented upon before this statement:

To place four or five thousand settlers, who you know will stay, and who you know just as well, will, in twenty years, have a thriving settlement, without any charges for maintaining order, or repressing crime in a part of the country hundreds of miles from any of the ordinary means of communication with the rest of the world, was in the exceptional circumstances of the North-West Territory, worth a great deal of money.³⁷

Any expense paid towards Mennonite settlement was excused because of the benefit they brought to the lands they settled. This benefit was not only economic, but also social, as they generally settled in isolated, stable, low-crime communities.

The 1890s saw increased immigration to the prairies, which once again sparked debates about immigration and the “right kind” of immigrants for the province of Manitoba. This brought the successes of both the Icelandic and Mennonite populations to the centre of the discussion, as

³⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, November 27, 1875.

³⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, April 15, 1876, “The Mennonites.”

they had been the two groups to immigrate and settle in large, close-knit communities in the 1870s.³⁸ While in 1877, federal politicians had reported that the Icelandic colony was “an example of the government’s failed colonization policy,” this changed, and by the 1890s, the Icelandic colony was seen as a success, at least some newspaper discussions.³⁹ The Icelandic reserve had been created at the same time as the Mennonite reserve, in order to facilitate settlement in an area that had “potential as an agricultural settlement” but in a location where Anglo-Canadian settlers were unlikely to move.⁴⁰ Ryan Eyford examines the Icelandic reserve and the tension that existed between the increasingly liberal government and society, who wanted less involvement in the day-to-day lives of Canadians, and these highly regulated immigrant reserves which were initially funded and closely observed by the government.⁴¹ The connection between these two immigrant reserves was discussed in the newspapers in order to prove that the Canadian colonial project had been successful, as the government had directly orchestrated and facilitated this immigration.

In 1892, in an article elaborately titled “The Mennonites: ‘Or the Heroes of a Flat Country:’ A History of Manitoba’s Most Prosperous Agriculturalists Briefly Told- Terms Under Which Mennonites Settled in This Province,” several columns were again dedicated to telling the history of the Mennonites over the last several hundred years, how they came to Canada, and their success.⁴² The language used was clearly designed to communicate their success in transforming the province, as they were considered heroes purely because they were the “most

³⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 26, 1890, “In 1877 and Now: Lord Dufferin’s interest in our Icelandic population.”

³⁹ Ryan Eyford, “An Experiment in Immigrant Colonization: Canada and the Icelandic Reserve, 1875-1897” (Phd diss., University of Manitoba, 2010).

⁴⁰ Eyford, “An Experiment in Immigrant Colonization.”

⁴¹ Eyford, “An Experiment in Immigrant Colonization.”

⁴² *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 30, 1892, “The Mennonites: ‘Or the Heroes of a Flat Country.’ The History of Manitoba’s Most Prosperous Agriculturalists Briefly Told- Terms Under Which Mennonites Settled in This Province.”

prosperous agriculturalists.”⁴³ This storytelling about the formation of Manitoba into a successful farming province completely erased the long history of agriculture that had existed prior to Mennonite arrival, which had been undermined by the federal government’s rejection of Métis land rights set out in the *Manitoba Act*.⁴⁴ This dismissal of Métis land rights caused settlers from Eastern Canada to initially become “squatters” on Métis river lots. These lots were then classified as “wastelands,” and the Métis inhabitants officially listed by land offices as “former occupants” of land that the squatters had claimed.⁴⁵ This whole history of agriculture in Manitoba was conveniently able to be forgotten with discussions of Mennonite agricultural success, as Mennonites became the new benchmark for the beginnings of agriculture in the province.

The debates around immigration featuring Mennonites emerged again in 1898, specifically because of the arrival of a large number of Galician immigrants in the North-West. This discussion placed the Galicians in direct contrast to the Icelanders and Mennonites, as shown in one article, entitled “The Galicians: Their Importation Strongly Condemned by Mr. Oliver: The Liberal Member for Alberta Adversely Criticizes the Immigration Methods of Hon. Clifford Sifton- A Strong Plea for Settlers of Some Value to the Country.”⁴⁶ While this title clearly communicates a strong opinion, the most direct comparison occurs midway through the article, when it argues that “the Mennonites and Icelanders are agriculturalists and that,

⁴³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 30, 1892, “The Mennonites: ‘Or the Heroes of a Flat Country.’ The History of Manitoba’s Most Prosperous Agriculturalists Briefly Told- Terms Under Which Mennonites Settled in This Province.”

⁴⁴ Norma Hall, *A Casualty of Colonialism*, accessed February 19, 2016, <https://casualtyofcolonialism.wordpress.com/table-of-contents/the-pastoral-turns-political-on-the-hay-privilege-red-rivers-distinctive-farm-hold/>

⁴⁵ Norma Hall, *Casualty of Colonialism*.

⁴⁶ *Morning Telegraph*, June 11, 1898, “The Galicians: Their Importation Strongly Condemned by Mr. Oliver: The Liberal Member for Alberta Adversely Criticizes the Immigration Methods of Hon. Clifford Sifton- A Strong Plea for Settlers of Some Value to the Country.”

therefore, as a natural consequence the Galicians, being agriculturalists, are also good settlers.”

This was promptly refuted, using evidence that the Galicians were the native population of Russia, in the same area the Mennonites had come from. Since the Russian government had imported the Mennonites to settle their land and make it productive, clearly the Galicians had not been doing so sufficiently. In this way, it was argued that “Russia imported German farmers [Mennonites] for the purpose of making the country more productive than the native Slavonic farmers were able to make it, which is fair evidence of the respective values of the two peoples.”⁴⁷

This immigration debate came shortly after there had been a legal dispute between two Galician laborers and their Mennonite employers in Altona, Manitoba. The police court article in the *Daily Nor’Wester*, described that the men had been employed under a contract to work for a year, but “now that the hard work of the year has begun they deserted and came to the city, followed by their irate employers, named Hildebrand, who were bound to win at all costs, the principle that a contract is made to be executed.”⁴⁸ This certainly did not help the comparisons of the two groups of settlers, who had lived in the same land before, in Russia, where that government had placed them in a similar hierarchy.

George Bryce, an academic from Ontario who arrived in Manitoba in 1871 to set up many educational institutions in the new province, also wrote about Mennonites for the newspapers.⁴⁹ He had become a writer and authority about prairie and Canadian history, giving his opinions on everything from education and religious organizations to immigration and

⁴⁷ *Morning Telegraph*, June 11, 1898, “The Galicians: Their Importation Strongly Condemned by Mr. Oliver: The Liberal Member for Alberta Adversely Criticizes the Immigration Methods of Hon. Clifford Sifton- A Strong Plea for Settlers of Some Value to the Country.”

⁴⁸ *Daily Nor’Wester*, April 13, 1898, “The Police Court: Two Young Galicians Desert their Employers.”

⁴⁹ Catherine Logan Macdonald, “George Bryce, Manitoba Scientist, Churchman, and Historian, 1844-1931” (M.A. diss., University of Manitoba, 1983).

Canadian identity.⁵⁰ He offered his own comparisons of the Mennonites, stating that they had taught Manitobans “from their Russian experience how to live upon the absolutely treeless prairie.”⁵¹ He also noted that they needed to assimilate to Canada, saying that all the different groups needed be educated in the same way, while remembering their unique backgrounds. He also was concerned that of all the groups in Manitoba, including Mennonites, only the Icelandic community had become politically engaged.⁵² Although he acknowledged the contributions of the Mennonites, he was concerned with all of the non-Anglophone immigrants who he thought were not fully embracing their new country.

Mennonites were also observed within their own homes, particularly in the early years of settlement. Outsiders who entered the villages and homes of the Mennonites made many observations during their visits, but this section will examine the comparisons of the Mennonites to others, and the ways in which they were discussed as both foreign and belonging in Manitoba. The earliest official reports of Mennonite settlements in newspapers came from the federal Minister of Agriculture and Immigration’s 1876 report. His report covered the layout of the villages and homes in great detail, as well as how they saved money on fencing, due to their communal lifestyle and sharing of labour, which differed from the other settlers of the province. Their gardens and fields were commented upon, but what is interesting was how these observations were made. In the report the author said that he “visited almost every family” and that he had “seen nothing as regards industry equal to the Mennonites.”⁵³ This intimate level of observation, where he supposedly went from home to home for the purposes of writing a report

⁵⁰ Macdonald, “George Bryce.”

⁵¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 26, 1895, “Greater Canada: Rev. Dr. Bryce before Manitoba College Literary.”

⁵² *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 26, 1895, “Greater Canada: Rev. Dr. Bryce before Manitoba College Literary.”

⁵³ *Manitoba Free Press*, March 10, 1877, “Report of the Minister of Agriculture and Immigration for 1876.”

to be read by a non-Mennonite audience, reveals one aspect of the surveillance that the government attempted to maintain over certain immigrant groups.

The next, and most significant observation of the Mennonites within their own homes occurred during the Vice Regal visit, when the Governor General visited Manitoba, and made reports on the Mennonites, the Roseau River Indian reserve, and the Icelanders.⁵⁴ The English newspapers spent several weeks reporting these visits, in order to thoroughly capture every aspect of these trips, while *Le Métis* simply reported that Lord Dufferin, the Governor General, was in the province.⁵⁵ The *Daily Free Press* and the *Manitoba Free Press* both reported the same story, specifically about the portion of the Vice Regal visit to the Mennonites at the Rat River reserve, the Mennonite settlements on the east side of the Red River.⁵⁶ This story gave a thorough description of the trip, giving details on everything from the travelling and camping portion of the visit, to the speeches made, and observations about the homes and gardens in the village.

The observations of this Mennonite village served to provide the readers with background information on their new neighbours, showcasing their differences, but also their potential for assimilation. The main purpose of the Governor-General's visit was to welcome the Mennonites to Canada, and to make them feel included in the colonial project of the West. This was made most evident during Lord Dufferin's speech, when he said:

The war to which we invite you as recruits and comrades is a war waged against the brute forces of nature; but those forces will welcome our domination, and reward our attack by placing their treasures at our disposal. It is a war of ambition, -- for we intend to annex territory after territory, -- but neither blazing villages nor devastated fields will mark our ruthless track; our battalions will march across the illimitable plains which

⁵⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 11, 1877. "The Vice Regal Visit."

⁵⁵ *Le Métis*, August 1877, "Lord Dufferin en route."

⁵⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, "The Vice Regal Visit: The Trip to the Mennonites."

stretch before us as sunshine steals athwart the ocean; the rolling prairie will blossom in our wake, and corn and peace and plenty will spring where we have trod.⁵⁷

The militaristic language in this section at first seems out of place in a speech given to the pacifist audience of Mennonites, but the goal of the speech was to communicate how the Mennonites fit into the narrative of Canadian colonialism. Their pacifism was central to this point, as evident in the language just before the previous quote, which clarified that “nor will you be called upon in the struggle to stain your hands with human blood- a task which is so abhorrent to your religious feelings.”⁵⁸ Apart from incorporating the Mennonites into Canadian history, these visits also emphasized the differences of their culture to readers.

One of the examples of the differences that were emphasized was the Mennonite response to Lord Dufferin’s speech, which included “the entire crowd taking off their hats during its delivery in token of their approbation.”⁵⁹ This was clarified in a later paragraph that “the frequently bared heads indicated as deep-seated enthusiasm as that which ever took possession of a more demonstrative people.”⁶⁰ Earlier descriptions in this same piece emphasized the decorations and beautiful gardens, including the reception grounds, which were decorated with Canadian and German flags.⁶¹ This all emphasized how the Mennonites had a different culture, but were trying to accommodate the presence of government authority in their community.

In his analysis of newspaper coverage of Dufferin’s visit, Frank H. Epp writes that at a “farewell banquet for distinguished citizens in Winnipeg” he praised Mennonite accomplishments and went into great length about their quick success at creating villages and

⁵⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “The Vice Regal Visit: The Trip to the Mennonites.”

⁵⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “The Vice Regal Visit: The Trip to the Mennonites.”

⁵⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “The Vice Regal Visit: The Trip to the Mennonites.”

⁶⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “The Vice Regal Visit: The Trip to the Mennonites.”

⁶¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “The Vice Regal Visit: The Trip to the Mennonites.”

“European comfort and a scientific agriculture.”⁶² Epp also writes that the Mennonites “were not present at the celebration, and it is doubtful that they read the *Free Press*, which reported the proceedings in detail.”⁶³ This comment draws attention to the underlying problem with all of the newspapers discussed in this thesis, which is that, because of the language barrier, the Mennonites did not know how they were being discussed and commented upon by outsiders.

In the years after these initial observations, Mennonites continued to have outsiders visit their communities in an attempt to offer their own opinions on this group whom they did not understand. In 1879, the *Daily Free Press* published a report from Jacob Y. Shantz, a Mennonite from Ontario who had helped to arrange the initial immigration of Russian Mennonites in Manitoba. Shantz had been part of an inspection of the Mennonite reserves and titled his report “Mennonite Progress.”⁶⁴ His observations were not about culture or anything personal, as he focused mainly on the agricultural progress and the expansion of the settlements. This demonstrated the difference when the observer was someone from within the community compared to someone without the background knowledge. Shantz found it unnecessary to mention language or culture, or any markers of difference or assimilation, instead drawing attention to the progress of the farms and expansion of the settlements.⁶⁵

Another reported incident of the Mennonites being observed by others was reported in 1890 by the *Daily Free Press*, which stood apart from previous visits to the Mennonite settlements. The August 9th report read that “Miss Helen Gregory has been visiting the Mennonite settlements securing subjects for future letters. She also carries a camera with her and

⁶² Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 218.

⁶³ Frank Epp, 218.

⁶⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 31, 1877, “Mennonite Progress.”

⁶⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 31, 1877, “Mennonite Progress.”

in this manner secured a number of sketches.”⁶⁶ On August 19th, she returned, and it was reported that “Miss Helen E. Gregory, Mus. Bach, M.A., returned to the city last evening after a visit to the Mennonite settlement in Southwestern Manitoba.”⁶⁷ While her observations are not known, it is interesting that an unmarried woman was venturing to the Mennonite settlements for her own agenda. This implied that the Mennonite settlement was seen as a respectable place for her to visit, although she almost certainly travelled to the settlement with other people.

This trend of women visiting the Mennonites and making their own observations continued in 1894, when Miss Cora E. Hind and Mrs. R. E. Carr visited the Mennonite settlements. Hind was an aspiring journalist working as a stenographer at the time, who submitted articles on agriculture to the *Free Press*, after being denied a position in 1882, and eventually became the agricultural editor in 1901.⁶⁸ Mrs. R. E. Carr was a local Winnipeg photographer who now has an extensive collection of portraits of everything from families and children to prisoners at Stony Mountain in the Glenbow archives, from the 1880s and 1890s.⁶⁹ Hind was preparing to write an article for a St. Paul-based magazine, and Carr was going to illustrate the article.⁷⁰ On October 19, 1894, Hind’s observations appeared in the *Daily Free Press*, and she commented on the public schools and flour mills that she visited there. At the schools she noted that the children sang in both English and German, suggesting both difference and assimilation.⁷¹ Her observations about the mill included the logistics and success of the mill, but she also commented that “I could not help asking if they only employed handsome men as

⁶⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 9, 1890.

⁶⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 19, 1890.

⁶⁸ Merna Forster, *100 Canadian Heroines: Famous and Forgotten Faces* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2004), 109-111.

⁶⁹ Glenbow Museum, “Archives Photographs Search Results,” accessed February 19, 2016, <http://ww2.glenbow.org/search/archivesPhotosResults.aspx>.

⁷⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 10, 1894.

⁷¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 19, 1894, “On a Trip to Morden: Reflections and Observations of a Racy Writer.”

millers in this part of the country.”⁷² She closed her observations by stating that Mennonites were credited with the success of this portion of the province.⁷³ The tone of her article was more artistic and less concerned with presenting “unbiased” observations than the formal government-related visits.

One final aspect of the discussion of Mennonites as both foreign and belonging in Manitoba can be seen in looking at the differences in how *Le Métis* and *Le Manitoba*, the two French-language newspapers, made their observations of the Mennonites. The two newspapers were continuations of each other, with *Le Métis*, which had begun in 1871, changing its name to *Le Manitoba* in 1881 to reflect “the changing demographic make-up of the province.”⁷⁴ *Le Métis* had been primarily focused on Métis land rights, and the French-Catholic cause, including French-Canadian immigration to Manitoba.⁷⁵ This focus was evident in how they chose to discuss or not discuss Mennonite immigration, and how that changed with the demographic of the province. *Le Métis* initially reported only the basic information about the Mennonite arrival, after an initial examination of Mennonite religion and history in 1873.⁷⁶ This initial report was intended to provide a basic history of Mennonites, but essentially only discussed religion and politics, ignoring any of the cultural or familial information that the English newspapers found interesting.

In the years following, as Mennonites settled in Manitoba, *Le Métis* noted when new Mennonites arrived, but it took further notice of the loans they received, especially when

⁷² *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 19, 1894, “On a Trip to Morden: Reflections and Observations of a Racy Writer.”

⁷³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 19, 1894, “On a Trip to Morden: Reflections and Observations of a Racy Writer.”

⁷⁴ Manitoba. “Le Manitoba,” Accessed January 6, 2016,

<http://manitoba.ca/content/en/newspapers/Le%20Manitoba>.

⁷⁵ Manitoba. “Le Métis, Accessed January 6, 2016,

<http://manitoba.ca/content/en/newspapers/Le%20M%C3%A9tis>.

⁷⁶ *Le Métis*, June 21, 1873, “Les Mennonites.”

compared to the lack of aid extended to the French Canadians.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the townships and reserves set aside for the Mennonites and other immigrants were documented and listed in great detail, as in the case of a 200,000 acre Scottish reserve.⁷⁸ Other lists of Mennonite arrivals appeared throughout 1874 and 1875, with qualifying statements such as one explaining that the Mennonites in Ontario had given them “milliers de dollars pour l’achat de grain et de provisions.”⁷⁹ In 1878, *Le Métis* reported that the established reserves at Rat River and Lorette were “dans le tirage au sort des réserves des métis.”⁸⁰ As will be discussed in the third chapter, Métis land claims under the Manitoba Act were in “total chaos” by the spring of 1873, and so *Le Métis* coverage of Mennonite and other immigrant reserves should be understood within that context.⁸¹ This early coverage from *Le Métis* only discussed the Mennonites when they came into contact with Métis or French Canadian concerns, such as land claims and immigration aid.

After the demographic in the province shifted, and *Le Métis* became *Le Manitoba*, the newspaper ran a thorough, month-long series about the history and culture of the Mennonites, which followed closely to the kind of coverage conducted by the English newspapers. This series, entitled “Etude Historique sur les Mennonites,” was written by “le Révd Père Bitsche,” and ran from December 6, 1883 until January 10, 1884. Bitsche wrote about the Mennonites on the West Reserve, through the knowledge he gained from his personal visits and fluency in German.⁸² According to James Urry and Ingrid Riesen, he appeared to be impressed by the Mennonites, because of their “simple faith and pragmatic approach to life.”⁸³ He also “found

⁷⁷ *Le Métis*, March 20, 1875.

⁷⁸ *Le Métis*, September 12, 1874.

⁷⁹ *Le Métis*, September 26, 1874.

⁸⁰ *Le Métis*, November 21, 1878.

⁸¹ D.N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988), 106.

⁸² Ingrid Riesen and James Urry, “A Catholic Priest’s Account of the Mennonite of Manitoba in 1883: Father Bitsche on the Mennonites,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* Vol. 16 (1998): 230.

⁸³ Riesen, 230.

them wanting in human spirit and believed their community life doomed in a land of individual freedom.”⁸⁴ The December 6th section was completely dedicated to the three-hundred-year history of Anabaptism, and how the Mennonites emerged out of a split from the Catholic church during the Reformation.⁸⁵ The December 13th edition focused on Mennonite-specific religious customs, such as sacraments, pacifism, and excommunication.⁸⁶ It also began to discuss their move to Russia, and the process of how they arrived in Manitoba. This coverage of the Mennonites in Manitoba was the topic of discussion in the December 20th segment, which was appropriately subtitled “Les Mennonites au Manitoba.”⁸⁷ In this section, the Mennonite village structure was examined, including not only how far apart villages were placed, but also how individual lots were set up within the village system.⁸⁸ The names of villages were also part of this article, with Bitsche writing the translations of many villages, such as “Blumenort, endroit aux fleurs, Blumenfeld, campagne aux fleurs” and so on.⁸⁹ With these observations, Bitsche emphasised how the Mennonites loved the land and chose beautiful names even for mundane places, as they named most of their communities after features of the land.⁹⁰

On December 29, 1883, Bitsche wrote a long, detailed account of how Mennonite communities governed and regulated themselves, including the roles of the clergy-equivalent.⁹¹ This religious connection was carried into the new year, with the January 3, 1884 section focusing on religion and theology.⁹² Religion had been one of the topics discussed by *Le Métis*, in much less detail, so it makes sense that *Le Manitoba* would continue to find it a priority, as

⁸⁴ Riesen, 230.

⁸⁵ *Le Manitoba*, December 6, 1883, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁸⁶ *Le Manitoba*, December 13, 1883, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁸⁷ *Le Manitoba*, December 20, 1883, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁸⁸ *Le Manitoba*, December 20, 1883, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁸⁹ *Le Manitoba*, December 20, 1883, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁹⁰ Riesen, 230.

⁹¹ *Le Manitoba*, December 29, 1883, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁹² *Le Manitoba*, January 3, 1884, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

they shared a similar readership (despite changing demographics). However, on January 8, 1884, Bitsche wrote a section about marriage and family life, which included many of the same observations about the similarities and differences of Mennonites to their observers as were made in the English newspapers. He wrote about their strong belief in monogamy and their abhorrence of divorce, as well as how they educated their children to be obedient and to learn about their religion.⁹³ Making this connection was important as it showed the similarities the priest saw between the Mennonites and the French Catholic readership of *Le Manitoba*, as religious minorities with many other differences.

At the end of the series, on January 10, 1884, *Le Manitoba* published the final segment, which covered the topics of agriculture, schools, and their “personalities.” Specifically, Bitsche made the judgement that Mennonites were reserved around strangers, but if they were spoken to in their language “ils deviennent plus communicatifs.”⁹⁴ He also commented that they were generally quiet and reserved in all aspects of life. He concluded his month-long series with a statement that he had researched all of these facts thoroughly, so his report was unbiased.⁹⁵ He also concluded by saying that he believed there would soon be so many divisions between the Mennonites that they would no longer be able to live in their communities and would seek “une vie moins réglementée par leurs chefs.”⁹⁶ He seemed to think that it would be better for the Mennonites to be less regulated by their leaders and to be able to think independently. Of course, as a priest, he may have had a personal motive in writing that the Mennonites and their religious communities were not sustainable. This story in particular by *Le Manitoba* shows an observational gaze of “the other” that had not been evident in prior stories about the Mennonites.

⁹³ *Le Manitoba*, January 8, 1884, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁹⁴ *Le Manitoba*, January 10, 1884, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁹⁵ *Le Manitoba*, January 10, 1884, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

⁹⁶ *Le Manitoba*, January 10, 1884, “Etude Historique des Mennonites.”

Whereas the early French newspaper had discussed the Mennonites only when their presence directly affected them, the later French newspapers began to observe the Mennonites more intimately to assert their position as “different.”

The discussion in this chapter on the ways in which the Mennonites were seen as foreign but also as belonging to Manitoba has focused on the aspects of Mennonite appearance, home, and language because these were the obvious markers that set them apart from other immigrant or Indigenous groups in the province. Whether Mennonites were in cities or towns for business purposes, or being visited by government representatives, or observed by private citizens, the foreignness of the Mennonites in Manitoba was the topic of articles in the newspapers. While they were observed as foreign, they were also seen as belonging in the province in significant ways. They were credited with the success of agriculture in the province, and despite being seen as religiously and culturally different, they represented a safe type of difference that did not pose a threat to the colonial project of tearing down and rebuilding Manitoba into a settler “Canadian” space.

Chapter 3

Economy and Land: Agricultural Prosperity and Conflict

The newspapers of Manitoba told the story of Mennonite settlement and economic success as a lesson for current settlers, as well as those who would become settlers. Mennonites were able to be successful on land that was not originally seen as ideal for European settlement, as discussed on March 21, 1876, when the Dominion Land Office reported that the Mennonites would be successful on land that was “almost completely destitute of timber, and would, consequently, hardly have been chosen for settlement by the ordinary immigrant.”¹ The Mennonites were given two blocks of land, one on each side of the Red River, and intended to live amongst themselves within these two reserves. As will be discussed in this chapter, Mennonites were often not as isolated as they desired. In some cases, it was the Mennonites who chose to engage with the governments and authorities, especially when it came to improving the land for more prosperous agriculture. Shannon Stundén Bower, in her examination of water management in Manitoba, observes that Mennonites were struggling to control the drainage problems in the West Reserve, and became involved in municipal and provincial politics the 1880s and 1890s in order to take on larger projects to manage drainage.² Initially their exceptions to homestead laws meant that the village system and communal land allowed Mennonites “a greater measure of flexibility in accommodating local environmental conditions, including surface water patterns, than was available to the average homesteader.”³ As their communities grew and they could no longer avoid the sections of land that tended to flood, they took on

¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 21, 1876, “Manitoba Land Business.”

² Shannon Stundén Bower, *Wet Prairie: People, Land and Water in Agricultural Manitoba* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 38-39.

³ Stundén Bower, 37.

community projects and coordinated efforts such as hand-digging ditches.⁴ Even this would have been difficult if they had not been settled in close, cooperative communities.

After the provincial government passed “stronger municipal legislation” the municipality of Rhineland was formed out of the West reserve in 1880, despite the objections of many of the more conservative Mennonites.⁵ However, this soon opened doors for Mennonites to address the drainage problems with more force, as they realised that the smaller, localized efforts of ditch-digging were not going to be able to solve the problem.⁶ This prompted several decades of petitions and cooperation between the Mennonites and the government of Manitoba, as well as with the neighbouring municipalities. Specifically, the Mennonites reached out to the largely French-Canadian municipality of Montcalm, just to the east of Rhineland, for cooperation, as the Mennonites’ drainage efforts would have sent all the excess water into Montcalm.⁷

The municipalities of Montcalm and Rhineland developed separately, as they were each home to distinct cultural and linguistic groups. They were both agricultural and Christian communities, but the Mennonite communities saw greater economic success than their neighbours. Kenneth Michael Sylvester writes about the municipality of Montcalm and its relationship to the neighbouring Mennonite community by saying that while they were both focused on living rurally, Mennonites experienced a “higher degree of rural industrialization.”⁸ This industrialization was “a by-product of Anabaptist traditions of literate religiosity,” and aided by the arrival of late nineteenth-century German machinists who settled around the Mennonites, where they could provide services to a linguistically-similar group.⁹ Many

⁴ Stunden Bower, 38.

⁵ Stunden Bower, 38.

⁶ Stunden Bower, 39.

⁷ Stunden Bower, 39.

⁸ Kenneth Michael Sylvester, *The Limits of Rural Capitalism: Family, Culture, and Markets in Montcalm, Manitoba, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 89.

⁹ Sylvester, 89.

Mennonites also preferred to buy from other Mennonites which meant that communities like Altona in the early twentieth century had far more distinct industries (according to the *Mercantile Reference Book, 1916*, this included three stores that sold a variety of goods like drugs and furniture, as well as a print shop).¹⁰ Because of this guaranteed market for Mennonite goods, the Mennonite communities became successful. While their neighbouring communities may also have been successful in time, the rapid success of the Mennonites caused every other group to be compared to them. Sylvester himself compares the residents of Montcalm with the Mennonites discussed in Loewen's *Family, Church, and Market* to examine how the neighbouring communities developed differently.¹¹ While at some level the success of the Mennonites meant that the province as a whole was succeeding, as time passed, many other rural groups expressed bitter disappointment about their comparative lack of success.¹²

In the early accounts of Mennonite arrival in Manitoba, the English newspapers reported that those who had only just arrived in the recent weeks and months were already making "good" use of the land. Even the families who did not yet have livestock were storing up hay for the future. Many of the families were living in homes made of grass and hay, with clay mortar for the floors. Newspapers reported these modest beginnings as signs of hardiness and good work ethic because Mennonites were able to adjust to a difficult area without lumber.¹³ This showed the haste with which the settler narrative began to take over the story of Manitoba, bringing with it ideas of respectability and success that were specific to Euro-Canadians.

Newspapers also discussed Mennonite agriculture as it related to addressing weeds and grasshoppers. Grasshoppers have been previously discussed as a marker of difference because

¹⁰ Sylvester, 90.

¹¹ Sylvester, 89.

¹² Sylvester, 90.

¹³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 11, 1874, "The Mennonites in Manitoba."

the Mennonites supposedly ate them as food, but their influence over the land and economy was a prominent part of the discussion. Grasshoppers had plagued the settlers in Manitoba for years, and a variety of approaches were tried in order to save the harvests from grasshoppers, and to encourage settlers to remain on the prairies for more than a few years. In an article from the *Manitoban and Northwest Herald*, entitled “The Grasshopper: Historical Sketch of its Ravages on Prairies, Pampas, Steppes- Methods of Prevention and Destruction- Mennonite and Old World Experience,” from August 22, 1874, the Mennonites were lauded as having the best chance of ridding the prairie of grasshoppers, as they had previous experience in Russia. James W. Taylor, the author of the long piece, claimed that in Southern Russia, including the area where the Mennonites lived, there were several tactics and programs in place that helped limit the effects of grasshoppers.¹⁴ These tactics included “turning up the ground” in autumn and collecting the eggs, for which the authorities paid a bounty of ten cents per pint of eggs.¹⁵ This did not completely eliminate the grasshoppers, but did limit their numbers and the damage they did to the harvests. Taylor gave many other examples from the “Old World” and argued that Manitoban authorities and farmers should learn from this Old World wisdom. This article, however, was based on assumptions about Mennonite farming practices before they were ever able to set up farms in their new homes. As such, it reveals the anticipation of Manitoban agriculturalists for the solutions that the arrival of the Mennonites might provide, as many Anglo-Canadian settlers found the combination of flat prairies with little surface water or trees, along with the cycles of drought and grasshoppers to be a nearly impossible challenge.

¹⁴ *Manitoban and Northwest Herald*, August 22, 1874, “The Grasshopper: Historical Sketch of its Ravages on Prairies, Pampas, Steppes.”

¹⁵ *Manitoban and Northwest Herald*, August 22, 1874, “The Grasshopper: Historical Sketch of its Ravages on Prairies, Pampas, Steppes.”

In 1875, the following year, it was reported that the presence of a large number of grasshoppers was “not encouraging,” as the “whole thirteen hundred settlers [on the Mennonite settlement] have sown all their seed.”¹⁶ This was likely discouraging for the observers, who had hoped that the Mennonites would transform the environment into one of successful agricultural practice. However, by July of 1875, the news was not all bad regarding grasshoppers, as the *Manitoba Free Press* reported that “there are not many hoppers at the Mennonite settlement on Scratching River” but that “most of the settlement of Mennonites on the east side has suffered considerably.”¹⁷ Ultimately, grasshoppers were not an easy problem to solve, and while the Mennonite presence was initially praised as a potential solution, it ended up with mixed results.

In 1877, the grasshopper situation was once again discussed in the newspapers, and the Mennonites were again used as examples. In Minnesota and other states where the Mennonites had settled, laws had been put in place to encourage settlers to follow the advice of the Mennonites. This advice was given to residents of Manitoba: “that the older residents of Manitoba will profit by the example of their Mennonite neighbours.”¹⁸ The article discussed the parishes along the Red and Assiniboine rivers and how the long, narrow lots were “favourably situated for the adoption of the tactics of a locust war.”¹⁹ The “Scotch parish of Kildonan” was also identified as an area that could benefit from the example of the Mennonites.²⁰ The article closed with the statement that this would be successful, “especially if the former experience and future example of the Mennonites is closely followed.”²¹ This drew a distinction between the Mennonites and other settlers (although the long narrow lots along the rivers were likely Métis),

¹⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 27, 1875, “Further Grasshopper Intelligence.”

¹⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, July 3, 1875, “Grasshopper Intelligence.”

¹⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 5, 1877, “A Hopeful Augury.”

¹⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 5, 1877, “A Hopeful Augury.”

²⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 5, 1877, “A Hopeful Augury.”

²¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 5, 1877, “A Hopeful Augury.”

suggesting that the Mennonites were the newcomers and the experts, coming into a settler space to teach, rather than coming into an Indigenous space to settle the land. As previously mentioned, this erased the history of Métis agriculture and the manner in which they were denied land rights by the very governments who praised the Mennonites for their innovation.²²

As the years progressed, the ways in which the Mennonites used land were part of the story told for the education and information of future non-Mennonite settlers and immigrants. Specifically, when it came to weeds, soil, and raising livestock, Mennonites were described as having the benefit of experience that made their products superior to those from other groups. On March 5, 1877, the Minister of Agriculture and Immigration published a report in the *Daily Free Press*, giving information about the new immigrants: the Icelanders and Mennonites.²³ While the report commented on the logistics of the progress of the immigrants, it specifically reported that the Mennonites, in a few years, would be a “wealthy and respectable race.” The report also said that the Minister had “seen nothing as regard industry equal to the Mennonites. They are, and no mistake, a hive of busy bees, and a credit to any country.”²⁴ The ways in which the Mennonites used the land were recognized by the Anglo-Canadian observers as being particularly valuable, while the ways in which Indigenous peoples used the land in southern Manitoba was not recognized in the same way.²⁵

In 1886, the narrative of successful Mennonite settlement was still being told, but the decade of settlement that had passed had changed the ways in which the land of Manitoba was used. In the 1870s, there was a strong Indigenous and Métis claim to the land, which the English

²² Norma Hall, *Casualty of Colonialism*, accessed February 19, 2016, <https://casualtyofcolonialism.wordpress.com/table-of-contents/the-pastoral-turns-political-on-the-hay-privilege-red-rivers-distinctive-farm-hold/>.

²³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 5, 1877, “Report of the Minister and Agriculture and Immigration for 1876.”

²⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 5, 1877, “Report of the Minister and Agriculture and Immigration for 1876.”

²⁵ Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996), 173-175.

newspapers were hesitant to emphasize. By 1886, the Indigenous presence on the land was largely displaced by the agrarian production of the Mennonites, and this served to romanticize the history of the province.²⁶ These observations were published in a report about the Pembina Mountains and the western Mennonite settlement. In this report, the Mennonite settlement was praised as “the only one that has really prospered in Manitoba or the Northwest so far” and the usual discussion of Mennonite work ethic and thrift was offered.²⁷ Apart from the praise of Mennonite land use, there was also a discussion of Indigenous presence on the land. This newspaper story was careful not to draw direct connections between the present-day Indigenous peoples of Manitoba and the people who had built the mounds that were the subject of this section of the article. In the paragraph prior to the examination of the burial mounds, “Indians” were mentioned, in an off-hand remark about ridding the country of gophers, and that “perhaps a premium of a cent for each [gopher] scalp or tail would induce the Indians and others to go for them.”²⁸ The next paragraph discussed the burial mounds, and it began with the phrase “Long before the present Indian tribes came to the Northwest it was inhabited by a more civilized race, of whom we have no records except the few mounds they have left.”²⁹ The mound, called “Calf Mountain” was described, including the evidence of “skeletons of recent burials.”³⁰ The paragraph closes with the suggestion that “in the interests of science this mound should be properly opened.”³¹

While at first this description of burial mounds does not seem to have any relation to the previous paragraphs about how Mennonites had transformed the land, a closer examination

²⁶ Gerhard Ens, 139-140.

²⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 10, 1886, “Pembina Mountains: Good Crops for a Hundred Miles.”

²⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 10, 1886, “Pembina Mountains: Good Crops for a Hundred Miles.”

²⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 10, 1886, “Pembina Mountains: Good Crops for a Hundred Miles.”

³⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 10, 1886, “Pembina Mountains: Good Crops for a Hundred Miles.”

³¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 10, 1886, “Pembina Mountains: Good Crops for a Hundred Miles.”

reveals some interesting juxtapositions. While Mennonite land use was praised, the “Indians,” living in the same area of the province, were not discussed as farmers or as people who had previously used the land. Instead the newspaper mentioned that they might be able to catch gophers. In further contrast to this, the Indigenous peoples who created the burial mounds were admired by the Euro-Canadian observers, who declared them to be a “civilized race,” different from the Indigenous peoples living on the land at the present time. This type of depiction mattered, because the English newspapers, through stories like this, were able to retell and reposition the history of settlement in the province of Manitoba. By telling the story in this way, the Mennonites and the government did not take land that was in use by a “civilized” people, but rather land that had been used, but was temporarily held by a “less civilized” people. Both former Indigenous and Mennonite land use practices were praised, while present Indigenous land uses were seen as less legitimate.

Part of the narrative of Mennonites as desirable immigrants was directly related to the money they were able to bring with them. While not all of them had been wealthy in Russia, the Mennonites were not evaluated as individuals, but rather as a group, and the group came with an amount of capital that impressed those who were observing immigrants to Canada. It was reported in the *Manitoba Free Press*, in an immigration report, that immigrants brought \$909,519 into the country, but that “the amount of settlers’ effects entered \$433,054, making a total of 1,344,573.”³² Of this amount, “\$380,000 was brought in by the Mennonites.”³³ The Mennonites were praised for bringing in approximately one-third of the money brought by immigrants. Financial “independence” (despite their loans from the federal government and the

³² *Manitoba Free Press*, April 8, 1876, “Report of the Minister of Agriculture.”

³³ *Manitoba Free Press*, April 8, 1876, “Report of the Minister of Agriculture.”

Ontario Mennonites) was important in how English-language newspapers discussed the new groups of immigrants.

However, in 1886, the discussion about Mennonite immigration changed in the English newspapers. In a previously-discussed report on the Pembina Mountains, the Mennonites were described as having “all started poor, actually in debt for money advanced by the government, and totally ignorant of prairie farming in a district [...] far from wood and good water.”³⁴ This negative portrayal of Mennonites in a report from Pembina Mountain is unsurprising, as tensions peaked between these two groups at this time, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

While settlers in other areas of the province may have seen the positive side of Mennonite settlement, their closest neighbours (at Pembina Mountain) were more intimately involved in land and resource disputes, which naturally caused a different tone in observation of the Mennonites.

Another aspect of Mennonite arrival which was the subject of frequent discussion in the newspapers was the reserve system. While government officials and those living in Winnipeg who benefited from the success of the Mennonite reserves found the system worthwhile, because of the wealth it brought, other settlers in southern Manitoba found it frustrating that settlers did not have exceptions to homestead laws and that certain land was withheld from them. This frustration led to confusion, as various levels of government tried to determine what could be done with the reserve system, once the Mennonites had proved that the land could be profitable. Initial reports from the Department of the Interior in 1877, after the first round of complaints had been made, decided that “the complaints of the English-speaking settlers were either unjustified

³⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 10, 1886, “Pembina Mountains.”

or frivolous.”³⁵ The reports claimed that if the Mennonites had not settled there and proven the land to be valuable, “others would probably not be doing so either.”³⁶ Over the next few years, the complaints continued. However, many officials felt they had to support the Mennonites out of fear that land agents from the United States would use any conflict that arose to persuade the Mennonites to leave Manitoba.³⁷ This would have removed a sizeable portion of the population of Manitoba, as well as left that section of the border unsettled. While the government of Manitoba was not as accommodating to other groups of immigrants, the Mennonites were favoured when it came to this issue of land, which led to complications and disagreements.³⁸

This frustration was expressed in newspapers as early as 1875, when the *Manitoba Free Press* correspondent from the Pembina Mountains submitted a regional update. The correspondent, in a section succinctly called “Rumor,” addressed a rumour that three townships had been set aside for Mennonite settlement, and that “the settlers in township three are very dissatisfied in consequence.”³⁹ This was because much of the land was “already taken up and a good part settled by English speaking people [and] it would certainly be very unjust that they should be compelled to reside among people of altogether different customs and language.”⁴⁰ The complaints were also raised because that land was considered desirable, and the writer was concerned that “we, as Canadians, do not wish to see the balance (the Half-breeds have the rest) of the choicest land reserved for a foreign people, while native born Canadians may content themselves as best they can on the ‘big plain’ or elsewhere.”⁴¹ Canadian settlers, who were

³⁵ William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 22.

³⁶ Janzen, 22.

³⁷ Janzen, 22.

³⁸ Janzen, 3.

³⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 28, 1875, “Pembina Mountains.”

⁴⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 28, 1875, “Pembina Mountains.”

⁴¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 28, 1875, “Pembina Mountains.”

already displeased with the land set aside for Indian reserves, were upset at the idea that other groups were also reserving land for themselves.

The Canadian settlers' concerns were likely less about the Mennonites and more about the shifting demographics of the province in the mid-1870s. Another report from the Land Office from 1876 mentioned that the Mennonite reserve was growing, but also that "twelve Indian reserves also have been surveyed and several others are in progress."⁴² This report made no mention of the land set aside for the Métis in the Manitoba Act, but presumably some land was being sold, as implied by the phrase "5000 acres were sold for cash."⁴³ By 1876 it was unlikely that many successful Métis land claims were being allotted, as by the spring of 1873 "it had become clear that the entire question of land claims under the Manitoba Act was in total chaos."⁴⁴ D.N. Sprague argues that the delay in Métis land claims was likely a "deliberate strategy of discouragement," as not only had very few claims been acknowledged by 1873, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald informed Lieutenant Governor Alexander Morris that "future conflicts between 'actual settlers' and 'former occupants' ought to be handled by local militia."⁴⁵ Not only this, but Macdonald told Morris to "stir up the people to form volunteers or active militia corps... to protect themselves."⁴⁶ It is in this climate of racial tension over land disputes that the Mennonite and settler land conflicts should be understood. This was not a problem that was unique to the Mennonites, and had in the previous years, been a considerable problem for the Métis population in Manitoba.

⁴² *Manitoba Free Press*, March 18, 1876, "The Land Office Business."

⁴³ *Manitoba Free Press*, March 18, 1876, "The Land Office Business."

⁴⁴ D.N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988), 106.

⁴⁵ Sprague, 107.

⁴⁶ Sprague, 107.

The anti-reserve discussions again placed Mennonite land use in the newspapers in a long article entitled “The Land Reserves,” which did not specifically target Mennonites, but rather expressed frustration with the Half-breed, Indian, Hudson’s Bay Company, French, Mennonite, and Icelandic reserves in various parts of the province.⁴⁷ This sentiment is expressed through the fictional albeit probably relatable story of a man trying to find a place to settle his family, but who is continuously told by the Land Office, that the land he has chosen has been set aside, first as part of the “1,400,000 acres of land reserved for the children of Half-breeds” and then “a Hudson’s Bay Company lot” and then his homestead was “within twenty miles of a prospective line of railway.”⁴⁸ He continued his struggle several more times, before becoming discouraged, and returning to Winnipeg with his family “and if he does not leave the country, or has not the means enough to get out, he goes into teaming and his family opens a cheap boarding house.”⁴⁹ This was seen as the worst thing that could happen to a respectable Canadian settler, as that was generally a role for less desirable immigrant families. One of the complaints raised was that “holders of these reserves will not occupy them or let others occupy them, who are ready to plunge the plow into the soil and cause the now waste places to teem with golden grain.”⁵⁰ While the Mennonites were using land in a way that settlers acknowledged as valuable (for farming), and so were not the main subject of the frustration (the railway, Hudson’s Bay Company, and Indian reserves were seen as the largest offenders), they were brought into this discussion of legitimate land use in Manitoba. The closing of this article contained an appeal to various levels of government (and for citizens to petition these governments) to prevent this from becoming the

⁴⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, June 17, 1876, “The Land Reserves.”

⁴⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, June 17, 1876, “The Land Reserves.”

⁴⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, June 17, 1876, “The Land Reserves.”

⁵⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, June 17, 1876, “The Land Reserves.”

norm in other places, as well as to pressure governments to open “unoccupied” reserves for settlement.⁵¹

A few weeks later, on July 18, 1876, the Land Reserves were once again the subject of public outrage, in the *Daily Free Press*. This article raises similar concerns to the previous one, emphasizing that half of the land in the province had been set aside for “special settlement, extinguishment of Indian title and railroad purposes.”⁵² The Mennonites entered into this discussion only in the observation that “the special reserves, except perhaps those for the Icelanders and Mennonites [have] failed in any good effect.”⁵³

The unique reserve system brought with it many complications when non-Mennonites came in contact with the barriers to their own settlement. In 1876, several families from Ontario arrived to southern Manitoba to settle in the same community as their friends, and discovered “their old neighbours’ settlement reserved for the Mennon[ite]s” which caused them to return to Ontario.⁵⁴ This sparked a brief moment of political outrage, as one letter to the editor claimed that this misunderstanding was the result of “another of Bishop Tache’s sharp moves.”⁵⁵ The anonymous settler claimed that “This country has hitherto been represented by one of his selection” and that with “the increase of Ontario population in the county there was no hope that the Bishop’s nominee would in future be elected.”⁵⁶ While the Mennonites were likely not conspiring with Bishop Tache in any sort of political intrigue, their reserve was strategically located for electoral purposes and the reserve system caused the newspapers to take notice of the

⁵¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, June 17, 1876, “The Land Reserves.”

⁵² *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 18, 1876, “The Land Reserves.”

⁵³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 18, 1876, “The Land Reserves.”

⁵⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 13, 1876. “Local and Provincial.”

⁵⁵ *Manitoba Free Press*, July 29, 1876, “Land Reserves.”

⁵⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, July 29, 1876, “Land Reserves.”

potentially problematic location of the Mennonite reserve and how it could affect political representation.

Many problems emerged because of the reserved land, and while some expressed their frustration with the Land Office in newspapers, others simply ignored regulations and became squatters on reserved land. In the late 1870s, and peaking in the year 1880 the issue of squatters on Mennonite settlements was raised, and featured prominently in local and regional newspapers for the majority of the year. One of the early discussions of the Mennonite reserves and squatters appeared in the *Manitoba Free Press*, on December 22, 1877. In this incident, a timber inspector went to “warn off the squatters on the Dufferin Mennonite reserve.”⁵⁷ There had been a previous conflict between these groups over the use of “some wooded land” but now it seemed that the squatters had actually moved onto the reserve.⁵⁸

That same week, *Le Métis* offered a longer, more thorough examination of the conflict between the Mennonites and the Ontario settlers. The *Métis* newspaper covered the story with much less sympathy for the Ontario settlers, referring to them as “individus, qui se prétendent au-dessus des lois” and shaming them for creating “des scènes de pugilat et de bâton.”⁵⁹ This concern over settlers who felt that they were “above the law” and were stirring up violence showed that in *Le Métis* the settlers were seen as the antagonists. *Le Métis* also raised concerns about how the Mennonites were supposed to access their wooded lands, if the squatters refused to move. There were calls to the government, but rather than asking the government to open the reserve, they asked that the government enforce the law with more strength, to prevent this from happening. In contrast to that, on December 29, 1877, the *Manitoba Free Press* reported that

⁵⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, December 22, 1877, “Local and Provincial.”

⁵⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, December 22, 1877, “Local and Provincial.”

⁵⁹ *Le Métis*, December 27, 1877.

“The Menno-Canuck difficulty at Pembina Mountain is still lively,” before reporting that ten Mennonites were “captured in the act of driving off with a load of wood from a homestead claim.”⁶⁰ According to the newspaper, previous offenders had been fined for doing this, although no comment was made about whether the Mennonites were on their own reserve. The contrast in the tone of reporting (from condemning the violence, to describing it as “lively”) demonstrated the different approach each newspaper and their audience took to these land disputes.

The conflict between the Mennonites and Canadians continued to escalate, with the *Manitoba Free Press* reporting that “one Mennonite, just in from the Mountain, shows signs of rough handling and twelve others have been summoned [...] on charges of trespass and stealing.”⁶¹ Other reports found that five Mennonites “were lodged in the provincial gaol [jail] for twenty days” after being caught taking wood from a township that had been included in the Mennonite reserve.⁶² The township, despite legally belonging to the Mennonite reserve, was filled with non-Mennonite settlers, who had claimed it for themselves. Initially ten Mennonites had been arrested after refusing to pay a fine for taking the wood, but their friends had come to their assistance and had rescued five of the Mennonite prisoners. One report said that the person to blame for stirring the Mennonites to action was “Mr. Miller [called Muller or Mueller in other accounts], the Mennonite chief.”⁶³ This Mennonite resistance to Canadian authority caused a different kind of debate in the English newspapers, as some people wrote letters, concerned that the Mennonites did not respect local authorities. One letter said that the Mennonites had “refused to pay the costs, and when a constable was sent to apprehend them they laughed at him.”⁶⁴ The

⁶⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, December 29, 1877, “Local and Provincial”

⁶¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, December 29, 1877, “Emerson.”

⁶² *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 10, 1878, “The Menno-Canuck Difficulty.”

⁶³ *Manitoba Free Press*, January 19, 1878, “Local and Provincial: Pembina Mountain.”

⁶⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, January 19, 1878, “The Menno-Canuck Difficulty.”

writer of this letter was concerned that outside authorities were not respected upon Mennonite reserves and this would lead to further conflict between the different groups of settlers.

After that encounter, concerns over settlers “squatting” on Mennonite reserves were reignited in 1880, when there was a renewed interest in settlers moving onto the “unoccupied lands within the Mennonite Reserve, west of Red River.”⁶⁵ At this point, the English newspapers were writing that “a great many people are under the impression that there would be no bad faith towards the Mennonite colonist were the unappropriated lands within this reserve thrown open for general settlement.”⁶⁶ Along with the renewed interest in the land, there was a call to government action, saying that “the quicker they make a move in the premises the better it would be. On the other hand, if the determination is to hold the whole reserve intact, effective preventative measures to “squatting” should be taken at once.”⁶⁷ By June of 1880, this issue had escalated and the newspapers were reporting that there was a “rush being made on to the Mennonite lands immediately west of [West Lynne].” There were rumours going around that the government intended to “throw them open to settlement on the first of July,” which the newspaper commented “If this is true it is one of the best things the Government could do.”⁶⁸

Just few days later, there was a longer story in the *Daily Free Press*, reprinted from the *Emerson International*, entitled “Huge Land Grab: Rush of Squatters to the Mennonite Reserve-Claim Shanties Going up in Every Direction.” At the time of this article, the reserve had still not been opened, but settlers expected it to be opened for settlement in July and that “those who squatted upon the Reserve now would not be put off and would have prior claims upon the land

⁶⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 23, 1880.

⁶⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 23, 1880.

⁶⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 23, 1880.

⁶⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 16, 1880, “West Lynne Correspondence.”

when it was opened for entry.”⁶⁹ This brought so many people to the Mennonite reserve that “it had developed into a regular land craze and stampede.”⁷⁰ For the most part, Mennonite perspectives on this rush of settlers to their reserve were not included, although one anecdote was written, in order to show the “good feelings” about this:

A Mennonite, with a humorous turn, met one of the squatters yesterday, and addressed him thusly: -- “You fine good English speaking man, you break five acres for me; you very good man. Guide daaie!”⁷¹

The Mennonite in this story clearly still saw the land as belonging to himself, as he viewed the squatter as having done his work for him, by breaking the section around his shanty, which he intended to claim.

This conflict continued in the newspapers on June 21st, in a short article called “Badly Sold,” where the Mennonite perspective was given. This story discussed the visit of “Ober Schultz Miller, chief of the Mennonites” to Winnipeg, “where he had been interviewing Surveyor General Russell in reference to the squatters who have been piling onto the Mennonite reserve.”⁷² Russell, the surveyor, determined that the Mennonites had another three years on the land where they should not be disturbed, and so the squatters would have to leave. This news was not well received, as the settlers claimed they would “hold their ground until dislodged at the point of the bayonet.”⁷³ This whole situation seemed to have started because of rumours without any basis in fact, and brought Manitoba and the Mennonites to the attention of a St. Paul-based newspaper from across the border. Essentially, the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* wrote about the how this conflict over land would affect their own trade with Manitoba and the

⁶⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 19, 1880, “Huge Land Grab: Rush of Squatters to the Mennonite Reserve.”

⁷⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 19, 1880, “Huge Land Grab: Rush of Squatters to the Mennonite Reserve.”

⁷¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 19, 1880, “Huge Land Grab: Rush of Squatters to the Mennonite Reserve.”

⁷² *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 21, 1880, “Badly Sold.”

⁷³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 21, 1880, “Badly Sold.”

Northwest Territories, as the Mennonite reserve ran along the border, and if others who were more receptive to trade and capitalism were living along the border, they would bring more wealth into the United States.⁷⁴ This story also expressed concern over how this rumour about available land was able to spread so quickly, without any pamphlets or information released from the land offices.⁷⁵

This confusion over the Mennonite reserves would keep the Mennonites in the news in the following days, as newspapers continued to publish various perspectives about the actions the government should take, with some insisting that “we believe that [to open the reserve for settlement] would be no bad faith to the Mennonites.”⁷⁶ Others protested that “there should not be one law for Mennonites and another for Canadians.”⁷⁷ Tensions did not dissipate as time passed, as evidenced in the *Free Press* commentary on a *Nelsonville Mountaineer* article from March 2, 1881, which passionately argued against the Mennonite reserves, and insisted that the *Mountaineer* had “correctly [declared] that the Mennonite reserve in South Dufferin and the French reserve in North Dufferin are on all hands pronounced a nuisance and an injustice.”⁷⁸ The main argument against the Mennonite reserve was that the land was too good to be reserved only for them, and that the Mennonites had been so successful already, that “the Dominion has in every sense fulfilled her obligations to the Mennonites [because] the land set apart for them has proved more than sufficient.”⁷⁹ In this context, the Mennonites were no longer seen as the “advance guard” towards the progress of their new nation, but rather as a barrier to the success of “real” Canadians.

⁷⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 23, 1880, “The Squatters and the Land Regulations.”

⁷⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 23, 1880, “The Squatters and the Land Regulations.”

⁷⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 28, 1880, “The Mennonite Reserve.”

⁷⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 5, 1880, “A New Departure.”

⁷⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 1, 1881, “Land Reserves.”

⁷⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 1, 1881, “Land Reserves.”

This debate shaped the province in ways that were not fully discussed in newspapers, as the border of the reserve had actually shifted in order to accommodate squatters and others. According to Adolf Ens, in his book *Subjects or Citizens*, Mennonite leaders actually petitioned the Prime Minister in 1880 to protest that the Nelsonville Land Office “was not enforcing the ‘Meno-Canuck’ line, which they had always respected.”⁸⁰ This line actually cut through the western edge of the West reserve in a zig-zag manner, which moved the location of Morden and Stodderville, two non-Mennonite communities technically inside the reserve, to the outside of the reserve.⁸¹ It seemed that while that compromise had worked for a while, that line continued to be moved by the squatters, who pushed further into the reserve, and in consequence, pushed the Mennonites further from their available woodlots.

Amidst this debate, tensions between the Mennonites and the Canadians were felt on another front when several constables went to the Mennonite reserve to seize “a couple of horses and a cow or two” in order to fulfill the payment of a fine.⁸² As seen previously, the Mennonites did not necessarily respect the authorities from Nelsonville or the Pembina Mountains, and this particular incident turned violent when other Mennonites defended the land of the person charged with paying the fine. The constable returned with reinforcements, prompting this situation: “The Mennonites were gathered in force, but a well directed volley [...] backed by a few well constructed maneuvers on the part of the artillery, resulted in a parley.”⁸³ When the Mennonites continued to object, the newspaper referred to them as “the enemy” who “proposed an adjournment,” but then “three of their citizens [were taken] as prisoners of war.”⁸⁴ The

⁸⁰ Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens: The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 31.

⁸¹ Adolf Ens, 29.

⁸² *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 8, 1881, “A Mennonite Difficulty.”

⁸³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 8, 1881, “A Mennonite Difficulty.”

⁸⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 8, 1881, “A Mennonite Difficulty.”

Mennonite charged with paying the debt argued in court that he had previously paid the fine. Regardless, the language of “enemy” and “prisoner of war” demonstrated a shifting perspective in how the Mennonites were seen by the English newspapers as a result of the land claims debate that dominated the news about them at the time.

The French-language newspapers had a different focus. In 1881, *Le Métis* wrote a story about the updates from the “Bureau des Terres,” which explained that there were three major changes for land in Manitoba. The concern about Mennonite land being opened did not feature prominently in the French-language *Métis* newspaper, so this was a significant mention. Even when these changes were discussed, the Mennonite reserve, opened for sale at three dollars an acre, was ranked as less significant than the sale of parishes between the Red and Assiniboine rivers for five dollars an acre, as this land was traditionally French-speaking *Métis* land.⁸⁵

Official announcements were made in the English-language newspapers in October of 1882, stating that land in the Mennonite reserve was for sale, and these advertisements continued to feature prominently in the newspapers for several weeks.⁸⁶ Several weeks after this, the same newspaper reported that the “squatters on the Mennonite reserve have been notified by the Government that they can hold their lands by the payment of [three dollars] per acre.”⁸⁷ After these announcements, land disputes on the Mennonites reserves were no longer part of the newspaper coverage, other than when timber regulations were changed across the province in 1898, when more sections of the western Mennonite reserve were opened to general settlement.⁸⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, there was no more “empty” land in Manitoba to be fought

⁸⁵ *Le Métis*, August 6, 1881, “Vente de Terres: Departement de l’Interieur.”

⁸⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 10, 1882.

⁸⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 19, 1882, “City and Province.”

⁸⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 23, 1898, “Timber Regulations.”

over, and the Mennonites and Métis no longer held different rights over reserved lands, which meant that English language newspapers moved on to discuss other and more relevant things.

Beyond conflicts over land use, many observations were made about the Mennonites as they participated in the economy as a collective group. Mennonites were rarely mentioned as individuals so it can be difficult to determine if these observations represented just a few families, or the group as a whole, but they were largely characterized as the achievements and assimilation of the whole group. In particular, the economic contributions of the Mennonites were upheld as evidence of the Mennonites holding onto the best parts of themselves, but also adapting successfully to their new country, and improving the country to which they arrived. These observations began in 1874, when the *Manitoba Free Press* wrote that “a large number of Mennonites who drove through with teams and cattle, arrived yesterday, and created the usual ripple upon the bosom of the city’s business stream.”⁸⁹ That the Mennonites, so early after their arrival, were seen as having a “usual ripple” on the economy of the city suggests that the Mennonite impact on the economy was a large part of the discussion around these newcomers, as Manitobans sought to see their province become a wealthy part of the nation.

Newspapers continued to make note of the ways in which the Mennonites as a collective group were consumers and contributed to the economy, even if at times these observations seemed insignificant, such as noting that because of the Mennonites, “woodenware in the shape of tubs, pails, churns, etc.” were in demand and continued to be brought in by steamer.⁹⁰ Other reports on Mennonite arrival used phrases like “everybody will be jingling ten dollar gold pieces” in reference to the effect of Mennonites on local economies.⁹¹ Newspapers frequently

⁸⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 29, 1874, “Local and Provincial.”

⁹⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 5, 1874, “Local and Provincial.”

⁹¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, January 9, 1875. “Local and Provincial.”

referred to Mennonites as a collective force on the economy, without questioning whether or not all Mennonites were successful. An example of this was from the “Emerson Report” of the *Manitoba Free Press*, when two consecutive stories about the economy showed how the reporting differed:

Joseph Klint has the honor of drawing to Emerson the first load of wheat raised in this township. The settlers in this district have their ground well prepared for sowing early in the spring. The important question now is “What shall the harvest be?”

A large number of Mennonites, with teams, are in to-day from the neighborhood of the Pembina mountain. They are in for lumber and supplies generally. They express themselves well pleased with the winter weather so far. They find it less severe than they expected to find it in Manitoba.⁹²

Listing Joseph Klint (who was not a Mennonite) as an individual, who was not asked about the weather, differs from the reporting of the Mennonites, listed as “a large number,” who were reportedly questioned about the weather, despite immigrating from a similar climate in Russia. Klint was also named in the paper and discussed as a solitary figure, while the Mennonites do not speak as individuals or contribute to the economy as individuals. There were other instances when Mennonites were listed as individuals who were part of the economy, as when “Mr. Weins, a Mennonite” was the proprietor of a new grist mill close to Rat River, but these examples were less common.⁹³

While the general trend was to see all Mennonites as one large group, the *Manitoba Free Press* did explain the differences between the “Scratching River” and “Rat River” Mennonite settlements, based on their relative economic and agricultural success. The paper wrote that “at Scratching river [sic] is the most wealthy portion of the Mennonites, and [...] they separated themselves from those at Rat River, being afraid that the burden of supporting the poor at the

⁹² *Manitoba Free Press*, January 15, 1876, “Emerson Report.”

⁹³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 28, 1876, “City and Provincial News.”

latter place would be more than they could bear.”⁹⁴ This whole discussion was framed by the idea that Morris was becoming an economic centre in Manitoba, and its proximity to the Mennonites was partially credited for its success. In contrast to this, the far more common portrayals of Mennonites as a group, continued, with stories such as “several loads of grain were on the market this morning, no weather being bad enough to deter the hardy and industrious Mennonite from coming to market.”⁹⁵ Part of the reason for reporting the Mennonites as a unified group was that at some moments, they did engage with the public as a group, such as when “Kaiser Miller, head man of the Mennonites, signed a contract to have his people deliver 40,000 bushels of wheat at \$1.00 per bushel.”⁹⁶

Economic innovation was another theme that emerged about how the Mennonites used land and engaged in the economy. The English newspapers wrote about how the Mennonites were adjusting culturally, which has been discussed in other sections, but they also wrote about their successful assimilation into the Manitoban economy, as agriculturalists but also as employers and even people who cheated. Particularly in the 1890s, the newspapers were no longer as fascinated by general statements about the Mennonites (although these still occurred), and so observations about more specific projects and altercations with Mennonites became part of newspapers. An early story about Mennonite economic assimilation was written about the new linseed oil mill, which was being established around Point Douglas Avenue, and the Mennonites were filling a contract for a large amount of the seed required to keep the mill running.⁹⁷ This showed that the Mennonites were engaging in the economy beyond their nearest communities of Morris and Emerson.

⁹⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, July 22, 1876, “Morris.”

⁹⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 13, 1880, “West Lynne.”

⁹⁶ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, October 18, 1881.

⁹⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 24, 1884, “The Linseed Oil Mill.”

This discussion about Mennonite economic assimilation appeared again in the English newspapers in 1885, when the Mennonites in “Schanzenfeldt, a Mennonite village nine miles from Morden” set aside land to start a cheese factory.⁹⁸ This had to be negotiated with provincial authorities, and Mr. A. E. Shantz, the interpreter, reporting to the newspaper that not only had the cheese factory negotiations gone well, the village system unique to the Mennonites was going to be “broken up in the coming spring” in the region, with “all except about a dozen [of the thirty families] [taking] up their residence on their several farms, removing their buildings, which are of logs, from the village.”⁹⁹ The article closed with the statement that “Some of the leaders still cling to the old system and strongly oppose the changes, so that there is quite a little revolution in progress in the generally calm and quiet communities.”¹⁰⁰ The English newspapers clearly had an opinion about this, as earlier in the article the author wrote that “the more enlightened of them see that see that this must come about sooner or later” in reference to the Mennonites who were choosing to break up the traditional village structure.¹⁰¹ This was seen as economic assimilation, but also cultural assimilation, and part of the inevitable process that perhaps was no longer resisted by the Mennonites.

Mennonite involvement in the cheese industry was evidently successful, as one 1890 report stated that “thirty thousand pounds of cheese [...] from the Mennonite reserve, were shipped to the English market yesterday.”¹⁰² In 1898, the *Daily Nor’Wester* reported that the Provincial Dairy Commissioner was holding “a cheese factory school of instruction among the Mennonites.”¹⁰³ This school would also run “amongst the French speaking people” for the same

⁹⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 14, 1885, “The Mennonites: A Cheese Factory to be Started at Schanzenfeldt.”

⁹⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 14, 1885, “The Mennonites: A Cheese Factory to be Started at Schanzenfeldt.”

¹⁰⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 14, 1885, “The Mennonites: A Cheese Factory to be Started at Schanzenfeldt.”

¹⁰¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 14, 1885, “The Mennonites: A Cheese Factory to be Started at Schanzenfeldt.”

¹⁰² *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 28, 1890, “City and General.”

¹⁰³ *Daily Nor’Wester*, April 14, 1898.

two weeks that the Mennonite school would take place.¹⁰⁴ Several weeks after this, the *Daily Nor'Wester* published an update on the cheese schools, writing that “the school was attended by all the Mennonite cheese makers, and good results may be confidently expected from the training given.”¹⁰⁵ The goal of these schools had been to ensure that there was a uniform standard for cheese production in Manitoba, and the Mennonites and “French speaking people” attended these schools, allowing government regulation in their factories.

Part of this economic assimilation included Farmers Unions, and in 1885 some Mennonites had begun organizing themselves alongside other farmers. The *Free Press* reported:

The Mennonites pointed out that they are purely a pastoral people living from the products of the soil [however] the municipal taxation system and other institutions are bearing heavily upon them, and they desire to stand shoulder to shoulder with their Anglo-Saxon neighbors in obtaining equal rights to all.¹⁰⁶

This language of standing “shoulder to shoulder” with other farmers could be seen as more evidence that assimilation was possible for the Mennonites. This made the goal of cultural assimilation more attainable.

In 1891, it was reported that “most of the Russian Jews who arrived here lately from Montreal have gone out into the country to work on farms” and that many of them would be working on “the Mennonite settlements in Southern Manitoba.”¹⁰⁷ Mennonite employers, this time named as “two brothers, named Hildebrand” had employed “two young Galician laborers.”¹⁰⁸ After they had signed a contract and been partially paid in advance, the labourers

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Nor'Wester*, April 14, 1898.

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Nor'Wester*, May 2, 1898, “Cheese Schools: Messrs Macdonald and Shunk Return from Steinbach and St. Cloud.

¹⁰⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 12, 1885, “The Mennonites: Their Reasons for Wanting to Join the Farmers Union.”

¹⁰⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 12, 1891, “City and Country.”

¹⁰⁸ *Daily Nor'Wester*, April 13, 1898, “Two Young Galicians Desert Their Employers.”

deserted their employers.¹⁰⁹ This prompted them to all appear before the Magistrate who made the labourers return to their employers to serve out their contract.¹¹⁰

Further evidence of assimilation was seen during the 1892 civic election, when “by a unanimous vote Mr. Penner was chosen” in Rosenfeld, a Mennonite district. Mr. Penner was described as “a wealthy Mennonite,” but after his acceptance speech “a strong feeling against the Government was manifested.”¹¹¹ Despite a reluctance to enter into formal politics, by the 1890s the Mennonites found themselves needing the support of various levels of government if they were going to be able to expand their farms and participate in the agricultural economy. Once it became evident that being part of a rural municipality could be useful, some Mennonites became further involved in politics, to get support for drainage and other community problems.¹¹²

Early accounts of Mennonites described them as “inordinately honest” in their economic transactions, but this novelty of seeing the Mennonites as those who could do no wrong eventually wore off.¹¹³ In 1882, *Le Manitoba* reported that a Mennonite was accused of forging a cheque and pleaded guilty, however, the charge was dismissed because the complainant was found lacking.¹¹⁴ This was reported as a “chose étrange” or, a “strange thing.”¹¹⁵ Several years later, in 1885, a Mennonite man was caught trying to sell a sheep that was “unfit” for consumption because it had starved to death, and was fined for marketplace fraud.¹¹⁶

Mennonites were engaged in the economy in similar ways to other settlers. At times they cheated, and they contributed to the local and provincial agrarian economy. Occasionally they

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Nor’Wester*, April 13, 1898, “Two Young Galicians Desert Their Employers.”

¹¹⁰ *Daily Nor’Wester*, April 13, 1898, “Two Young Galicians Desert Their Employers.”

¹¹¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 11, 1892, “A Sure Winner.”

¹¹² Stundt Bower, 38-39.

¹¹³ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 22, 1874, “Local and Provincial.”

¹¹⁴ *Le Manitoba*, March 9, 1882.

¹¹⁵ *Le Manitoba*, March 9, 1882.

¹¹⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 31, 1885, “Was it a Sheep? A Mennonite Offers for Sale that Which Cannot Be Eaten.”

were seen as individuals, but they were usually observed as a collective group. Mennonites also faced complicated relationships with their Indigenous and settler neighbours because of their exemptions to homestead laws and special relationship with the federal government. While Métis farmers found themselves removed from their land, Mennonite communities had their land rights protected by governments. Newspapers were the site of these discussions, publishing the official government reports as well as the letters to the editor written by concerned and frustrated settlers who did not want to accommodate the prior agreements made between the government and the Mennonites. Newspapers also reported Mennonite participation with the local economy as evidence of successful assimilation, when perhaps the reality was not as simple. This apparent economic success of the Mennonites demonstrated that the Canadian government had made the “right” choice regarding the colonization of the province of Manitoba.

Chapter 4

Gender, Family, and Religion: Monitoring Assimilation

Mennonite settlement in Manitoba typically occurred on reserves, which allowed Mennonites certain privileges in practicing their own religious and cultural practices. However, the reserve system also facilitated government intervention and observation. Ryan Eyford writes about the government regulation of the Icelandic reserve and how reserves more broadly functioned as “tutelary spaces where, under the watchful eye of state administrators, citizens could be made.”¹ Of course, there was a difference between reserves created under the Indian Act, and immigrant reserves, which were far less regulated. The main goal of immigrant reserves, from the perspective of the government, was that in time “they would cease to exist and their residents would be fully assimilated members of Canadian society.”² This chapter addresses how newspapers reported these observations of Mennonite family and religious lives, monitoring the assimilation “progress” of the Mennonites.

Newspapers were interested in the family lives of the Mennonites, and comparing the way their personal lives were different and similar to those of the observers. A main element of these observations concerned labour and gender roles. Observers seemed fascinated by the ways in which Mennonite men, women, and children worked in the home and on farms. Others also made observations about Mennonite family and gender, published in different ways, such as Lady Dufferin’s diary from her visit to Manitoba in 1877. Her diary provides insight into what she observed thought would be interesting for her wider readership. In the newspapers, gender was often not specified, unless describing legal situations, or when making an observation of family life. However, historians have many other sources to examine regarding how Mennonite

¹ Ryan Eyford, “An Experiment in Immigrant Colonization: Canada and the Icelandic Reserve, 1875-1897” (PhD diss., University of Manitoba, 2010).

² Ryan Eyford, “An Experiment in Immigrant Colonization: Canada and the Icelandic Reserve, 1875-1897.”

men and women saw themselves. Royden Loewen has written extensively about this, and observes that when “Yankee newsmen” observed Mennonite women, they would portray them as “silent, working doggedly and artistic only in their nurture of the ubiquitous flowers.”³ When Mennonite men wrote about Mennonite women it was often in similarly one dimensional ways, writing about them mainly as “victims of misfortune: disease, death in childbirth, insanity, domestic mishaps” and the list continued.⁴ In contrast to this, Loewen writes that when women wrote about their own lives they were not so one dimensional. They kept detailed diaries of their home lives, but also wrote about their involvement in “the entire economy of the farm household” extending to the trade with neighbouring farms.⁵ This was also significant because most Mennonites practiced “bilateral partible inheritance,” meaning that each child, regardless of gender, inherited an equal share of the farm, which tended to create a socially egalitarian society “especially when poor boys married well-to-do girls, or poor girls married rich boys.”⁶ While the remainder of this chapter will discuss how Mennonite family and religious lives were portrayed in newspapers, it is important to understand that how the newspapers wrote about Mennonites were not necessarily how they saw themselves.

The interest in Mennonite families will be discussed later in this chapter, but their value as immigrants is especially interesting when compared to the frontier of British Columbia as described by Adele Perry in *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*. According to this book, the mid-nineteenth century brought new ideas about masculinity and race. Perry writes that “Middle-class masculinity especially was re-cast in

³ Royden Loewen, *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 53.

⁴ Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 53.

⁵ Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 53.

⁶ Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 34.

the mould of the self-controlled, temperate, disciplined, and domestic patriarch.”⁷ This extended to the role of male breadwinner, where “men ought to earn sufficient wages to enable women and young children to live in uninterrupted domesticity.”⁸ This idea of respectability was complicated in frontier communities, as they were distant from the society of Eastern Canada, and frontiers like British Columbia “provided a useful haven for men on the lam from unwanted encumbrances of wives and families.”⁹ Frontiers were more difficult to regulate, and people moving away from heavily settled areas could live lives that differed from what would have been acceptable in Eastern Canada.

Another significant aspect of Mennonite respectability in an early pre-immigration report stated that they “reject divorce except for adultery” and that they only married within their own group.¹⁰ This confirmed that Mennonites practiced the same sort of “respectable” marriage that mainstream settler society promoted. The Canadian frontier was home to a variety of ideas about marriage and family, as discussed by Sarah Carter’s *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, which examines the importance of marriage in discussions of nationalism and Canadian identity, and how Indigenous and Métis customs, as well as Mormon ideas, complicated that understanding of family life.¹¹ Marriage was directly tied to ideas of citizenship and Canadian identity. The Mennonite practice of immigrating with complete families and extended family units complicated understandings of the frontier as a stage of colonial development. Mennonite families, at least on the surface, closely resembled the ideas of middle-class respectability that Anglo-Canadians were promoting in Manitoba.

⁷ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 20.

⁸ Perry, 20.

⁹ Perry, 30.

¹⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 23, 1874, “Mennonites in Canada.”

¹¹ Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 24-27.

The majority of interactions between Mennonites and the newspapers took place between men, and while the newspapers sometimes referred to the Mennonites as a large group, there were instances where the masculinity of the Mennonites was commented on, both in the ways it matched mainstream masculinity and in the ways it differed. One of the earliest mentions of this occurred when this was reported in the *Manitoba and Northwest Herald* on August 22, 1874: “Mennonites are not so strict in their religious tenets but what they can manage to take a glass of whiskey when occasion offers.”¹² This differed from what the *Manitoba Free Press* wrote based upon a letter from a Mr. Cornelius Jansen, where the Mennonites were described as having “a diversity of opinion and practice about the cut of garments and the use of alcohol and tobacco.”¹³ The *Free Press* was writing prior to the arrival of the Mennonite immigrants, based on correspondence they had received, while the *Herald* wrote based on personal interactions, after the arrival of Mennonites to the province. The *Herald* wrote as though they were surprised at this “normal” expression of frontier masculinity, when according to the Mennonites themselves, there was not agreement on the use of alcohol, and so of course some would not be opposed to it. The manner in which this behaviour was praised and held up as a sign of being “not so strict” suggests that people were concerned with how the strict beliefs of the Mennonites would cause them to fit in with “regular” settlers, as some degree of drinking culture was present on the western Canadian frontier.

Mennonite men were observed in specific ways beyond their participation (or lack thereof) in what newspapers saw as appropriate masculine behaviours. The work ethic and productivity of men was under scrutiny, as was their position as the heads of large households. When the farms and settlements of the Mennonite men were credited as “productive” and

¹² *Manitoban and Northwest Herald*, August 22, 1874, “Local and Provincial Items.”

¹³ *Manitoba Free Press*, May 23, 1874, “Mennonites in Canada.”

“clean”, the compliments may have been directed toward the men, but traditional gender roles meant that clean settlements would have typically been the result of Mennonite women and children’s hard work. Nonetheless, Mennonite men (and women) were praised for their hard work, particularly because of the way the men all worked, even if they held other positions in the community, as shown in this statement: “They have bishops, pastors, teachers, deaconesses, but no salaries are paid, and the ministers and teachers maintain themselves and their families by daily labor.”¹⁴ This labour, and this emphasis placed on how all men laboured, was important, because the idea was that the Mennonites would break the ground for other settlers to make their homes on the inhospitable prairie, as seen in this quote: “there can be no doubt that when once settled, they will induce others rapidly to follow.”¹⁵ By June 10, 1876, the *Manitoba Free Press* was defending the Mennonites, saying that while it was:

[...] the habit with many people to make light of the Mennonites [...] judging by the results exhibited at their settlements, in the improvements made by them on their roadways and their general attention to material developments, they are likely to prove amongst the most valuable class of our settlers.¹⁶

The success of the Mennonites was credited partially to their perceived potential to assimilate and become full participants in “Canadian” society. The culture of observation around the Mennonites meant that any progress they made was quickly reported by the newspapers or government reports.

This “progress” continued to be reported in gendered observations about Mennonite men and their work ethic. This was evident in a previously-discussed speech made during the Vice Regal visit in 1877, where the work of the Mennonites was compared to a war, with the words “the war to which we invite you as recruits and comrades is a war waged against the brute forces

¹⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 4, 1875, “More about the Mennonites.”

¹⁵ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 1, 1874, “Mennonites for Manitoba.”

¹⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, June 10, 1876, “The Mennonites.”

of nature; but those forces will welcome our domination.”¹⁷ Mennonite men were supposed to feel encouraged by this speech, with its rousing and aggressive language, generally saved for battles, but to the reformers and promoters of the province of Manitoba, there was a cultural and racial battle taking place, as well as one with the land itself, and the Mennonites were valuable “warriors” in this process.

Mennonite men continued to be observed in the newspapers, although as time passed, it was not always only about their labour. In 1889 a newspaper reported that “Two German girls lately from the old country, working in a Mennonite village, eloped with a couple of young Mennonites. When last heard from, the quartette [sic.] were heading for Fargo, Dakota.”¹⁸ While perhaps the newspaper’s interest in this story was merely one of neighbourly curiosity, it likely raised questions about the close-knit and closed-off Mennonite communities, as to why these couples were not married in their own churches with the consent of their community and families, although as mentioned before, many German immigrants found work in the Mennonite communities.¹⁹ While Mennonites had requested reserves in order to be able to live in their own communities, the story of Mennonite relationships with non-Mennonite people demonstrated that the Mennonites also interacted with other settler communities.

By 1898 the Mennonites were no longer seen solely as a monolithic group of settlers, and were the standard to which all other “ethnic” immigrants were compared. Along with this, Mennonite men began to be seen as individuals who sometimes departed from traditional agricultural pursuits and explored new kinds of masculinity. On April 15, 1898, the *Daily*

¹⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “Vice Regal Visit.”

¹⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 25, 1889, “A Gretna Elopfement: Two German Girls Hie Away to Fargo with Mennonite Lovers.”

¹⁹ Kenneth Michael Sylvester, *The Limits of Rural Capitalism: Family, Culture, and Markets in Montcalm, Manitoba, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 89.

Nor’Wester recorded that Mr. F. Schneider and Chris Robinson, a Mennonite farmer and Danish miner, had left “for the Klondyke.”²⁰ The report also said that “Both have been living for some time near Winnipeg and they are taking with them a complete outfit for a year’s ‘roughing it.’”²¹ While it is unclear what the relationship between these two men would be, as they had different professions and ethnic backgrounds, they lived together and left to the “Klondyke” together, which suggested some degree of closeness. Schneider’s participation in the Klondike was also a significant departure from Mennonite gender roles and understandings of masculinity.²² Mennonite men typically performed their masculinity as heads of households and through hard labour, not through “get rich quick” endeavors. Even when settling the frontier, the men did not venture off alone, but brought their wives, children, and even elderly relatives to the frontier. Mennonites typically did not value monetary gain that came easily and without hard work, and so Schneider leaving the Mennonite community to live with a man, and not starting a family of his own was significant on its own, but their departure for the gold fields shows a distinctly different value system. Obviously Schneider was not the majority, and Mennonite masculinity continued to be defined through family and church leadership, rather than homosocial adventure, but Schneider’s case did show that there were exceptions and that the mainstream newspapers were aware of them.

Early newspaper recordings of Mennonite womanhood and femininity are even scarcer than references to Mennonite men, but they are most visible during discussions of their contributions to the cleanliness and productivity of their settlements. One of the early reports in the *Manitoba Free Press* came from the *Montreal Witness*, and described the Mennonites as

²⁰ *Daily Nor’Wester*, April 15, 1898, “City and General.”

²¹ *Daily Nor’Wester*, April 15, 1898, “City and General.”

²² Schneider was not a common name for Mennonites in Manitoba, so this Schneider was likely originally from the Ontario German Mennonites- a distinction that seemed insignificant to the newspapers.

settlers with the best sort of qualities, and specifically said that “they supplied the Winnipeg market with butter and eggs within a week of their arrival, as it had never been supplied before.”²³ As milking cows and making butter, as well as collecting eggs were generally considered tasks done by women on the farm, this article is praising the hard work of the Mennonite women in areas that were familiarly women’s work.

Mennonite women were also praised for their work in their own homes, which was part of the observations made on several occasions in 1877, one being the Vice Regal trip to the Mennonite settlements. During this trip, the villages of the Mennonites were described, with one street full of family lots, with gardens “cultivated with exquisite care.”²⁴ The homes themselves were also commented upon, describing how the floors were “swept and sanded afresh daily, and thus kept perfectly clean.”²⁵ Mennonite values were further praised by the statement that “Scrupulous cleanliness is a characteristic of the Mennonite house, throughout.”²⁶ This section about the homes ended with a statement about the overall Mennonite wellbeing, saying that “everything about the villages is indicative of a happy, frugal, and superlatively industrious people.”²⁷ Overall, the Vice Regal visit made observations about the Mennonite community that were designed to communicate with the rest of the nation that the Mennonite women worked hard and were suitable settlers, proving that the frontier could in fact be a space for women and families.

Further emphasis about the labour of women was made in reporting of the “Ministerial visit” to the Mennonites in September of 1877. During this visit, the Mennonites were described

²³*Manitoba Free Press*, May 27, 1876, “Local and Provincial.”

²⁴*Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “Vice Regal Visit.”

²⁵*Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “Vice Regal Visit.”

²⁶*Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “Vice Regal Visit.”

²⁷*Manitoba Free Press*, August 25, 1877, “Vice Regal Visit.”

as neither “particularly sharp or brilliant, yet they have in the most remarkable degree the quality of persevering labor.”²⁸ What makes this observation interesting was the language used to specifically describe the ways in which women participated in labour that went beyond the forms of labour previously discussed. The article says that:

On the occasion of this visit the women were seen working like men at outdoor labor. Two were seen plastering the outside of the house; others on the roofs of outhouses; and others in the field, together with children. We saw women and children starting to begin their work before the day had begun to dawn in the morning.²⁹

The interesting phrase here is not that women were working, but rather that they were “working like men.” Women on frontiers naturally worked hard, as did farm women in general, but the observers from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Interior were struck by the manner of work which these women were doing. As shown in previous articles observing the culture of the Mennonites, when commenting on the cleanliness of homes or gardens, or the productivity of their cows or chickens, the observers did not mention that women were the ones performing these tasks. However, when it came to work like plastering homes or working in the field, observers felt the need to comment on how it was women who were engaged in men’s work, and not just for part of the day, but starting before dawn. While it appears that the observers found this foreign, labour was one of the reasons that they viewed the Mennonites as suitable first settlers. When the entire family was engaged in labour, farms were settled and successful in much less time.

The value of family labour was mentioned in an article entitled “Who Should Come to Manitoba,” which appeared in March 23, 1878 in the *Manitoba Free Press*. By this time the Mennonite immigration had slowed down slightly and the provincial government was trying to

²⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 29, 1877, “Ministerial Visit to the Mennonites.”

²⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 29, 1877, “Ministerial Visit to the Mennonites.”

recruit immigrants of other backgrounds. This article made it clear who was welcome and who was not, for example, there were no openings for those looking for “genteel occupations.”³⁰ Essentially, they were asking for farmers, but not just any farmers. Based on the Mennonite example, the article made recommendations, saying that it would be “very advantageous to the new settler to have abundant help in his own family. Among the Mennonites, all work- which is one of the secrets of the immense progress their settlements have made.”³¹ The article concluded with a call for domestic servants (young single women), as they were always in demand on the frontier, specifically saying that “one condition necessary to the success of the young farmer is the possession of a suitable helpmate.”³² Mennonite immigrants to Canada came as entire family units, which was the key to their success, and was recognized as such by the non-Mennonite observers. The labour of Mennonite women was regularly used as an example of how the Mennonites were ideal, highly praised immigrants.

In 1880, Mennonite women and their labour alongside their husbands was still the subject of discussion in newspapers, as was the case in one poetic observation of an evening harvest in a Mennonite village:

If not employed with the steam threshing machine you will probably fine Mr. Mennonite and his frow [sp. “Frau?”] with a Russian machine [...]. Madam places the sheaves around in a circle and Mr. Mennonite drives around on the top with this wonderful piece of machinery. [...] It takes no gold out of Mr. Mennonite’s pouch to thresh this way.³³

A Mennonite couple farming was described as being cost effective and efficient, and while the people described were not named, the Mennonite woman in this story was referred to as

³⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, March 23, 1878, “Who Should Come to Manitoba.”

³¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, March 23, 1878, “Who Should Come to Manitoba.”

³² *Manitoba Free Press*, March 23, 1878, “Who Should Come to Manitoba.”

³³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 14, 1880, “Pembina Mountain.”

“Madam” or “frow,” referencing her title as a married woman and implying at least some level of respect.

While the Mennonite women received praise for their labour during this time, Ukrainian women who engaged in similar labour were seen as “enslaved, servile, beasts of burden” in descriptions that were “very similar to the descriptions of Aboriginal women.”³⁴ Ukrainian women were also “characterized as lacking in femininity in contrast to the delicate and pure Anglo-Canadian woman.”³⁵ Mennonites did not have their femininity critiqued in the same way, at least in these early newspapers, but their non-Anglo immigrant counterparts were seen as less than feminine.³⁶ It was clear through the newspapers that Mennonite women were praised for their work, although it was seen as unfeminine at times, but the language used by the newspapers came across as admiration or appreciation rather than critical.

Far from being critical of Mennonite women in Manitoba, newspapers even found opportunities for humour because of the presence of these women. The “female individuals of the Mennonites” were mentioned in the *Manitoba Free Press* on August 8, 1874, which stated that they were “all titled ladies, being, of course women o’ Knights.”³⁷ While this is an opportunity to laugh at the expense of the Mennonite women, the language of this joke, referring to them as “titled ladies” demonstrates a kind of respect. Even when mocked, their position and respectability was never questioned as in the case of other immigrant women.

As in the case of Mennonite men, by 1898 the newspapers were recording evidence that Mennonite women were not a monolithic group. Miss Susie Isaac was the first Mennonite

³⁴ Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, 53.

³⁵ Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous* 52-53.

³⁶ Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 21-22.

³⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 8, 1874, “Local and Provincial.”

woman mentioned by name in the newspapers, and her mention came about because of an “unusual petition” which was presented by a Mr. Winkler from Rosenfeld.³⁸ This “unusual petition” was “a prayer from nearly 500 people in the Mennonite settlement, that a lady named Miss Susie Isaac be licensed as a physician or midwife.”³⁹ This was reported as “unusual” because while midwifery was certainly seen as women’s work, being a licensed physician was not. Not only was it a departure from traditional gender roles for women to work outside of the home, but it was also incredibly uncommon for unmarried Mennonite women to work outside of the home, other than in domestic service. Even among married men, it would have been rare to seek certification for any sort of professional work, as made clear in an 1877 article saying “They have no lawyers among them; and, we believe, no doctors.”⁴⁰ Interestingly, Isaac was licensed as a doctor, as she referred to herself in a piece of 1898 correspondence to the *Rundschau*, a Mennonite German-language newspaper, as “Susie Isaac, M.D.”⁴¹⁴² To the non-Mennonite observers, who perhaps did not have intimate knowledge of the diversity among Mennonite families and people, this petition, and its considerable support from what they perceived to be an exceptionally conservative community, would have seemed even more unusual. This demonstrated the shifting perceptions of how the non-Mennonites regarded the Mennonite settlers, as they were now occasionally mentioned as distinct individuals who apart from the larger group.

The non-Mennonite observers commented on children of the Mennonites more often than other distinctions within the Mennonite community, partially because large numbers of settler

³⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, April 5, 1898, “The Legislature.” 3.

³⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, April 5, 1898, “The Legislature.”

⁴⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 29, 1877, “Ministerial Visit to the Mennonites.”

⁴¹ Royden Loewen, *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 60.

⁴² For more information about Susie Isaac, see Conrad Stoesz’s article “Midwives in the Mennonite West Reserve of Manitoba, 1881-1900,” *Manitoba History*, 2014, 75: 13-24.

children were not common in the early years of the province. When Mennonite babies were born during the immigration journey, newspapers recorded these births, mentioning that they were given such patriotic names as “Patrick John Toronto” and “Arthur Ontario.”⁴³ Including these specifics in an immigration report gave hope to the reader that despite the foreignness of the Mennonites, they desired to adapt and were also a hardy people who gave birth to healthy children. Another report commented on a group of Mennonites saying they were similar to the earlier groups but “there seemed to be less grown men, more half-grown boys, and grown women.”⁴⁴ Non-Mennonites were clearly observing the presence of children during immigration, and this was possibly because immigration rarely happened in complete family units. The family-building process normally took place over several years on the frontier, but in the Mennonite case families came complete with men, women, children, and even the elderly.

On August 15, 1874, the *Manitoban and Northwest Herald* published an article with a letter from one of the Mennonites, giving an overall description of their community. The unnamed Mennonite writer provided answers to many questions the non-Mennonites may have had, writing:

We all work at agricultural pursuits; we don’t smoke; if we drink too much we are publicly reprobated in our religious meetings. We do not use wedding rings; we have no divorce; if man and wife separate neither is allowed to remarry again [...] We have a large number of families here, some of them being as large as eight or ten children. There are always some very old people amongst us, like great-grandmother Hesterstahl, who is about 82 years of age.⁴⁵

The discussions of Mennonite families were of interest to those reformers who wanted to see Manitoba develop into a respectable part of the empire, and no longer remain a frontier. The

⁴³ *Manitoba Free Press*, July 24, 1875, “Mennonites en route.”

⁴⁴ *The Standard*, July 24, 1875, “Mennonites.”

⁴⁵ *Manitoban and Northwest Herald*, August 15, 1874, “The Mennonites.”

presence of women, children, and the elderly were a part of remaking the empire into the ideal settler-state.

Mennonite gender roles were further praised through stories such as one from 1878, which said that because of the range of Mennonite children present during arrival, the Mennonites were just the people to “multiply and replenish the region of the lower Red River valley.”⁴⁶ Using this type of language once again erased the long history of settlement and the forced removal of Indigenous and Métis people from the region that the Mennonites had “settled.” The high birth rate also confirmed that there would be a large new generation of Canadian-born Mennonite children who may be easier to assimilate than their Russian-born predecessors.

Newspapers also provided observations about the childhood tasks that children did within families, as part of their observations of the success of the Mennonite settlements. Some of this was already discussed in the previous section, when the children were observed working alongside their parents, but in other cases they were observed separately. One article written in 1876 tackled the issue of finding fuel for the winters. One suggestion made in this article was that hay could be “woven (by the children usually) into as large braids as can be conveniently handled.” The article also stated that “the Mennonite settlers have put in furnaces for this special purpose.”⁴⁷ While no doubt children of all backgrounds were involved in braiding hay to keep houses warm, this article specifically mentioned the Mennonites and their children, as their children were visible to observers during the settlement period.

⁴⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 20, 1878, “The Mennonites.”

⁴⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, August 26, 1876, “The Fuel Question.”

Mennonite children were also employed in tasks that were more specific to their particular ethnic villages, such as herding cattle for the entire village. The task was described in the following way:

The cattle of a village are driven out to the prairie by day, watched and kept off the wheat or other grain fields; driven home at night to milk; and kept in an uncovered enclosure till morning. We saw this duty done by two very small children. One of the severe expenses of farming is thus cheaply saved.⁴⁸

The writer and observers seemed to be impressed with this child labour as a money-saving practice, and one of the ways Mennonites had an advantage in building up successful farms. Not only did this mean that each farmer could avoid the cost and time of building and maintaining fences around a pasture, but two small children could care for the cattle of an entire community, saving each family time and money. The labour of children set the Mennonite communities apart from other settlers in the eyes of the observers, and was part of the observable differences between the culture of the observers and the Mennonites.

Another element of the observation of Mennonite families can be seen in the published diary of Lady Dufferin's the Vice Regal visit to the Mennonites with her husband, that was the subject of much newspaper coverage. In the newspapers, her voice was never included, despite the fact that she had a lot to say about Mennonite homes and families. She intended to publish her diary, so while her observations were privately recorded, they were written with the intent of being read by the public. She found publishing success with her previous "Indian Journal," written while Lord Dufferin was the Governor-General of India, so she had a sense of who her audience would be with this second journal.⁴⁹ When she visited the Mennonites she observed the Mennonites as she would have observed any of the communities visited by her and her husband

⁴⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, September 29, 1877, "Ministerial Visit to the Mennonites."

⁴⁹ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal, 1872-8: Extracts from my Letters Home Written While Lord Dufferin was Governor-General* (London: John Murray, 1891), 7.

during their trips. She noted that Mennonites “are hard-working, honest, sober, simple, hardy people; they bring money into the country, and can settle in a woodless place, which no other people will do.”⁵⁰ These observations were similar to those made by others, but where her observations differed were in the more personal aspects of Mennonite life.

Lady Dufferin noted that “they dress in the plainest and least decorative fashion.”⁵¹ After going into the specifics of their wardrobe, she concluded that “partly in consequence of this unbecoming costume, all the people, men and women, are plain.”⁵² She then commented on their welcome into one of the villages, where “three little girls, with lace handkerchiefs on their heads” brought them beverages and flowers, upon which time the speeches began.⁵³ At this point in her diary she reprinted her husband’s speech and context from the newspapers, writing that “they never cheered, but when anything pleased them they lifted their caps.”⁵⁴ She specifically included the excerpt from the speech about the Mennonites “as recruits and comrades” in “a war waged against the brute forces of nature[...] It is a war of ambition—for we intend to annex territory.”⁵⁵ This reprint of her husband’s speech was evidence that while she may have published her journal for her own audience, ultimately her writing supported the colonial projects of her husband.

The most unique aspect of Lady Dufferin’s writings detailed her interactions with Mennonite women and children, which she described in great detail. She wrote about being unable to communicate with them, but that despite this, her maid and companion, Nellie, enjoyed holding the babies, and “having nursed one for some time, its mother presented her with a

⁵⁰ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 332.

⁵¹ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 333.

⁵² Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 333.

⁵³ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 334.

⁵⁴ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 334.

⁵⁵ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 334.

cucumber.”⁵⁶ After this, some women showed them their houses, to which Lady Dufferin commented that “the only fault with this is that the stables open into the living room.”⁵⁷ However, she thought that the Mennonites “will gradually leave off this nasty plan.”⁵⁸ In her writing, Lady Dufferin was able to speak candidly in a way that the newspapers and official reports often did not. She also, as the lady of her own home, would have felt uniquely qualified to comment on the “proper” way for a home to be structured.

These official government visits to the Mennonites were part of a project of surveillance that confirmed the success of the Mennonite settlement project. Through observing men, women, and children within their own homes other residents of and visitors to Manitoba learned more about their Mennonite neighbours who would otherwise have only interacted with them economically. Despite the intimate forms of surveillance that prompted these newspaper articles, Mennonite families and specifically women were still portrayed with a certain level of respect that was not granted to other immigrant groups or Indigenous peoples. These gendered and familial observations shed light on the complicated relationship between ethnicity and gender in the colonial project of Manitoba, which did not factor into the French-language newspaper portrayals of Mennonites during this time.

While newspapers made observations about the work ethic and family dynamic of the Mennonites, they also noted problems and tragedies within Mennonite families and communities. One of these reported incidents was a lightning strike in the Rat River settlement, which shocked a couple and their two children, leaving one child paralyzed and injuring the mother and other child.⁵⁹ Other accidental tragedies were reported, such as “a young Mennonite

⁵⁶ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 335.

⁵⁷ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 335.

⁵⁸ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal*, 335.

⁵⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 31, 1878, “City and Provincial.”

farmer named J. Peters was drowned while bathing in the coulie [sic.] near the village of Bluemenort.”⁶⁰ In a recap of the events of 1889, June 20th had an event listed as “A Mennonite woman commits suicide at Morden.”⁶¹ A longer report documented an incident in 1893 which involved an accidental shooting, where a man “by some carelessness” discharged his gun at his mother and brother while they were sitting in a wagon on his yard at “Ustervick” (or Osterwick).⁶² In another incident, the wife of Johann Neufeld went out to milk a cow and was found dead by her husband, presumably after being kicked by a horse.⁶³ These tragedies were accidents and self-inflicted, but in the later years of the 1880s and early 1890s, the newspapers were informed about these happenings in the Mennonite community. The inclusion of these stories, and that they were told by the Mennonites to the newspapers (or to non-Mennonite people who then informed the newspapers) demonstrated that a level of assimilation had occurred. Accidents that took place on the Mennonites reserves were not kept within the community, but were shared as any other community would have their news shared.

In October of 1890, a Mennonite man named Jacob Friesen was arrested for stabbing his neighbour in Plum Coulee. In this incident the newspaper offered a judgement of his character, writing that “he appears to be a bad Mennonite and a hard citizen.”⁶⁴ The stabbing had occurred as a result of a conflict over Friesen’s cattle “straying onto the lands of a neighbor named Rempel” and escalated.⁶⁵ An interpreter was required to present evidence for each party, but there was too much contradictory evidence and the charges were dropped, which had “excited a lot of interest among the followers of Menno.”⁶⁶ This story was available to the public because

⁶⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 25, 1890, “Young Mennonite Drowned.”

⁶¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 21, 1889.

⁶² *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 18, 1893, “Serious Shooting Accident.”

⁶³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 23, 1896, “Western Fatalities: A Mennonite Woman Killed.”

⁶⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 23, 1890, “Morden Monitor.”

⁶⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 23, 1890, “Morden Monitor.”

⁶⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 23, 1890, “Morden Monitor.”

of the court's involvement, and it is interesting that the newspaper included the statement that he was a "bad Mennonite and a hard citizen," recognizing that Friesen was not "typical" for a Mennonite, and that Mennonites were considered to be citizens.

Another incident that went to court involved "an elderly man named Cornelius Klassen" who was wounded by "Jacob Lempki, a Mennonite youth of 20."⁶⁷ This incident had been the result of a family feud and dispute over wages that had initially been mediated by "a judge or priest of their own people" but the outcome had not been satisfactory. Lempki's father was in debt to "the old man Klassen" so when Jacob met him he "grievously assaulted him with an axe."⁶⁸ He had been found guilty, but it was noted that the court proceedings took longer than necessary because "the witnesses, being Mennonites and unable to speak English [needed] their evidence [to be] interpreted."⁶⁹ This incident and the way in which it was reported would have reminded the readers that Mennonites were still speaking their own language and not English, and in some cases were still trying to use their own system of mediation. In this story the Mennonite mediation system was portrayed as a failure, and the article does not discuss whether or not there were cases when the mediation system was successful, although no doubt there were some, since the system was still in use some twenty years after arriving in Manitoba. This article on language and mediation revealed a lack of assimilation in the Mennonite community, and suggested how inconvenient that was for the non-Mennonites, who then had to provide interpreters and court services when Mennonite mediation failed.

Another incident occurred at Plum Coulee in 1893 when three German brothers were charged with stabbing a man, during the arrest of a Mennonite man, who in turn was charged

⁶⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 10, 1893, "A Wounding Case."

⁶⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 10, 1893, "A Wounding Case."

⁶⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 10, 1893, "A Wounding Case."

with the attempted theft of an ox.⁷⁰ While the Mennonite was waiting to be charged for stealing the ox, he was caught up in this violent incident involving the three brothers and their stabbing victim, and so was further detained and made a witness in the assault case. This chaotic event was blamed on the influence of alcohol, as the newspaper wrote that “The prisoners are decent, quiet men when sober, but were only accustomed to drinking beer in Germany and when they get whiskey in this country, they get wild.”⁷¹ While a Mennonite man is involved in this story in the role of “ox thief,” he was not part of the escalating stabbing incident, other than as a witness. He also did not have his indiscretion become a cultural stereotype in the way that German brothers did. Their violence was credited to their lack of exposure to whiskey, because they were from Germany, which had made them “wild.” In contrast, the Mennonite man who stole an ox did not become representative for all Mennonites, and not all Mennonites would be seen as thieves as a result of this incident.

Some cases dealt more specifically with gendered violence, and these were generally described in the newspapers with great disgust. One incident described how a “brute in man’s form,” while passing through a Mennonite village “beat the owners of the house at which he had been most hospitably treated, not only the male portion but ill-used the women also.”⁷² The story went on to explain how there should be increased law enforcement at the borders, because “these very peaceful citizens” were being targeted by criminals heading towards the border.⁷³ This story reflected the non-Mennonite belief that the frontier was not a suitable place for women, particularly those seen as “respectable.” This also showed how Mennonites, and specifically Mennonite women, were used as justification for an increased presence of law enforcement on

⁷⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 18, 1893, “Plum Coulee Stabbing.”

⁷¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, November 18, 1893, “Plum Coulee Stabbing.”

⁷² *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 17, 1880, “West Lynne.”

⁷³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 17, 1880, “West Lynne.”

the prairie, which was another way for governments to have increased surveillance and control over monitoring Indigenous groups and groups seen as “less respectable.”

Mennonites were not only the victims of violence, but sometime the perpetrators. One story, entitled “To Arrest a Brute” described the arrest of a Mennonite man near Gretna who had tried to entice “three little girls into an empty house, but they succeeded in escaping by jumping out of the window, one of the children sustaining an injury.”⁷⁴ Other crimes were reported in more direct terms, simply listing the case and writing “a Mennonite accused of rape.”⁷⁵ When Mennonites were the ones being violent towards their own women and children, there were no calls for increased law enforcement and surveillance, which stands in contrast to stories where Mennonites experienced violence at the hands of others.

Mennonite religion and the generational changes taking place within the province were also topics of discussion in the newspapers. In early accounts of immigration, Mennonite faith and religion were seen as more similar than different by the English newspapers, when seen in comparison to Indigenous and Métis residents of Manitoba. By the 1880s, the province was more English and Protestant and the Mennonite religion was seen as foreign and “less Christian.” In the 1880s, missionaries from English Christian groups turned to the Mennonites as potential converts, souls in need of saving. The Mennonite religion, once a sign of similarity, now signified difference and was the subject of newspaper discussion.

In 1885, it was reported that Reverend Petereit from Minneapolis visited the Mennonites after holding “a series of Evangelistic meetings in the interest of the Germans in the city.”⁷⁶ The newspaper explained that there was interest among the Mennonites on “the South-western

⁷⁴ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 11, 1896, “To Arrest a Brute.”

⁷⁵ *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 12, 1895, “The Assizes.”

⁷⁶ *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 14, 1885, “City and Province.”

Mennonite reserve” in his message, and that it was good for both the Mennonites and Germans in the province to hear “the Gospel proclaimed in their own tongue.”⁷⁷ The following year, Reverent Peteroit returned to Winnipeg and gave a report about the Mennonites and “German missions” to the Baptist Convention.⁷⁸ His report said that “the door was open to a large Mennonite population of 13,000 souls.”⁷⁹ The Mennonites attended church, but “during the thirteen years they had been in the country they had not contributed a single dollar towards home or foreign missions.”⁸⁰ He described them as “unregenerate persons” who did not pay or value their pastors (a sign of communal living and equality for which they had been praised in the 1870s), but that there were a few families among them “who had experienced a change of heart and were willing to follow the Saviour in Baptism.”⁸¹

Baptists were not the only churches intent on saving the souls of Mennonites, as in December of 1886, the Presbyterian churches of Winnipeg set their sights on securing a missionary “that can speak English and German.”⁸² This report stated:

There is room for mission work among the Mennonites in the neighborhood of Gretna. The hamlets on the Mennonite reserve are swarming with children; in many of these villages there are no schools, and where schools do exist the teachers are very inefficient. The young people among the Mennonites are breaking away from the faith and customs of their fathers.⁸³

This concern over the religion of the Mennonites was directly related to their concerns over the “swarms” of Mennonite children, who the Presbyterians feared would grow up without religion or education.

⁷⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 14, 1885, “City and Province.”

⁷⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 8, 1886, “Baptist Convention.”

⁷⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 8, 1886, “Baptist Convention.”

⁸⁰ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 8, 1886, “Baptist Convention.”

⁸¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 8, 1886, “Baptist Convention.”

⁸² *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 9, 1886, “Presbytery Meeting: Steps Taken for the Benefit of Mennonites.”

⁸³ *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 9, 1886, “Presbytery Meeting: Steps Taken for the Benefit of Mennonites.”

During this same period of missionary involvement in Manitoban Mennonite communities, other Mennonite communities from the United States were sending their own missionaries and representatives to the Mennonite reserves.⁸⁴ Mennonites had not been as isolated in the United States as they had been in Canada, and so they had accepted “revivalism and new institutions, such as Sunday school and mission societies” which had not yet been brought to the Mennonites in Manitoba.⁸⁵ These Mennonite missionaries to other Mennonites were not discussed in the newspaper, as Presbyterian and Baptist organizations had Winnipeg-based mission societies to which they were reporting, but they would have been in similar communities at similar times.

This chapter has provided examples of how English-language newspapers were involved in observing Mennonite religious and family lives, through government surveillance and reports in early years, and court records and missionary involvement in later years. French-language newspapers did not include these types of discussions, as they focused mainly on the needs of their own communities. They were ethic and community specific, and did not report on larger provincial crimes or state visits. Frances Swyripa discusses the stakes of “Anglo-Canadian nation builders” and their surveillance of Ukrainian women in their bloc settlements, by saying that Ukrainian women specifically “affected their vision of Canada.”⁸⁶ This was because “women were perceived to be more backward than men, [so] they stood in greater need of ‘modernization’ and ‘emancipation’ if Ukrainians were to fulfil the ambitions others had for them.”⁸⁷ While in many cases Mennonites were seen differently than their Ukrainian neighbours,

⁸⁴ Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 170.

⁸⁵ Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*, 170.

⁸⁶ Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause*, 22.

⁸⁷ Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause*, 21.

they still were subject to the expectations of “Anglo-Canadian nation builders” who saw the Mennonites as the future success of the province of Manitoba and the nation of Canada. All of the discussions of gender and family roles, the tragedies and conflicts in Mennonite communities, and the religious life of the Mennonites factor into these discussions of nation-building and the assimilation of Mennonites into Canadian society. Initially the land reserves provided the opportunity for governments to monitor assimilation, although in the Mennonite case this consisted of visits and inspections, as opposed to constant surveillance. In later years it was private citizens, courts, and missionaries who provided the updates that appeared in newspapers. The ethnicity and “respectability” of Mennonites meant that even intimate discussions of Mennonite home life were generally discussed in ways that were not afforded to other immigrant or Indigenous groups.

Conclusion: Reflecting the Gaze

This analysis of has demonstrated that in late nineteenth-century Manitoba the non-Mennonite observers were fascinated by many aspects of Mennonite culture. Jean O'Brien, in her book *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England*, examined the way that the stories settlers told about “Indians” were really stories about themselves and their own claim to the land. She argues that “New Englanders embraced Indians because doing so enabled them to establish unambiguously their own modernity.”¹ Taking this idea and twisting it around, the reports and stories about the Mennonites and their “newness” to the land were a form of storytelling designed to place “indigeneity” on the settlers who had been in the province prior to their arrival, thus asserting their own place in a new, not-so-European province. By viewing the Mennonites as “foreign” and as “new” to Manitoba the Anglo-Canadian observers were able to observe and give advice to them, as though the Mennonites were the ones invading their land, rather than seeing themselves as invaders to an Indigenous space. The newspapers also portrayed the Mennonites as the only ones who would be able to “tame” a particular area of the prairie that other settlers had not been able to settle, once again asserting their differences. Mennonites were set up as an alternative to both the Anglo-Canadian settlers and the Indigenous peoples. They worked hard enough and were religious enough to be seen as respectable, but they were also decisively not British because of their language, culture, and gender roles. This relationship allowed the non-Mennonites to criticize the Mennonites without ever having to examine their own position on contested land.

¹ Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxi.

Mennonites were not opposed to telling their story as some of the first settlers of the province, in fact, their economic success and large numbers in Manitoba have been a source of pride and allowed the creation of a unique ethno-religious identity. Frances Swyripa argues that this was unique to Manitoba and that the Manitoban Mennonites did not identify with the Mennonites in Ontario, choosing an ethno-religious identity over a strictly religious one.² In these origin stories told by the Mennonites, place was central to identity. When the centennial of their arrival was celebrated in 1974, there was “a strong consciousness of place identified with the point of disembarkation at the junction of the Rat and Red rivers and with the East and West reserves.”³ In contrast to this, the Ontario Mennonite bicentennial celebration of their arrival in Canada, held in 1986, was not focused on land or culture, but about the milestone of the faith being brought into Canada, and included “more recent Chinese and Hispanic additions.”⁴ The focus of this origin story was diversity, but the prairie Mennonites did not celebrate it, preferring to identify with their ethno-religious identity, rather than just the religious identity. Evidently, Mennonites told their own stories about how they were different from the other residents of Manitoba, and how they were unique from other Canadian Mennonites as well. The difference between their own stories and the newspaper observations is a question of voice and agency. The question is about who the intended audiences of the stories were, and what purpose the stories served. Mennonites told their own stories to tie themselves to the land they inhabited, but were also the subjects of stories told by others.

The purpose of this thesis has not been to tell the story of why the Mennonites left Russia, or any of the tensions and relationships between the Mennonites who arrived in

² Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 126-127.

³ Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 128.

⁴ Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes*, 128.

Manitoba and those who stayed behind, or those who settled elsewhere. It is also not to examine in any great detail the intricacies of Mennonite societies in the late-nineteenth century. Excellent scholarship on all of these topics already exists and provides valuable insight into the Mennonites themselves. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the non-Mennonite newspapers reflected their own identities in their portrayals of the new immigrants to Manitoba. In their analysis of the Mennonites, Manitoban newspapers focused on the foreign aspects of Mennonite culture, but also on the familiar. They were seen as the solution to settling some difficult stretches of land on the prairies, and also part of the process of making the new province conform to ideas of British Empire, through the hard work of family units and tidy settlements. This positive attitude would not last, as World War I would reveal the lack of “Canadian” assimilation in Mennonite communities in both military service and language questions, causing many conservative Mennonites to leave Canada over the same issues that had caused them to leave Russia, and their many homes before.

Donovan Giesbrecht explored the relationship between how Mennonites have often told their own stories with little or no reference to the Indigenous peoples whose lands they were taking, and the reality that some Métis families still lived among them.⁵ This was not permanent, as several Métis families were displaced by the creation of the East Reserve, and filed a complaint with the Department of the Interior, which was not settled until 1879. Conflict persisted over Métis people continuing to live in the East Reserve, although the government took the Mennonite side in every case.⁶ His conclusion was that while Mennonites often write their own stories as those who have been oppressed, at times Mennonites have been the oppressors of

⁵Donovan Giesbrecht, “Métis, Mennonites and the ‘Unsettled Prairie,’ 1874-1896,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* Vol. 19 (2001): 104.

⁶Giesbrecht, 109.

Indigenous peoples.⁷ To tell the story of Mennonites in Manitoba while ignoring the Indigenous displacement that enabled their settlement is an incomplete narrative designed to solidify the Mennonite position as Indigenous to the land on which they now live. In the broader story of Manitoba, Mennonites occupied the place of the “other” which allowed Anglo-Manitobans to position themselves as those who were not foreign to the province. They were the ones who did not fit in, but who the Manitobans could compare themselves to, rather than confront the longer history of Métis settlement at Red River, which made them just as foreign to the province as the Mennonites.

Mennonites were the subjects of intense observation by the non-Mennonite residents of the province of Manitoba. They were desired immigrants for their work ethic and ability to transform the frontier into a respectable family space, but at the same time were distinctively not British, and had their language, religion, and culture critiqued and judged by Anglo-Canadians. These critiques served the purpose to educate the public on their new neighbours, but also to determine which immigrants should be encouraged to come to this not-quite British space. In some ways, the non-Mennonite observers celebrated the differences of the Mennonites, as there were aspects of this difference that made them more successful. This also allowed the Anglo-Manitobans to feel less out-of-place, compared to these new arrivals who were not English or French, and neither Catholic nor Protestant. Their participation in the economy and other aspects of public life in Manitoba were closely monitored to determine how “different” these new arrivals were from the other residents of Manitoba, and any small gesture at assimilation was seen as confirmation that Canada’s colonial project was finding success in the province. Mennonite men, women, and children lived different lives than their British counterparts and

⁷ Giesbrecht, 109.

tried to preserve their own culture and way of community in their new homeland, and these differences were celebrated and critiqued by others in the province, who were able to use that difference to establish themselves as true Canadians with the Mennonites as the perceived foreigners to the province.

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