

The Creation of an Identity:
The Conscientious Objector in Canadian Mennonite Memory.

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Abstract:

Past scholarly assumptions about minority group identities assume a weakening of identity over time. This thesis considers the Mennonites of Canada, an ethno-religious group that has evolved a distinct group identity that has endured since their first arrival in 1786.

Mennonites represent one of the historic peace churches that trace their roots to the European radical reformation of the sixteenth century. Mennonites came to Canada, in part, because of provisions provided by the governments of Upper Canada and Canada allowing exemption from military service for those who identified as conscientious objectors. Through the lens of conscientious objection this thesis uses the imagery of a kite to help explain the enduring identities in minority groups such as Mennonites. Just as a kite rises and falls from sources of wind, so the forces of the large host society cause the minority group to act and respond. The host society creates assimilating forces (wind) that acts upon the minority group's identity. The minority group responds to the wind by adjusting the kite string but can experience internal pressures that affect how the string is adjusted. My argument is that Mennonites in Canada used their historic teaching on peace and nonviolence to continually shape an identity buffeted by the winds of assimilation.

The thesis considers three texts: the three-volume history series, *Mennonites in Canada*, and the unifying theme of peace that is woven through the texts with the aim of bringing disparate Mennonite groups together; the memoirs written by Canadian conscientious objectors that contain clues about Mennonite masculinity and how Mennonites have socialized their menfolk to be Mennonite men; the documents of four western Canadian archives that pertain to the conscientious objector and the role of the archivist in collecting those documents and promoting peace.

The central argument of the thesis is that group identity does not have to disappear, but can shift, change, and be reinvented as it responds to internal and external forces. As society changes over time, new pressures are put on minority groups and their identities. Writing history books, memoirs, archives, and keepers of the record are shown to have important roles to play in how the minority group adjusts its identity kite amidst the Canadian context.

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Dedication:

To my grandfather John Stoesz, who served as a conscientious objector.
To my wife, Michelle, and my children Andrew and Rebecca.

“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.” Deuteronomy 32:7.

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Introduction:

The Mennonites of Canada are a diverse group that traces their theological origins to the sixteenth century's European Reformation and believed that peaceful living was God's will for all Christians. People from diverse backgrounds and locations, centered in the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland, joined the Mennonite migrations as they sought for places to live according to their principles. The first Mennonites in Canada came from Switzerland via Pennsylvania to Upper Canada in 1786. Mennonites from Russia began populating western Canada in 1874, with additional large migrations in the 1920s and post Second World War.

Mennonites and their beliefs were not welcome in the old homeland, resulting in numerous migrations. This kind of external pressure cause the Mennonites to become insular and in this context, Mennonite groups began creating their own traditions and values, in essence an ethnicity. A major reason for Mennonites coming to Canada were provisions provided by the Upper Canada and Canadian governments for those who stood by their community's value of non-violence and claimed conscientious objector (CO) status. During the Second World War almost 11,000 Canadian men opted for CO status with 7,500 coming from the Mennonite community.¹ Unlike previous wars, exemption was to be based on individual conviction and conscientious objectors, all men, had to perform alternative service working in mines, forests, hospitals, or farms. This thesis uses the example of the Mennonite conscientious objectors to explore how external and internal forces act on ethnic identity.

A variety of metaphors have been used to describe the workings of ethnicity including melting pot and mosaic. Gerald Friesen likened immigrant cultures on the prairies to a stew,²

¹ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada: 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 60.

² Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 272.

Bruce Thornton suggested imagery of a salad.³ In this thesis I work with the imagery of a kite. My thesis contends that minority group identity is not a straight downward trend into some kind of abyss of assimilation.⁴ Rather, identity is like a kite that reacts to the “winds blowing” in social contexts, reflecting the powers that hold the string of the kite, offering resistance to the winds acting on the kite. The “host society” acts like a wind, causing ethnic identity to rise and fall, even as the small group holds the string of the kite, refusing to let go. But the activities and actions inside the group also affect the kite. As the winds shift and the string is pulled in or let out, the group identity adjusts, elevating, and muting certain aspects of the identity to fit the context. The creation of ethnic identity is an ongoing process that “incorporates, adapts, and amplifies pre-existing communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories,” writes Kathleen Neils Conzen and her fellow historians in their 1991 watershed article, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.”⁵ Identity is complex and the kite imagery shows the forces that act upon it in a way that images of the slow but steady cultural adjustment, the stew, salad, and melting pot do not.

A modifying voice in the discussion around ethnic identity is the voice of sociologist Rogers Brubaker, who challenges the idea of enduring ethnic identities, rather positing that groups experience moments of group identity and that the level of “groupness” waxes and wanes rather than being a constant.⁶ Brubaker understands shared identity as a project aimed at a goal,

³ Bruce Thornton, *Hoover Digest* 4 (2012), accessed April 24, 2017, <http://www.hoover.org/research/melting-pots-and-salad-bowls>.

⁴ Gerald Friesen and Royden Loewen, “Romantics, Pluralists, Postmodernists: Writing Ethnic History in Prairie Canada, in *River Road: Essays on Manitoba and Prairie History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 183.

⁵ Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (1992): 4-5.

⁶ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12.

where members come together for a joint purpose, often a political one, and once achieved the experience of groupness wanes.⁷

Ethno-religious identities have also been studied in recent years using the framework of ethnic reinvention. In his book, *Staying Italian*, Jordan Stanger Ross compares Italians in Toronto and Philadelphia, arguing that immigrant ethnic identity is shaped by larger societal forces such as the church's relation to government and is expressed variously according to geography.⁸ In her book *Ethnic Elites and Canadian Identity: Japanese, Ukrainian, and Scots, 1919-1971*, Aya Fujiwara explores the struggle of internally displaced Japanese Canadians who were sent to work on Alberta sugar beet farms during the Second World War; their uprooted experience caused them to pull together, with renewed interest in their ethno-religious identity.⁹ Adara Goldberg's study of Jewish immigrants in post-Second World War Canada, shows there was no "typical" Jewish Holocaust survivor; they spoke different languages, experienced different levels of violence, and came from different educational backgrounds. Similarly, their reception in Canada was varied, as was their settlement process. To aid in their adaptation, recent immigrants created "survivor networks, mutual benefit aid societies, and informally shared information and friendship, [and as a result] grew larger and stronger."¹⁰ Goldberg's book highlights ethnoreligious transformation through memory and story-telling.

Within the context of identity reinvention, I use three "texts" focusing on how the experience of the conscientious objector has been used to build group identity. In chapter one I discuss the formation of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada as an attempt to strengthen

⁷ Brubaker, 8.

⁸ Maria C. Luzzi, review of *Staying Italian: Urban Change and Ethnic Life in Postwar Toronto and Philadelphia*, Jordan Stanger-Ross, *American Studies* 5 (2010): 218-220.

⁹ Aya Fujiwara, *Ethnic Elites and Canadian Identity: Japanese, Ukrainians, and Scots, 1919-1971* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Lisa M. Todd, review of *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusions, Inclusion, transformation, 1947-1955*, by Adara Goldberg, in *Project Muse* 97 (2016): 597-599.

ties in the Mennonite community. The national society was initially made up of two historical societies from two geographical centres, Ontario and Manitoba, which also represented two different cultural Mennonite groups. Through its central project, the writing of the *Mennonites in Canada* history series, the Society attempted to unite Mennonites through the common historical value of peace so that the new pan-Canadian Mennonite relief agency, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, could build a broad constituency.

In the second chapter I use the memoirs written by conscientious objectors to explore masculinity. Perceptions of sexual identity has evolved and is now understood as being constructed rather than innate. Judith Kagen Gardiner considers masculinity and femininity as “cultural groupings” and not facts.¹¹ For each society to function, rules and boundaries are created and the members of the society are instructed as to their role within the established boundaries. The socialization to the rules of the society begin in the family, write Michele Adams and Scott Coltrene in their chapter in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*.¹² Because the Mennonites had their own values, they socialized their boys and men in ways that was different than the Anglo-Canadian majority. A spot-light was shone on these differences when the pressures of the Second World War were felt across the country. The memoirs were written decades after the men’s service and the masculinity portrayed within the texts are within their Second World War CO context, but also in response to current social pressures in the 1980s and 1990s. Men were aging, the Gulf War was underway, and the men wanted to pass on their values to the next generation.

¹¹ Judith Kagan Gardiner, “Men, Masculinities, and Feminist Theory,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 35.

¹² Michele Adams and Scott Coltrene, “Boys and Men in Families,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 233.

In the third chapter I explore the CO records in four Mennonite archival centres in western Canada and the power of commemoration in producing these collections. Historian Francis Swyripa has studied ethnic-religious identity on the Canadian prairies and states commemoration aids in the “cultivation of group consciousness and sense of achievement around a particular interpretation” of the past.¹³ Historians like archivist Terry Cook have explored the role of archivists and reveal the human agency archivists hold in collecting, preserving, and making accessible historically significant materials, despite the “dusty” and “handmaiden to the historian” persona projected upon them.¹⁴ Lodging commemoration within the hands of archivists provides a powerful dynamic to influence group identity.

Archival theorists Dominique Daniel and Amalia S. Levi provide a helpful tool in understanding archives by likening them to a vector, which is a directional force.¹⁵ Vectors acting on Mennonites in Canada push the community in various directions and the Mennonite community has agency to counteract or redirect the vector. Part of this resistance for Mennonites was to rally around the peace value embodied in the conscientious objector. The thesis shows the ability of the archivist to direct the community’s vector.

The Mennonite constituency is fortunate to have several Mennonite archives and archivists who have taken a keen interest in the collection, preservation, and use of the CO records because of its importance to the Mennonite community’s identity. The thesis will

¹³ Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 9.

¹⁴ Terry Cook, “Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Role of Archives in Constructing Social Memory,” in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory*, ed. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 169-170. See also Terry Cook, “The Archives(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 90 (2009): 499-506, 528.

¹⁵ Dominique Daniel and Amalia S. Levi, “Introduction: From Containing to Shaping to Performing Ethnicity in Archives,” in *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*, (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2013), 1.

consider the archives in Abbotsford (B.C.), Calgary (Alberta), Saskatoon (Saskatchewan), and the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg (Manitoba).

Through the examination of these three texts, the importance of the peace theme to the Mennonite Community, embodied in the conscientious objector, will be explored. Minority group identities do not need to vanish but can be nurtured and built for the benefit of the minority group.

Chapter 1.

The Mennonites in Canada series and the formation of a Mennonite Constituency

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is a centralizing force within the Mennonite community in Canada. Today it is an umbrella organization for provincial historical organizations and a forum where like-minded people can gather, share best practices, and work on joint projects. Its first project was to create a history of Mennonites in Canada. The reasons for the project were not only to describe but to mold Mennonite identity in response to external pressures on the Mennonite communities in Canada. An important element in the development of the Historical Society and its project was the founding of Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCC Canada). Some of MCC Canada's early board members believed that the divergent Mennonite communities needed to be reminded of their shared values and past at a time when some of these values were at odds with larger national and international values and events. The best way to help MCC Canada in developing greater unity was from the outside, they believed. From this impetus, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was formed and the *Mennonites in Canada* history project was created. Drawing from the collective past, the theme of peace and conscientious objection became a unifying identity used to bring people together and support the peace advocacy of MCC Canada.

Origins of Mennonites in Canada

Mennonites in Canada is a three-volume work totaling some 1500 pages describing and analyzing the Mennonite experience in Canada from 1786 to 1970, commissioned by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. The *Mennonites In Canada* series would not have come about without the vision and hard work of some of the society's early members including

J. Winfield Fretz, Ted Friesen, Frank Epp, and T. D. Regehr. They were significant players in not only the historical society, but for Epp and Friesen, in the early years of MCC Canada. The seeds of a history of Mennonites in Canada were sown in the early years of the new peace advocacy and relief agency, MCC Canada. In the formative years there was a need within the Mennonite constituency to better understand their shared past so they could work better together. MCC Canada would be strengthened if its constituency from BC in the west to Ontario in the east could be educated in the foundations of Mennonite history and faith. The series was also directed at the larger Canadian society at a time when multiculturalism was being promoted nationwide and the Canadian centennial was being marked. This chapter will analyze how the *Mennonites in Canada* books deal with peace and conflict, and the depiction of conscientious objectors.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada began in 1968, as the “Joint Committee on the History of Mennonites in Canada,” under the leadership of Ted Friesen and J. Winfield Fretz. Theodore “Ted” Friesen was the sixth of seven children of entrepreneur David W. Friesen and Sara Klippenstein. Ted was a grandson of immigrants who moved from southern Russia to Manitoba in 1875. Friesen became a lay leader in his home congregation in Altona, Manitoba, one of the most influential businessmen in his community, and in 1963 was one of the founding members of MCC Canada. During the Second World War, Friesen opted for conscientious objector status and performed government sanctioned alternative service instead of entering active military service.¹

¹ Margaret Loewen Reimer and Sam Steiner, “Friesen, Ted E. (1920-2016),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 19 June 2017, from [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Friesen,_Ted_E._\(1920-2016\)&oldid=134527](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Friesen,_Ted_E._(1920-2016)&oldid=134527). See also Ted Friesen, *Memoirs: A Personal Autobiography of Ted Friesen* (Altona: Ted E. Friesen, 2003).

Joseph Winfield Fretz grew up on a farm in Pennsylvania as the sixth of nine children whose ancestors had come from Switzerland. He attended Bluffton College, a Mennonite college in Ohio, and went on to major in sociology at the University of Chicago. He had a keen interest in the history of Mennonites and was enamored with mutual aid organizations. Fretz landed a job at another Mennonite college, Bethel College in Kansas, where he continued his research on Mennonite communities in Canada, the United States, and Latin America. He also became involved with the relief agency, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) based in Akron, PA (a parallel organization to Mennonite Central Committee Canada that began in 1920, and not to be confused with MCC Canada). In 1964, Fretz became the first president of Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario.²

Ontario and Manitoba were the two original provinces where Mennonites established themselves and had the largest concentrations of Mennonites in the country. However, they also represented two of the foundational streams of Mennonites in North America. Ontario's Mennonites moved south to north, first coming to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania starting in 1786. Before Pennsylvania they had their origins in Switzerland. The Mennonites of Manitoba migrated from northern Europe to West Prussia (Poland) and then to Russia before immigrating west to Manitoba in the 1870s. In the 1920s, and post Second World War, two more large groups of Mennonites from Russia settled across Canada, in every province from Ontario to British Columbia.

Mennonites who had roots in Switzerland and those in Russia spoke different languages, ate different foods, had different customs, and sensitivities. Yet they shared a theological past and present. Many of their beliefs were very similar but varied to a degree or were practiced

² Sam Steiner, "Fretz, Joseph Winfield (1910-2005)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 20 June 2017, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Fretz,_Joseph_Winfield_\(1910-2005\)&oldid=143570](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Fretz,_Joseph_Winfield_(1910-2005)&oldid=143570).

differently. In short, they were different cultures now both in the same country. The Swiss Mennonites' natural kinship and lines of communication was north and south – between southern Ontario and the eastern United States. For the Mennonites from Russia, natural connections were east-west as they began to spread west, from Manitoba to Saskatchewan, Alberta, and BC, and for some groups, north-south between the American Mid-west and the Canadian prairies.³

While the two groups of Mennonites (Russian and Swiss origins) had few interactions, external pressures such as global armed conflicts and societal attitudes towards minority immigrant groups, impacted both groups because of their shared faith values. Both Mennonite groups maintained their historic beliefs about the importance of Jesus' call to his disciples to live peaceably with others, "love your enemies and.... pray for those who persecute you..."⁴ and to "turn the other cheek" when you are struck.⁵ Mennonites saw Jesus' example and commands as part of their communal faith journey. While Mennonites understood Jesus' call to be peace makers as part of daily discipleship, this value has been understood in the English press as pacifism whereas the Mennonites used the terms such as nonresistance and nonviolence.⁶

The First World War tested the resolve of the Mennonite communities' commitments to their peace principles. While the Canadian government allowed exemption from military service based on historic commitments to the historic peace churches, there were consequences for their

³ There were some north south networks among some of the sub groups such as the Kleine Gemeinde (current day Evangelical Mennonite Conference) who had communities in Manitoba and Nebraska.

⁴ Matthew 5:43-48.

⁵ Matthew 5:39, Luke 6:39. "Turning the other cheek" understood in societal context was a way of embarrassing the aggressor and not a sign of a lack of backbone.

⁶ Guy, Hershberger, "Pacifism. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*," accessed 26 June 2017, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Pacifism&oldid=146661>

military inaction.⁷ Mennonites were disenfranchised by the War-time Elections Act of 1917.⁸ Not only did they refuse active participation in the military campaign, they spoke the “enemy language,” and resisted adopting Canadian values. Public sentiment grew so shrill that in Manitoba and Saskatchewan the provincial governments imposed new educational regulations forcing Mennonite children to attend public schools as opposed to the privately-run schools in a hope to “Canadianize” the Mennonites. Some Mennonites were fined and jailed in their attempts to resist.⁹ Disdain for Mennonites reached beyond provincial sensibilities and was felt also on a national level. Robert Borden’s Conservative government passed an Order-in-Council in 1919, prohibiting Mennonites from entering Canada.¹⁰ All these external events and pressures on the had an impact on Mennonite communities. In the short term they struggled to resist while in the longer term, some lost confidence in the Canadian government and emigrated south to Mexico and Paraguay. For those who stayed in Canada, memory of the First World War and the public backlash was not soon forgotten and acted as a cautionary tale as other armed conflicts arose. War became one of the unifying forces within the Mennonite community, affecting how they thought about themselves.

In Canada there were no Mennonite organizations that straddled the Swiss-Russian divide on an inter-provincial or national level. Even within their own Swiss and Russian circles, Mennonites in Canada were organized primarily around their church communities and saw little

⁷ While the vast majority of Mennonite men sided with the community value of non-participation in war there were 99 men with origins in the Mennonite church in Russia who did enlist. Glenn Penner, “Canadian Low-German Mennonites Drafted or Recruited in World War I,” *Mennonite Historical Society of Canada*, accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/canada/WWI/WWIMennonitesIndexSorted.htm> .

⁸ Elections Canada, “A History of the Vote in Canada,” accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=his&document=chap3&lang=e>.

⁹ See William Janzen, *The Limits of Liberty in Canada: the experience of the Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 406-407.

need for inter denominational co-operation.¹¹ “Virtually nothing of consequence could be structured as inter-Mennonite activity,” claimed Frank H. Epp.¹² However, external forces pushed on the Mennonite communities to look to each other to address common needs and pool resources. Some German-speaking Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan joined forces in 1902 to form the Conference of Mennonites in Canada to promote home missions.¹³ The developing crisis in southern Russia in the late teens and 1920s spurred co-operation that led to the formation of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization based in western Canada and supported primarily by the Mennonites with roots in Russia.¹⁴

For decades, groups with roots in Switzerland and Russia did little together. However, the Second World War was another force that pushed the Mennonites to cooperate. Remembering the vitriol directed at the Mennonite communities during and after the First World War, Mennonites increased efforts to work cooperatively, attempting to show they were good citizens while strengthening their commitment to their faith principles. In 1940, the Conference of Historic Peace Churches was developed. While based in Ontario, it included members from other Mennonite and non-Mennonite, but peace oriented, denominations.¹⁵ The Conference of

¹¹ An exception would be the early Waisenamt (office for widows and orphans) and Brandverordnung (fire insurance) that were established by the first Mennonites to Manitoba. These organizations were somewhat inter-denominational.

¹² Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: McMillan of Canada, 1982), 420.

¹³ John G. Rempel and Lawrence Klippenstein, “Conference of Mennonites in Canada,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 19 June 2017, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Conference_of_Mennonites_in_Canada. Home Missions is a term used to describe domestic missionary activities as opposed to international missionary efforts.

¹⁴ The Mennonites in Canada were not of one mind about the kind of help that should be offered to the Mennonites suffering in Russia. It took leaders like David Toews who forged ahead selfless and tirelessly in the face of significant opposition from within the Mennonite constituency that any aid was offered.

¹⁵ Harold Bender, “Conference of Historic Peace Churches,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 19 June 2017, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Conference_of_Historic_Peace_Churches&oldid=135596. Groups involved include the Mennonite Church, Brethren in Christ (Tunker), Mennonite Brethren in Christ, Old Order Mennonite, Amish Mennonite, Society of Friends, Old Order Dunkard, Mennonite Brethren, and General Conference Mennonite.

Historic Peace Churches was an expansion of the Swiss Mennonite and binational Peace Problems Committee of the (Swiss) Mennonite Church that began as a response to the Great War in the United States.¹⁶

Negotiation parties armed with old federal promises travelled to Ottawa and came away with an alternative service plan that avoided active military service. The plan was open to all Canadians, most of whom needed to prove their case before a judge and not based on a group exemption that applied only to those in a historic peace church tradition. A total of 10,851 Canadian men served as conscientious objectors. While the Mennonite contingent was by far the largest, COs came from 33 ethnic backgrounds from across Canada. Men worked as orderlies, tree planters, medics, miners, lumberjacks, firefighters, farmers, road builders, dock workers, and shipbuilders. Most of their wages were redirected to the Red Cross for war relief projects. Families at home (often on the farm) had to find a way to do without their young men, who had almost no money to send home. An unexpected consequence of the alternative service program was the lasting positive impact it had on the men and their communities.¹⁷

After the Second World War the men returned home. Many expected to pick up where they left off on the family farm. However, advances in mechanization meant less labour was needed to yield the same or higher output of agricultural production. Some of the COs working in alternative service had learned new occupational skills that became vital to a post farming economy. George Groening wrote:

I was taken out of the comfort zone of home and church. I had to face the hardships of life which ultimately helped me mature and prepare for future service. I was thrust into

¹⁶ Harold Bender, "Peace Problems Committee (Mennonite Church)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 19 June 2017,

[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Peace_Problems_Committee_\(Mennonite_Church\)&oldid=76920](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Peace_Problems_Committee_(Mennonite_Church)&oldid=76920)

¹⁷ Conrad Stoesz, "This Thing is in our Blood for 400 years: Conscientious Objection in the Canadian Historic Peace Churches during the Second World War," in *Worth Fighting For: Canada's Tradition of War Resistance from 1812 to the War on Terror*, ed. Lara Campbell and Michael Dawson (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015): 104-105.

ministering to my peers in camp. We had to help in the spiritual ministry in the camp where the church could not do it. I found the opportunity to teach, preach, counsel and help give leadership; all of these helped me in later life. It taught me an appreciation for our Native people. It prepared me to become a teacher and later a pastor. It prepared me for future leadership in the church, conference and work at Columbia Bible College. I view these years as having been very useful for future ministry. They enriched my life and helped prepare me for my future.¹⁸

COs improved their leadership skills and learned to appreciate others who came from outside their own denominational boundaries.¹⁹

As a result of the positive CO experience, a renewed energy infused the Mennonite church communities. A significant shift led many Mennonite church communities to see service as an important expression of their daily faith. For some, a new focus moved from the Mennonites' corporate aim of separation from the world to one of engagement with the society at large as a response of their Christian faith. Responding to needs in the world with love and resources was a new paradigm for many Mennonite communities. As result of the CO experience, new organizations that provided opportunities to live out their faith in service activities were born. Mennonite Voluntary Service, Mennonite Disaster Service, Alisa Craig Boy's Home, Eden Mental Health Services, and MCC (USA)'s PAX program are examples. These programs and organizations were created by the post-war Mennonite demographic that held institutions in high regard and saw institutions as a vehicle to address social and spiritual needs.

Within a few years after the end of the Second World War, Mennonites were again wondering how to respond to war with the start of the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The consequences of opting out of military engagement was seared in the Canadian Mennonite

¹⁸ George Groening, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 99.

¹⁹ Conrad Stoesz, "This thing," 104-105. See also T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada: 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 54-59.

psyche. They recalled the criticism for not participating during the First World War including their loss of the right to vote and for banning Mennonite movement into the country. In the Second World War vandalism, arson, intimidation, censorship was heaviest at the beginning of the war. The alternative service program, established through negotiations with the Canadian government, did ameliorate the public criticism to some extent. However, the Vietnam War that erupted in the early 1960s was not like the other wars. Canada was not officially involved, but after the US draft was invoked Canada was a sought-after refuge by American draft dodgers and Mennonite Church leaders struggled how to respond.²⁰

Leaders juggled several forces. As the Americans became more heavily involved in the Vietnam War, draft dodgers began their clandestine move north. Mennonites, as well as some members of the Canadian general population, supported the ‘shirkers.’ This support thrust the Mennonites into the public spotlight, again in a largely negative light. No doubt some Canadians no doubt were getting tired of seeing the Mennonite name in the headlines always in opposition to conflicts beginning with the First World War, then the Second World War, and now the conflict in Vietnam. How could Mennonites explain themselves to their neighbors? At the same time, with a new philosophy of engagement with their neighbors, Mennonites felt an acute need for more resources to help pass on the faith to their children.

Another question was how to respond to the physical needs created by the war in Vietnam. With the Mennonites new-found openness to service and alleviating suffering, how could they act for peace?²¹ As a reflection of the decentralized and diverse nature of the

²⁰ James R. Klassen, “Vietnam War (1954-75),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 14 October 2018, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Vietnam_War_\(1954-75\)&oldid=133656](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Vietnam_War_(1954-75)&oldid=133656).

²¹ It should be noted that not all Mennonites were comfortable with a high degree of public engagement. The more traditional Mennonite groups were more cautious.

Mennonite community, there were numerous aid organizations. They were not coordinated by a central body and were largely created to help other Mennonites.

The external forces of public perception and internal forces of wanting to provide aid, compelled Mennonites to reorganize themselves. After significant negotiations nine Mennonite relief agencies from BC to Ontario combined to become Mennonite Central Committee Canada in April 1963. The new entity was closely aligned with the global MCC head-quartered in the USA. The new MCC organization in Canada was the most comprehensive organization the Mennonites had created in Canada. It cut across regions, denominations, cultures, and theologies to bring Mennonites together. The constitution outlined the purposes of the organization.

To function as a charitable organization in the relief of human suffering and distress, and in aiding, rehabilitating re-establishing Mennonite and other refugees... To coordinate the relief, peace and service efforts of the provincial and other organizations... To act as a united voice for the Canadian Mennonite brotherhood in matters of national concern, such as peace witness and alternative service...²²

The new MCC Canada also assumed the role of negotiator of conscientious objector rights and privileges previously held by Mennonite churches and denominations.

After the Second World War the two biggest, and most established Mennonite centres were Winnipeg and Kitchener representing both the Mennonites from Russia and the Mennonites with origins in Switzerland, respectively. Combining these two cultures for a common purpose was not without difficulties and trust needed to be built. In a confidential exchange of letters between new MCC Canada board members, Harvey Taves of Kitchener, Ontario and Ted Friesen of Altona, Manitoba, they discussed the need for cooperation between the “east” (centred in Kitchener, Ontario and dominated by Mennonites of Swiss origin,) and the “west” (centred in Winnipeg and dominated by Mennonites from Russia). Taves reminded Friesen of the concept

²² Constitution of the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), 1968. Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4874 file 7.

outlined by the “editor of the Canadian Mennonite” (Frank H. Epp) that there should be regional offices with centres in Kitchener, Winnipeg, and in British Columbia. Taves admits that in the new organization there is an “implied [assumption of a] very strong factor of nationalism.” The organizational architects of MCC Canada expected the new organization would be united internally and be able to speak with one Canadian voice.²³

Ted Friesen replied to Taves after consulting with several well-connected Mennonite leaders about the perceived unity of the new MCC Canada. Friesen agreed that there is “suspicion and apprehension on the part of both east and west.” Further, “the first thing we have to do is to break down walls of suspicion that exist between east and west and sit down to reach an understanding.” The tension between east and west highlighted the need for building a common understanding and narrative. Friesen, believing the new venture had the possibility to bring Mennonites together unlike before, wrote: “I am looking forward to is to be a unifying influence... and as such, to build a national identity.”²⁴ In relatively short order, significant bridging between east and west began. In a January 1969 letter, William T. Snyder, Executive secretary of MCC Canada joyfully stated

The membership of MCC (Canada) has a cohesiveness that is almost unbelievable after only five years of working together... Although there was not agreement on every point, the fact that brethren did not push each other but attempted to find common agreement, was most impressive to me.²⁵

The national character that MCC was to embody was aspirational and required work.

²³ Harvey W. Taves letter to Ted Friesen, September 25, 1963, Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4874, file 1.

²⁴ Ted Friesen letter to Harvey W. Taves, October 19, 1963, Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4874 file 1.

²⁵ William T. Snyder letter to David P. Neufeld, January 13, 1969, Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4874 file 9.

Friesen's dream of building a "national identity" to aid MCC Canada in achieving its goals, began to be worked out and the idea of a history project to help this process began to be discussed. The earliest concept of a history of Mennonites in Canada with MCC Canada's involvement perhaps came from a letter from Walter Quiring in early 1965 to MCC's executive committee. But his request for financial help to write a "one volume covering the period of [the Mennonite's] residence in Russia and... in Canada" was denied. After "considerable discussion it was moved and passed that due to certain foreseeable difficulties ... this request must be regretfully declined."²⁶ While the records do not indicate why Quiring's offer was rejected, the "regretfully declined" part of the resolution hints that MCC Canada thought a history of Mennonites in Canada was a good project because the idea continued to be raised in MCC Canada meetings.²⁷

In addition to the relief and peace advocacy work of MCC Canada, Executive Secretary J.M. Klassen was drawn into new circles such as the Interfaith Conference sponsored by the Centennial Commission of the Government of Canada. In 1965, the commission was encouraging religious groups to look towards the upcoming Canadian centennial celebrations in 1967. Klassen was asked to serve on a steering committee to discuss interfaith centennial projects. In his report Klassen mused about what the Mennonite community could do. Above encouraging churches to have celebratory services and pray for national leaders, Klassen

²⁶ "Mennonite Central Committee Canada Executive Committee Minutes April 30-May 1, 1965," Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives Volume 4875 file 5.

²⁷ In 1968, Walter Quiring offered the manuscript he wrote about the Mennonites in Canada to the Joint Committee for \$3,500, which was rejected. Numerous attempts from 1968 to 1971 to come to an agreement between Quiring and the Committee were unfruitful. Eventually in 1971 the Committee offered to buy the manuscript for \$500 to be a resource for author Frank Epp, but the manuscript appears to have been lost in transit. "Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society (Committee on the History of The Mennonites in Canada)," December 1971, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada fonds volume 4472 file 1. See also letter from Frank H. Epp to J. Winfield Fretz "Re: Walter Quiring," J.J. Thiessen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 1136 file 11.

suggested a project that “would in some way reflect Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ appreciation for the privileges enjoyed in this land... and help to direct attention to God as revealed through Christ and proclaimed by the church.”²⁸ In a June 1967 letter to MCC members, along with the Executive Committee meeting minutes for that spring, Klassen enclosed a copy of “The History of Mennonites in British Columbia.”²⁹ Klassen’s early ruminations about a project for people inside and outside the wider Canadian Mennonite community further cultivated the concept of a history project.

In 1966, MCC Canada’s annual meeting was held in Vancouver. How to be involved in the Canadian centennial celebrations was discussed. Among five options, option three was “the writing of a history of Mennonites in Canada.”³⁰ Board members of MCC Canada Ted Friesen and Frank H. Epp were present and no doubt influenced the discussion. Also attending the meetings was J. Winfield Fretz, the new president of Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario.

Friesen’s memoirs are not clear as to the timing, but informally at these MCC meetings Fretz, Epp, and Friesen met to discuss the idea of a history book chronicling the Mennonites in Canada. Perhaps participants at the MCC meetings gave some support to the history book idea, but perhaps questioned if MCC was the best body to undertake such a project. Friesen, Fretz, and Epp understood the milieu and decided to direct energies related to the history project to the formation of a new history society that would unite the Manitoba and Ontario Mennonite historical societies.³¹ Friesen’s dream of a national identity no doubt provided energy and vision

²⁸ “Executive Secretary’s Report to the MCC (Canada) Executive Committee Meeting September 10-11, 1965,” Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, volume 4874 file 5.

²⁹ J.M. Klassen letter to The Members of MCC (Canada), June 22, 1967, Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4874 file 6.

³⁰ Ted Friesen, “Report on MCC (Canada) Annual Meeting, Vancouver, January 7-8, 1966,” Ted Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4874 file 5.

³¹ Ted Friesen, *Memoirs*, 43, 74.

for some of these discussions. Epp too saw a bigger picture, as remembered by his daughter Esther Epp-Tiessen, a future author of the history of MCC Canada. Frank Epp

always thought about MCC as much more than a relief and development organization. He saw it as a way for Mennonites (and BICs) to do all manner of things together. He also saw it as a vehicle to nurture a broader peoplehood. So, the study of Mennonite history was always part of that larger vision [of] having Mennonites work together to address the needs of the world.³²

Work needed to be done for MCC Canada to function as one body and part of the solution was to explore and illuminate the shared history and values of its member groups.

As Epp-Tiessen saw it, MCC Canada overcame significant trust issues between east and west, between Mennonites of Russian and Swiss origins in western Canada and Ontario. To grow the MCC Canada brand and constituency, it was imperative to develop the trust established between east and west among MCC Canada board members and among the wider constituency. Epp-Tiessen concluded, “MCC Canada’s express purpose was to use history to help foster a national Canadian Mennonite identity.”³³

The events and actors outlined above represent forces within and outside the Mennonite community. Significant cultural differences based on country of origin existed between Mennonites with origins in Russia and Switzerland but living in the same country and sharing significantly similar faith convictions such as a firm commitment to non-participation in war were unifying elements. With reference to the metaphor of the ethnoreligious kite employed in the introduction to this study, the Mennonites held the line of their identity kite while external forces such as war and public perceptions of a German-speaking, separatist immigrant group blew against the kite of identity. How would the Mennonite groups of Canada respond? How

³² Email from Esther Epp-Tiessen to Conrad Stoesz June 13, 2017.

³³ Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2013), 173.

would they adjust the kite string to respond to these forces? The Mennonite Historical Society's *Mennonites in Canada Series* was, in part, a response to these factors. Its goal was to unify and educate the Mennonite and non-Mennonite communities. The propose for the books and the Canadian milieu impacted how they were written, including how the role of the conscientious objector was portrayed.

Frank H. Epp's authorship of *Mennonites in Canada*

While Ted Friesen and J. Winfield Fretz had the dream of a historical society, Frank Epp was the engine that put the ideas into motion. Friesen had a close connection with the editor of the *Canadian Mennonite*, Frank H. Epp. Not only were they on the first MCC Canada board together, Epp worked as half-time pastor of the Altona Mennonite Church in Altona, Manitoba, where Friesen and Epp were founding members in 1962. Epp and Friesen's friendship dated back to 1953, when the *Canadian Mennonite* was first launched, and Friesen invited Epp to be the editor; moreover, the *Canadian Mennonite* was owned and published by Friesen's family business, D.W. Friesen's & Sons of Altona.

The *Canadian Mennonite* shared a goal Ted Friesen had for the new MCC Canada – to create a national identity. To this end, correspondence, staff, and articles from and by Mennonites from Ontario of Swiss origin were included in the paper along with news and views of Mennonites in the west. Epp was a church leader, journalist, educator, and author.³⁴ The newly formed “Joint Committee on the History of Mennonites in Canada,” (Later known as the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada) engaged Epp as research director to spearhead a history of Mennonites in Canada in early 1968. Research assistants were also engaged for the project.

³⁴ Adolf Ens, “Epp, Frank H. (1929-1986),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, accessed 9 July 2017, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Epp,_Frank_H._\(1929-1986\)&oldid=143545](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Epp,_Frank_H._(1929-1986)&oldid=143545)

Epp's 1970 editor's report stated that the project was aimed "at a wider audience than just our own people,"³⁵ with an eye to explaining who the Mennonites were to the Canadian public. It was hoped that with more knowledge would come more understanding of the Mennonite particularities and faith convictions. Epp also understood the need for a reinvigorated and broadened Mennonite faith that would seek to engage the world with love and justice.

Secondly the work was needed for the Mennonite community to build a common identity and instruct its people in the principles of Mennonite faith. Epp set to work to write a one volume journalistic, yet scholarly, book that described the Mennonites' history in Canada, with their array of expressions and thus bring the community together. For Epp, one of the central unifying themes was that of peace which he dealt with in several ways in *Mennonites in Canada*.

The *Mennonites in Canada* turned out to be a three-volume set that described and analyzed the Mennonite experience in Canada and was a significant accomplishment. Some 1500 pages were written by two authors, supported by research assistants. These books became the textbooks for students, historians, pastors and interested people within and outside the Mennonite community. Supported by funds from denominations and MCC Canada, the project that started in 1968, was completed in 1996. Volumes one and two were written by Frank H. Epp and because of the untimely death of Epp at the age of 56 in 1986, Volume Three was written by T. D. Regehr, a professor of Canadian business history at the University of Saskatchewan. The books illuminate the important cog that peace, and the conscientious objector, played in the Mennonite wheel of identity. The seed planted by Friesen, that the history books should be used to create a national identity, was growing. However, while Epp and

³⁵ "Editor's Report: Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society (Committee on the History of the Mennonites in Canada)," December 5, 1970, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4472 file 1.

Regehr were describing the same people, the prominence of the peace story differed in the writing of the two authors. It differed because of changes within the subject (the Mennonite community), but also in the authors' own approaches and beliefs.

Frank Epp was born in 1929, to parents who emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1924 to escape the increasingly difficult and dangerous situation in the Soviet Union. Epp grew up in a Mennonite church and for most of his life worked for the Mennonite community. Following in his ancestor's footsteps, Epp was baptized as an adult in the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church on May 26, 1947.³⁶ In 1953, he was invited to become the editor of the *Canadian Mennonite*, headquartered in Altona. A significant experience for Epp was his trip in 1966, to Vietnam while the war there was raging. As Marlene Epp, another daughter of Frank Epp, wrote in a 1986 tribute to him, the trip "made him embrace whole-heartedly the peace movement."³⁷ At the time he wrote: "a faith even as small as a grain of mustard seed could give us more security than the mountains of weapons we have stock-piled."³⁸ In the same year Epp organized an international Peace Vigil in his role on the Canadian Board of Christian Service. The event was planned together with his American Mennonite counterpart, John A. Esau who represented the Northern District Peace Committee. The purpose of the event was to bring people from various states and provinces together at the International Peace Gardens, on the international boundary near Boissevain, Manitoba.³⁹

Epp was seemingly involved everywhere. He responded to J.M. Klassen's meeting of the Canadian Interfaith Conference where the Canadian government invited religious organizations

³⁶ Esther Epp-Tiessen email to Conrad Stoesz, July 12, 2017.

³⁷ Marlene Epp, "Frank H. Epp (1929-1986): the loss of a leader. Tribute from a daughter, spoken at his funeral," *Mennonite Reporter* 16 February 3, p. 8.

³⁸ Marlene Epp, "...Tribute from a daughter..."

³⁹ Frank H. Epp open letter, June 1, 1966, Mennonite Central Committee Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 1492.

to plan to celebrate the Canadian centennial. In 1967, Epp produced a super-sized, special 76-page issue of the *Canadian Mennonite*. Up and coming, as well as established Mennonite leaders wrote a host of articles for the special edition. The anticipated audience was again considered dual in nature. Thus, the issue was aimed at both the Mennonite community to educate them about their own history, and the larger society to show Mennonites as good, productive, Canadian citizens. In Epp's words the issue would aim "to reflect on Canada's history, destiny, mission... Mennonite history, destiny and mission, ... [and] on issues of church and society." In a March 1967 letter to MCC Canada's executive secretary, J.M. Klassen, Epp asked MCC to preorder copies of the issue for all members of parliament, all federal government departments, and some Canadian libraries.⁴⁰ Klassen returned Epp's letter and ordered 200 copies for libraries, presumably not paying for the suggested extra copies for the politicians and bureaucrats.⁴¹ Epp understood history as tool. A further purpose for the special edition was "to remember what should be remembered for our education, edification, and entertainment." In Epp's view there was a usable past to point us in the good and right direction. This special edition was a test run for Epp's larger project, *Mennonites in Canada*.

In 1968-1969 Epp wrote no fewer than twelve position papers on the topic of peace, which he submitted to MCC Canada. The papers included stories on armed conflicts that caught wide North American media attention, showing the external forces in the general society that Epp and his community of Mennonites were affected by. The titles included: "The Land of Promise, A Land without Peace: A report on Middle East Study Trip," "American Draft-Resisters and Canadian Mennonites," "On being afraid of Communism," "The American cause

⁴⁰ Frank H. Epp letter to J.M. Klassen, March 28, 1967, Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 1492, file "Canadian Mennonite."

⁴¹ J.M. Klassen letter to Frank H. Epp, April 20, 1967, Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 1492, file "Canadian Mennonite."

of World War III, “The Unrealism of Militarism: A Practical Look at War and Preparation for War,” “Sometimes I Pray for Nuclear War, But I’ve Never Yet Said Amen!,” “The Unilateral Disarmament of the Church,” “Human Rights and Christian Responsibility.”⁴²

Epp had a personal conviction about the importance of peace advocacy and was influenced by his community’s post Second World War awakening. Canadian Mennonite communities⁴³ had new energy to engage the world with the love of Jesus but believed that the Canadian population at large misunderstood them. International conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, as well as divisions within the Mennonite community, convinced Mennonite leaders of the need for a more cohesive Mennonite constituency. These forces impacted how the *Mennonites in Canada* series was written and in turn shaped the Canadian Mennonite identity.

Epp was committed to the Mennonite principle of peace and the conscientious objector story was seen as one expression of the commitment to peaceful living. Throughout his work, Frank Epp went out of his way to mention peace principles, in his view, the ideological underpinning of the conscientious objection. Indeed, the theme of peace was his preoccupation: he chaired the international MCC Peace Section 1979-1986, wrote extensively about peace and conflict, and during his presidency of Conrad Grebel College 1973-1979, and he ushered in new programs in peace and conflict studies.⁴⁴

Even among Epp’s acknowledgments in the first volume of *Mennonites in Canada*, the informed reader can detect the conscientious objector influence. After the leaders of the Joint Committee, his family, and research assistants are named, Epp acknowledges the committee and

⁴² Mennonite Central Committee Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 2440.

⁴³ Canadian Mennonites after the Second World War were not unified but most did respond with a renewed openness to engage the larger world and focus less on isolation.

⁴⁴ Adolf Ens, “Epp, Frank H. (1929-1986)”.

readers committee.⁴⁵ Of a group of 25 acknowledgements, 7 (28%) were for men who served as conscientious objectors during the Second World War: Gerhard Ens, Wilson Hunsberger, Newton Gingrich, Henry H. Epp, Noah Martin, John A. Toews, and Eddie Bearinger.⁴⁶

That conscientious objectors were part of the supportive network for Epp's production of *Mennonites in Canada* is not surprising. These were the people who supported Epp and his vision. Those who did not see the conscientious objector story as central to the Mennonite story were, by and large, not in leadership in the Mennonite congregations.⁴⁷ If people did have contrary views about military involvement, they tended to find church communities that were more in tune with their beliefs.⁴⁸

In his first volume, Frank Epp took a linear approach to telling the story of the Mennonite experience in Canada. He began by providing important contextual information with a quick overview of the European Reformation that began in 1517. The Reformation was a religious as well as social reformation that affected all western society. In the fertile, yet tumultuous early Reformation years, there were many competing, parallel, and countervailing ideas. In addition to the mainline reformation centred in Martin Luther, more radical reformers such as Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock and Menno Simons wanted a break between the twin powers of church and state and advocated for adult baptism, or an ana-baptism hence naming the movement. Some of the early Anabaptists believed that violence was not only useful but needed to usher in God's reign on earth. These violent Anabaptists made their stand in the takeover of

⁴⁵ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, 13-14.

⁴⁶ Peter Dueck and Conrad Stoesz, "List of known conscientious objectors," *Alternative Service in the Second World War: Conscientious Objectors in Canada: 1939-1945*, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 2004, accessed July 9, 2017, <http://alternativeservice.ca/service/ListofCOs.htm>

⁴⁷ Supporting conscientious objection to war was the orthodox position of the Mennonite churches. A few leaders questioned the absolutist position opposing the use of violence.

⁴⁸ An example is the establishment of the Altona United Church by people previously associated by Mennonite churches in that community. See Conrad Stoesz, "Altona United (Mennonite?) Church," unpublished paper, 2014.

the city of Münster, in north western Germany, where their movement was brutally crushed in 1535.⁴⁹ The Dutch Catholic priest, Menno Simons left his post in 1536, and was a unifying force in the disoriented Anabaptist community. Menno advocated for a radical nonviolence which became characteristic of all Anabaptist groups that survived, including the heavily persecuted community in Switzerland who also became known as Mennonites. Since the Reformation, critics have used the violent history of Münster attempting to discredit the Anabaptists. Mennonites, including Epp, have responded with their own historical narratives that eschew violence, explaining that their peaceful movement was not part of the Münster debacle.⁵⁰

Epp followed the prevailing understanding of Anabaptist history by anchoring the Mennonite story in the exhortations, examples and writings of leaders like Menno Simons. Epp noted that the Anabaptist communities used their violent and difficult history instructively with the pervasive use of martyr stories preserved in the *Martyrs Mirror* and the hymn book known as the *Ausbund*. The past instructed powerfully, and Epp understood this; he seemed to value the writing of the Mennonite experience in Canada as a way of telling the stories of the past to instruct people in the now for actions in the future.

From the Reformation period Epp jumped quickly to the Mennonite experiences in Switzerland, the United States, and the move to Upper Canada in 1786. He outlined the history of the Mennonites who emigrated from the Netherlands to Prussia to Russia and on to Canada in the 1870s. In these migratory experiences, Epp highlighted the value of nonviolence and exemption from military service as being significant factors that pushed them to uproot, and

⁴⁹ Another example is early Anabaptist leader, Thomas Müntzer, and the Peasants War of 1525.

⁵⁰ Abraham Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2006), 71-74. See also Cornelius Krahn, Nanne van der Zijpp and James M. Stayer, "Münster Anabaptists," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1987, accessed 10 Oct 2018, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=M%C3%BCnster_Anabaptists&oldid=161085.

significant points of negotiation for where they would move to including their eventual migration to Canada.⁵¹ In the case of the Mennonites in Russia, (who Epp calls Dutch Mennonites) exemption from military service and other privileges were threatened by new Russian regulations and, as Epp put it, for the more traditionalist Mennonites “life without the *Privilegium* had become quite unthinkable.”⁵² Epp kept the Anabaptist value of non-participation in war, on the basis of conscience, as an important thread throughout his texts to the arrival of Mennonites in Canada and asserted that for “Mennonites, migration was almost always a question of conscience.”⁵³

Epp went to some length to discuss the negotiation process before the immigration to Canada in the 1870s, showing the competition between the US and Canada for agricultural settlers. In focusing on these negotiations, Epp highlighted the role of conscientious objection in the minds of Mennonites who came to Canada, writing that no exemption from military service was offered by the US, while the Canadian government offered assurances Mennonites would be exempt, even answering their questions for clarification. Once the Mennonites of southern Russia believed there were “no loopholes” regarding military service, argued Epp, Canada was seen as the destination of choice for some.⁵⁴ Epp wrote that during the First World War, some Mennonites in the United States bemoaned their choice of settlement as they were ridiculed, abused, and some died in prison because of their beliefs. Migration to a safe haven for conscientious objectors “nearly reached flood proportions” as families and entire communities sought out relief in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.⁵⁵ He explained that the issue of conscientious

⁵¹ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*, 48-56, 67-72.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 178. The *Privilegium* was the document that outlined promised privileges given to the Mennonites by a government.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 318.

objection to war became a central reason for Canada closing the doors to Mennonite migration in 1919.⁵⁶

Epp maintained that when writing about Mennonites in Canada, events and movements in the United States needed to be considered since the long-standing church and kinship networks that were established were so important. One of the important dynamics in the United States impacting Mennonite communities there, and in Canada, were religious movements. Epp was interested in how new religious expression was rejected, accepted into the Mennonite church, or caused enough change that the adherents left the Mennonite fold. In Epp's chapter five of the first volume he documents the forces at play that caused new congregational alignment with the establishment of the General Conference in 1860 and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBIC) in 1883. Epp contrasted the two groups saying that while the General Conference wanted to "temper its reform activity with a strong emphasis on maintaining the Mennonite tradition..." the MBIC "largely abandoned that tradition, including the pacifist tradition... [and eventually would] drop their name [and] move outside the Mennonite family altogether."⁵⁷ For Epp, the "Mennonite tradition" of pacifism was a central marker for maintaining a Mennonite identity.

As Epp saw it, the religious movements placed strain on, and within, the Mennonite communities, pushing people apart. It pained Epp to document people leaving the Mennonite fold. However, in the closing of chapter eleven he foreshadows the important role MCC Canada would play as a centralizing force where the Mennonite value of nonresistance and conscientious objection to war would be nurtured and promoted: "[S]ome day it would be not only mutual aid

⁵⁶ Ibid., 406.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 154.

within the community but also relief action in the international arena which would bring the fragmented Amish and Mennonites into closer fellowship again.”⁵⁸

In addition to exemption from military service, argued Epp, the ability to educate their children as they saw fit was equally important, and in fact, connected to their principles of peace. Freedom of education was included in Canada’s federal letter of invitation (known as the Canadian *Privilegium*) signed by the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture John Lowe in 1873. Mennonites understood that those who educated the child had great influence and believed that it was the role of the church and the family to educate children, not the state. Epp quoted Old Colony Bishop Isaak M. Dyck as insisting that “The rationale for the public school was expressed with the following slogan: one king, one God, one navy, one all-British Empire... For us it was unthinkable that we should educate our children with such implications.”⁵⁹ For Epp, militarism began in the public classroom. Epp ended Volume One with reference to the end of the First World War and part of the Mennonite community looking for emigration opportunities due to a perceived hostile Canadian government and social environment, and on the other – Mennonites looking to Canada to escape Russia.

The plan of the Joint Committee had been to create a single book documenting the Mennonite experience in Canada drawing the Swiss and Russian originating streams into a narrative that built up the concept of a Mennonite peoplehood aimed at the Canadian public and the Mennonite people themselves. However, Epp discovered he had too much to say and so a new plan was created that would span the text over three volumes. Volume One was published in time for the Manitoba Mennonite centennial in 1974. The Joint Committee was reorganized to

⁵⁸ Ibid., 279.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 333.

include newly formed Mennonite historical societies in British Columbia and Alberta/Saskatchewan and Epp was hired to continue his work to produce Volume Two.

In Volume Two Epp continued to highlight the central role of the peace theme to his construction of Mennonite history and identity. However, the supporting cast for Volume Two was different from Volume One. In Volume Two, Epp's list of collaborators included fewer lay people and more Mennonite historians, archivists, and other professionals; indeed, only George Groening had Second World War conscientious objector experience. The volume covered only twenty years, 1920-1940 and Epp illuminated the new Mennonite immigrants' struggle to maintain their culture and religion within an economic and agricultural crisis. Epp entices the reader, how will the Mennonite community fare? By this time, other Mennonite communities in Europe had lost much of their commitment to the peace principle and many "flocked to the colours in the military defense of their fatherland."⁶⁰ Other issues are also highlighted like the peace issue in the foreword and thereby Epp again sets the peace principle as pivotal to the Mennonite identity.

At one level, in Volume Two Frank Epp seemed to engage the religious pressures faced by the Mennonite communities such as modernism and fundamentalism, rather than the peace position. He covered societal pressures including backlash for the peace principle, economic and agricultural depression of the 1930s; and internal struggles such as new immigration to Canada, denominationalism, church organizational structures, and cultural difference. Still, throughout these issues and themes, Epp drove the point home, seemingly whenever he could, that the peace principle is the piece that holds the groups together. As he states, "there was no unified approach because Mennonites lacked solidarity on almost every social question, except perhaps military

⁶⁰ Ibid., viii-xi.

service and the importance of land.”⁶¹ Saying no to war was central to who Mennonites are, according to Epp.

Indeed, Epp returned to the peace theme time and time again. Sometimes in significant ways, and other times simply slipping in a mention, but making the “peace point” a value that underpinned Mennonite identity. For example, Epp discussed the facts surrounding the influx of 20,000 new Mennonite refugees arriving in Canada from the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Epp argued that the refugees constituted isolated communities in a sea of nationalistic and militaristic attitudes, resulting in very little intermarriage and thereby helping the maintenance of an isolated Mennonite identity.⁶² In the face of societal pressures to conform, Epp maintained that the Mennonite groups sought to strengthen their core. He wrote that “The reaffirmation of the fundamentals meant not only strengthening Mennonite peculiarities such as the doctrine of nonresistance.... And the practice of nonconformity... but also Christian theology and ethics in general, as historically taught by the Mennonites.”⁶³ Epp elevated the principle of nonresistance above other aspects of Mennonite theology as a unifying and foundational value.

In his zeal to unify Mennonite people with the peace theme, Epp sometimes misled his readers. In chapter ten, entitled “Keeping the Young People,” for example, Epp documented some of the forces encouraging the Mennonite communities to become more engaged with Canadian society and less isolationistic. Religious revival, Sunday schools, English language adoption, and Bible schools are named as encouraging greater interaction. As a result more young people left the Mennonite communities, and some joined other church communities. However, Epp gives the example of John K. Friesen (brother to Epp’s friend Ted Friesen) who

⁶¹ Ibid., 19.

⁶² Ibid., 33.

⁶³ Ibid., 49.

left his Mennonite community to teach in Virden, Manitoba where he joined the United Church and brought with him the Mennonite peace teachings. Epp records with some excitement the ways John Friesen promoted the traditional peace stance of Mennonites in his new community. Friesen became involved in the Young People's Union of the United Church and became president of the Manitoba Conference in a few short years. Along the way, he was also chairman of the Peace Commission of the Young people's Union of the United Church of Canada. Every context gave him an "outstanding opportunity to speak up for peace and nonresistance." Epp goes on to talk about Friesen's promotion of peace in the school where he taught and used his position in the church to support anti-conscription efforts.⁶⁴ A glaring omission on Epp's part was leaving out the vitally important information that John Friesen subsequently volunteered for the air force in the Second World War. He flew 35 missions over Germany and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross," and was later awarded the Order of Canada for his military and philanthropic services.⁶⁵ Epp's writing at times is more persuasive than simply interpretive. Epp's focus on the peace theme did not allow him to paint a more nuanced picture about peace within the Mennonite community.

Handing the Reigns of *Mennonites in Canada* to T. D. Regehr

Epp closed Volume Two with the Second World War and had planned to have Volume Three ready for the Mennonites in Ontario bi-centennial in 1986. However, Epp became ill and died in 1986. In 1988, T. D. Regehr was asked to continue where Epp had left off. Regehr was a natural choice, since he was one of Epp's research assistants. Regehr also had worked at the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 483-484.

⁶⁵ John K. Friesen obituary, *Vancouver Sun*, accessed July 28, 2017, http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/vancouver_sun/obituary.aspx?pid=143632500 . See also David Neufeld, *The Pacifist who Went to War*, National Film Board of Canada, 2002.

Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa from 1960-1968, was a classically trained historian receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Alberta in 1967 and was a professor of history at the University of Saskatchewan until his retirement in 1996.⁶⁶ Volume Three's advisors continued the trend towards professionalization mirroring the growing professionalization of Canadian Mennonites. Now the author could draw upon trained historians, sociologists, and archivists such as Leo Driedger, Abe Dueck, Marlene Epp, David Fransen, Reginald Good, Harry Loewen, Royden Loewen, Lucille Marr, Lorraine Roth, Rodney Sawatzky, and Paul Toews.⁶⁷ In comparison to Volume One, there were fewer people representing the pastors and the Mennonite church in Volume Three.

Regehr did however, not share Epp's position within the Mennonite community, or the same sensitivities. Regehr was a classically trained historian who understood objectivity as something to aspire to. He also states: "I am neither an outsider nor fully an insider."⁶⁸ While he grew up in a family that was committed to the Alberta Mennonite Brethren Community, he rebelled and did not embrace the Mennonite faith. He "escaped" from the rural community to the big city of Ottawa. However, here too he found community with other Mennonites and later experienced a return to and appreciation for the Mennonite faith.⁶⁹

Regehr did not carry on Epp's activist approach to the issue of peace and conscientious objectors in Volume Three of *Mennonites in Canada*. Regehr does not dismiss, or hide, the occasions where the "peace principle" was an important factor in the Canadian Mennonite past, but provides more examples where "peace" was not the only response by Canadian Mennonites.

⁶⁶ Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, "2016 Award of Excellence," accessed September 11, 2017, <http://mhsc.ca/>. Archives Society of Alberta, "Theodore D. Regehr fonds," accessed September 11, 2017, <https://albertaonrecord.ca/theodore-d-regehr-fonds>

⁶⁷ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, x.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xv-xiv.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xv-xxi.

Chapter two's title provides an example. It is entitled "Wartime Alternative and Military Service." Regehr details the position taken by Mennonite church leaders who advocated for men to choose conscientious objector status and provide alternative service, but he also includes a discussion about the people who volunteered for military service. Whereas Epp wrote several essays and books on the theme of peace for the Mennonite church while researching and writing *Mennonites in Canada*, Regehr wrote a journal article about the Second World War Mennonite enlistees entitled "Lost sons: The Canadian Mennonite Soldiers of World War II"⁷⁰ published in the premier Mennonite journal of the time, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

Not only is Regehr a different writer, the Mennonite and Canadian context was different for Regehr who wrote Volume Three in the late 1980s and early 1990s during a time when the cold war raged between The Soviet Union and the United States. The fear was a nuclear war that could destroy the entire globe several times over. This kind of war did not need soldiers as in previous wars. A few buttons could be pushed to launch a myriad of nuclear war heads. While society was alarmed and there was an urgency to publicly pressure politicians to reduce the nuclear threat, there was no pressure in Canada for Mennonite men to enlist. There was no external pressure on the Mennonite community to be involved in the military so the kite of Mennonite identity as it related to peace was not facing the same wind and therefore the community did not have the same urgency to promote the peace agenda.

For Regehr, the war and the Mennonites' reaction to it, was foundational to understanding Mennonites and his book. The subtitle of Volume Three is "a people transformed." Central to the transformation was the Second World War. Most of the men who

⁷⁰ T. D. Regehr, "Lost Sons: The Canadian Mennonite Soldiers of World War II," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66 (1992): 461-480.

chose to enlist with the Canadian military did not return to the Mennonite church⁷¹ and thereby concentrating the value of alternative service within the Mennonite churches. However, while these men were not part of the Mennonite church, they remained part of the community through kinship and other networks.⁷² Those men who performed alternative service had a profound experience that broke down barriers between denominations, gave the men new skills, and instilled a belief that service to society was central to their faith. Their experience influenced their home congregations and there was a new emphasis on being in the world and responding with love and material aid. The conscientious objector experience was important to the kind of life the men led in regards to their future occupation, values, friends, and faith. Regehr states “there was always a close link among alternative service, voluntary service, and mission work.”⁷³

As Canadian Mennonites adapted to a new view of their place in the world, there were new forces to contend with including education, mass media, and urbanization. Regehr discusses these factors noting that the community’s responses were designed to maintain a Mennonite identity but often acted as a double-edged sword. Sunday Schools did help the church did fill the gap after religious education was removed from the public schools. However, curriculum that came from outside the denomination often did not promote a Mennonite theology including a Mennonite response to war.⁷⁴

Considering Epp and Regehr

⁷¹ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 57. Not all churches responded in the same way to the war veterans. Some churches required an apology and others (First Mennonite in Winnipeg) did not. Ibid., 178..

⁷² At times these men challenged Mennonite identity saying they could be Mennonite without ascribing to the peace principles of the Mennonite church. See also Conrad Stoesz, “Altona United (Mennonite?) Church.”

⁷³ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 72-73.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 228-229. Regehr’s book focuses on the experience of the Mennonites who were more open to accommodation and assimilation and talks less about the more traditional Mennonites in Canada.

While Epp and Regehr took different approaches to creating the historical narrative that became *Mennonites in Canada*, they both by design and necessity illuminated the importance of peace for Mennonites. Epp shared Ted Friesen's vision of building a common identity between east and west, between Mennonites with roots in Russia and Switzerland so that there could be greater cooperation in a new interdenominational relief agency – MCC Canada. Epp sought to show the common values the groups shared attempting to bind people together with a common identity. At times Epp's journalistic tendencies overshadowed his historical writing. Fellow historian John Friesen of Canadian Mennonite Bible College commented that,

In *Mennonites in Canada* the journalists' desire for style and popular appeal and the historian's search for careful analysis and deliberation were frequently in tension.... Frank Epp's hope that someday the fragmented Mennonite community would be united was expressed in the weaving of various strands and groups into one history... Frank was not only an historian who analyzed from a detached perspective but also the prophetic preacher, moving people in the direction he saw as good.⁷⁵

Professor Friesen's analysis succinctly sums up Epp's goals and challenges.

T. D. Regehr's tack was different. Regehr approached the historical task as someone not as invested in the Mennonite community and attempted to describe the Mennonite experience from more of an arms-length vantage point. However, he could not (nor did he want to) ignore the story of the conscientious objector and the peace position of the church. Regehr did not promote the peace position as Epp did but did try to give voice to various views within the church. Regehr did show how the experience in the Second World War was crucial to understanding Mennonites in Canada in the post war period.

The texts created by Epp and Regehr continue to stand as the most comprehensive works exploring the Mennonite experience in Canada. Together, Epp and Regehr ensured that the *Mennonites in Canada* series would be part of the project of the Mennonites' reinvention of

⁷⁵ John Friesen, "Frank H. Epp: Historian," *Mennonite Historian* 12 (March 1986): 3.

identity. While there is no study analyzing the reception or use of the books, we do know that Volume One has been the most popular and has been printed three times. The first printing of Volume One in 1974 was for five thousand copies⁷⁶ and in about a year later there were only one thousand copies left and a second printing was planned. In 1975 it was reported that “the book has had a good reception not only in Mennonite circles but also in the public at large. Over 20 favourable reviews have already appeared in print.”⁷⁷ Not only was Volume One well received, it helped in bringing Mennonites together. According to the 1975 annual report of the Historical Society, “an important by-product ... [is] the interest generated in historical things [and] the formation of regional historical societies in British Columbia and in Alberta-Saskatchewan. This in turn led to the formation of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the incorporation of which is planned in 1975.”⁷⁸ While the Society was formed in 1968, the report is referencing the incorporation of the society with the added western provincial societies. Soon after 1975, these three historical societies in Western Canada established their own archives and historical programs for their Mennonite communities, continuing the work of preserving, educating, and commemorating their Mennonite past.

While the first volume covered over 130 years of time, the second volume covered only twenty years and the five thousand books published of Volume Two did not sell like Volume One had. Volume Three also had five thousand copies produced with The Historical Society purchasing three thousand copies and the publisher, the University of Toronto Press, taking two thousand copies. By 1996, when Volume Three was published, T. D. Regehr was an established

⁷⁶ Memo from J. Winfield Fretz to The Members of the Joint Committee, May 20, 1974. Mennonite Historical Society of Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4473 file 7.

⁷⁷ “A Report from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada,” June 30, 1975. Mennonite Historical Society of Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4473 file 9.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

and seasoned professor and author, yet he reported that Volume Three and the publicity created around it, “have given both me and the book a higher profile than was the case with any of my previous books.” By the end of November 1996, Regehr reported that sales were “reasonably good” and that he was “pleased and encouraged by the response to [his] presentations and the reviews published thus far.”⁷⁹ Reviewers of Regehr’s volume, Frieda Klippenstein and Gerhard Ens, echoed Conzen’s ideas around ethnic reinvention; Klippenstein, for one stated, “identity has multiple and contradictory aspects which are constantly changing. Identity is not realization of an essence, but the story of ongoing political contestation... [O]ver two centuries of Mennonite life in Canada, identity has been reinvented and reimagined in a myriad of new ways, in order to cope with and negotiate discontinuity.”⁸⁰

By the end of 1996, the Historical Society reported that of Volume One, 357 copies remained, Volume Two 1058, and Volume Three 2147.⁸¹ The books have been used as a text books in numerous post-secondary Mennonite history classes over the decades and can be found on the shelves of church libraries, pastors, lay leaders, and others. However, book ownership does not necessarily equate book readers.

The role of a book is explored in David L. Weaver-Zercher’s study on the social history of the *Martyr’s Mirror*. Weaver-Zercher explores the variety of meanings and ways that this seventeenth century tome has been used by Mennonites. It was written in Dutch by Thielmann Van Braght in 1660, illustrated by Jan Luyken, and was over one thousand pages. The book

⁷⁹ Report from Ted Regehr to “The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada,” November 28, 1996. Mennonite Historical Society of Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4878 file 18.

⁸⁰ Frieda Esau Klippenstein, “Review,” review of *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, by Ted Regehr, *Manitoba History*, 33 (1997): 42-43. See also Gerhard Ens, “Preparing for the World: The Modernist Romance Approach in Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970,” review of *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, by T. D. Regehr, *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 15 (1997): 132.

⁸¹ The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada book sales report, November 14, 1996, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, volume 4878 file 18.

described how Anabaptists were killed for their faith. The *Martyr's Mirror* has been reprinted many times and the text has been translated into German, English, and other languages. Weaver-Zercher noted that “in some households, at least, it was rarely if ever read... [but] it signified something important to those who owned it, recalling for them when their theological ancestors were faithful unto death. A history book, an instruction manual, an heirloom, an icon.”⁸² While no detailed research exists on the use of the *Mennonites in Canada* series, it is possible that the books also had a symbolic presence reminding the owners of their identity in ways similar to the *Martyr's Mirror*, recounting stories of ancestors who remained faithful in the face of hardships.

The *Mennonites in Canada* books have been influential in Canadian Mennonite communities, informing them of their past and shaping their self-understanding. Through Epp and Regehr's writings, readers have learned about the struggle for survival and to maintain community among a variety of forces and conflict.

For all of war's many and significant faults, Epp does recognize some positive outcomes for the Mennonite community. The external force that the winds of war imposed on the Mennonite community, pushed Mennonites to new levels of cooperation. What internal strife and division caused, could be (in part) be mended through coming together for a common goal. The importance of standing together (or the implications of failure to do so) during times of trial was highlighted in wartime. It is external pressures (hard economic times, war, etc.) that encourage – even force – Mennonites to overlook differences and cooperate.⁸³

After the Second World War Mennonite conscientious objectors came home to a world they soon realized they did not recognize. The war pushed them to new understandings of what

⁸² David L. Weaver-Zercher, *Martyrs Mirror: A Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 145-146.

⁸³ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*, 322, 366.

faithful Christianity was about, but also the farms they hoped to return to, had found ways to be productive without them due to advances in mechanization. Many young men across the country looked to the towns and cities for work. Canada experienced significant urbanization after the Second World War. Rural Canadian Mennonites feared the city and all of its evil influences that threatened faith and identity.

Classical historical theories of cultural minority groups suggest that time increases assimilation and Mennonites feared that urbanization would do the same.⁸⁴ However, groups can respond to external forces with forces of their own, employing their own agency to resist and undermine assimilative forces. In addition to churches that Mennonites created to maintain Mennonite values, the newly formed MCC Canada aid agency brought Mennonites together in a new way for the purpose of providing material aid to people in need. However, bringing the disparate groups of Mennonites together was one feat, keeping them together was another. One of the large chasms in the Canadian Mennonite world was a historical one centered on the geographical family of origin (Switzerland or Russia). The *Mennonites in Canada* series was another way the group responded to external pressures. The series helped create a common identity through the value of peace and peace advocacy that Mennonites had touted for centuries. Historian Frank Epp used his journalistic skills to weave together a narrative showing the importance of peace embodied in actors such as the conscientious objector. The Mennonites had found a way of adjusting the kite string of identity as the assimilative forces of society blew.

These external forces acted against the Mennonite community causing the community to adjust its tack. As holders of the string on the kite, influential people such as Epp encouraged the kite string to be adjusted. Epp looked to the past to pull together common strands in the

⁸⁴ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 169.

Mennonite past to create a common narrative in regards to the value of the peace position to unify the Mennonite community so it could be more effective in the works of the new MCC Canada. Epp did not invent the peace value, but he elevated it above other distinctive elements in the Mennonite experience.

Sociologists such as Rogers Brubaker caution analysts against drawing firm lines around groups, and not to give undue agency or permanency to group identities. He writes that groups are not as cohesive or homogeneous as we think they are.⁸⁵ Instead he acknowledges the power in joint activities and refers to people experiencing instances of “groupness” that wax and wane. He would affirm Epp and Regehr’s observation of a fragmented and highly variable Mennonite community in which fragmentation and togetherness fluctuated and a sense of groupness (as opposed to unity) might happen but then dissipate. Brubaker understands groups to have moments of shared identity and are in constant flux rather than viewing identity as a constant.⁸⁶ Brubaker suggests that identity is a process, one in which the group embarks on a purpose, oftentimes one with political goals. Brubaker’s work, however, is relevant only to an extent for his is an attempt to understand ethnic violence and written in a time of hyper individualism. Indeed, he seems not to fully appreciate the cohesiveness of groups that place the group above individual rights.

Epp, for one argued that Mennonites promoted community-based values of self-denial, humility, obedience, meekness, lowliness, and forbearance, which were challenged by urbanization.⁸⁷ How does Brubaker’s post-modern model that highlights variability work to interpret groups that, while modern in some ways, downplayed individuality?

⁸⁵ Brubaker, 8.

⁸⁶ Brubaker, 12.

⁸⁷ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 170-171.

Brubaker illuminates the power of ethnopolitical entrepreneurs who have an interest in promoting groupness for their own goals. Brubaker acknowledges this is a powerful tool, and he also validates this activity however, he states that as analysts of identity we need to be aware of these projects, goals, and entrepreneurs.⁸⁸ In Brubaker's understanding, author Frank H. Epp, would be such an ethnopolitical entrepreneur.

The *Mennonites in Canada* series promoted unity through a common value and history of peace advocacy, embodied in the conscientious objector as a product of its context. The Vietnam war, the cold war, celebrations of Canada's centennial, and the Mennonite arrivals in Manitoba and Ontario created forces that acted on the Mennonite community. The writing of *Mennonites in Canada* was influenced by these forces as it acted as its own force to bring Mennonite groups together to help support a unified effort in MCC Canada.

⁸⁸ Brubaker, 10-11.

Chapter 2

Mennonite Masculine Identity Through the Eyes of Conscientious Objectors.

A second set of texts that reveal the experience of Canadian men who served as conscientious objectors (COs) in the Second World War are memoirs written by the COs. Very few were written between the end of the war and the 1980s. However, in the 1990s there are many more examples. This surge correlates with the 50th anniversary of their CO service commemorated in 1991 and followed two years after the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War when the Canadian government sponsored a surge in activities, money, and publicity commemorating the start of the war and the men who fought in it. Also during this time, from 1990-1991, the Persian Gulf War captured news headlines and people's attention. The Gulf War again elevated the role of military service and unlike any time previously, images, discussions, reports, and "film" brought the "shock and awe" of war from an allied perspective into the homes around the world. The Gulf War, commemoration of the Second World War, and the compulsion to record one's life events collided in the 1990s and some of the COs believed their experience was viewed as irrelevant.

After some of the CO reunions in the early 1990s, some COs believed the CO story had faded in importance and the CO reunions were not newsworthy, and according to Henry H. Funk, not event to the Mennonite press.¹ Even within communities with strong CO representation, cenotaphs were being erected in the 1990s honoring the military personnel who fought with no mention of the service of men who were conscientious objectors.²

¹ Henry H. Funk, "C.O. Experience During World War II: The Manitoba School for Mentally Defective Persons, Portage la Prairie," in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 152.

² Conrad Stoesz, "Some did protest war memorial in Altona," *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 March 2001, p. 11.

Gender Studies: Masculinity

One way of understanding these texts is by considering them through the lens of gender. The Canadian Mennonite man's concept of masculinity was a construct just like it was for other men in Canada. If gender is understood as constructed as opposed to innate, questions around how CO masculinity is the same or different than Canadian society's construction can be observed. Indeed, like other young men at the point in which Canada entered the Second World War, Mennonite conscientious objectors (COs) were attracted by the perceived masculine value of adventure.³ They were interested in being part of something bigger than themselves and to see other parts of the world. COs and Canadians believed that active, hard work, and physical strength were markers of a man. However, unlike Canadians, the strength was not to be used to dominate, destroy, or kill others. The COs found other ways to exhibit their strength and ability for hard work. In their texts the COs speak of their highest moral authority was a biblical and community imperative to be faithful to God's divine will and to follow the actions of a non-violent Jesus as exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount. Conscientious objectors were formed by a different community, with different values and therefore had a different understanding of masculinity, which clashed with the dominant hegemonic Canadian society during the Second World War.

One of the most deeply established aspects of identity in history has been a person's gender, male or female. The binary and biologically prescriptive (male and female options) have dominated humanity's understanding about gender. Marlene Epp writes that "how individuals and communities behave in light of their understanding of male and female roles is fundamental

³ Jane Nagel, "Nation," in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 400.

to history,” but has been a more recent theme of historical inquiry.⁴ In the late 1960s and early 1970s feminists led the research on gender, giving rise to a whole new field of inquiry known as gender studies. This research benefited from the growing acceptance of postmodern thought in the social sciences “emphasizing that there is no one truth,” as asserted by Frank Cooper and Ann McGinley.⁵ Feminism began to challenge what it meant to be male and female – what were feminine and masculine traits -- and found throughout history a lack of uniformity on what constituted masculinity and femininity. Masculinity studies are a sub set of gender studies and compliments feminist research. Each of these fields contains different schools of thought, where there is not agreement in all aspects.⁶ Since 1985, the field of gender studies has grown rapidly, with new scholarly journals, books, and conferences on the topic around the world.

The underlying message in these works in gender studies claims that what it means to be a man or woman is constantly being adjusted. Masculinity and femininity are social constructions, seen as, in the words of Judith Kagen Gardiner, “cultural groupings” rather than facts.⁷ Each society socializes its children to operate within social norms, following prescribed rules in order that the society can function. Socialization allows a society to self-regulate and makes it possible to flourish by working together. The family is a key socializing force in society where children learn male and female roles.⁸ While the family plays an important part in socializing children, gender roles are not static but are shifting over time and place. Masculinity is shaped by age, class, economic standing, race, religion, and ethnicity. In actuality we need to

⁴ Marlene Epp, “Heroes or Yellow-bellies? Masculinity and the Conscientious Objector,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 17 (1999), 111.

⁵ Ann C. McGinley and Frank Rudy Cooper, *Masculinities and the Law: A Multidimensional Approach* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 2-3.

⁶ McGinley, 4.

⁷ Judith Kegan Gardiner, “Men, Masculinities, and Feminist Theory,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 35.

⁸ Michele Adams and Scott Coltrene, “Boys and Men in Families,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 233.

think not of masculinity but of masculinities claim gender historians such as R.W. Connell, Jeff Hearn, and Michael S. Kimmel.⁹ What it means to be a man is variable. What it means to be a man born in southern Manitoba in 1920, the grandson of agrarian Mennonite immigrants from Russia, whose first language was Low German and whose social networks were based on family and church, is different than an Anglo-Canadian man who grew up in the city of Winnipeg, the son of a wealthy business man and a graduate from the University of Manitoba. Historian Jane Nagel says that “all cultures have a perceived normative masculinity that sets the standards for male demeanor, thinking, and action” and has the quality of appearing natural.¹⁰

Differing understandings of masculinity embodied by young Mennonite men and Anglo-Canadian men resulted in a culture clash when the nation called its young men to serve in armed conflict during the Second World War in Canada. The writer of a 1941, article in the *Prince Albert Daily Herald* had an erudite understanding of the role of socialization in forming identity. In comparing Anglo-Canadians and Doukhobor conscientious objectors he stated:

These men had been formed with different ideals. The average Canadian, like the British, is reared in the tradition of national and Empire heroes. He is taught to look up to and admire the men who sacrificed everything, including life, for their country and their country's cause. On the other hand, the Doukhobors have been raised in the tradition of martyrs and taught to revere those who suffered persecutions for their pacifist ideals. They wish to be Christ-like and they remember that Christ was persecuted for His beliefs.¹¹

With reference to what makes a man, the Doukhobor conscientious objector, as well as the Mennonite conscientious objectors, were socialized in distinctively different ways than the “average Canadian.”

⁹ R.W. Connell, Jeff Hearn, Michael S. Kimmel, “Introduction,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 3.

¹⁰ Jane Nagel, “Nation,” 400.

¹¹ *The Prince Albert Daily Herald*, October 25, 1941, 5. Quoted in Koozma J. Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (Grand Forks, British Columbia: Mir Publications, 1982), 155-156.

On the heels of the First World War the provincial governments of Saskatchewan and Manitoba sought to break into the Mennonite socialization cycle by insisting on public education for Mennonite children to assimilate them and make “good citizens” of them. When the most tradition minded Mennonites resisted, the government responded coercively and tried to make an example of a few parents by confiscating their property, fining, and even imprisoning Mennonite parents for not complying. This resulted in an emigration from Canada of some seven thousand Mennonites to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s.¹²

By using schools, the government hoped Mennonite boys would become more like Anglo-Canadian boys so that during a time of war, all men would be “good citizens” and follow the predetermined gender patterns because war is gendered conflict. There are general divisions of labor during an armed crisis with the men being called to fight and protect. The “linking of war, militarism and masculinities has remained an enduring and consistent feature of societies and their cultures across time.” As Highgate and Hopton argue, the hegemonic Canadian expectations of boys and men was for them to aspire to “a form of masculinity [which] is characterized by the interrelationship of stoicism... the domination of the weaker individuals, competitiveness, and heroic achievement.”¹³ Other historians add strength, courage, determination, adventure, patriotism, bravery, loyalty, and a willingness to defend ideals as key masculine traits sought after by society, which were celebrated with public ceremonies such as parades and other commemorative events.¹⁴ Men were doers, they were productive, and they did

¹² See Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?: The Mennonite Experience in Canada 1870-1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994). See also William Janzen, *The Limits of Liberty in Canada: The Experience of the Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1990.

¹³ Paul Higate and John Hopton, “War, Militarism and Masculinities,” in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, R.W. Connell (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 433-434.

¹⁴ Timothy Stewart-Winter, “Not a Soldier, not a Slacker: Conscientious Objectors and Male Citizenship in the United States During the Second World War,” *Gender & History*, 19 (Nov 2007), 521. Nagel, “Nation,” 402, 407.

their part. Some of the most damning charges against a man was to claim he was not a man; but a coward, wimp, yellow, shirking responsibility, and unpatriotic.¹⁵ Yet in pacifist groups such as the Mennonites, ideals around masculinity were more complicated, having been informed by their religion that counselled against public displays of physical power and strength. Such men had been formed with distinctive ideals of what it meant to be a man.

Nonresistant masculinity exemplified in the Mennonite conscientious objectors held other traits as central to an understanding of masculinity, including traits such as humility, cooperation, and communal direction. As Bruce Hiebert writes, good Mennonite men were active members of the community, followed instructions of the community, and got along well with others and “in the process exemplifying the life of Jesus, the God who died rather than resist his persecutors.”¹⁶ Mennonite men were steeped in a society that encouraged men to be the quiet in the land, restrained, sober, submissive to authority, and to value hard work. However, as Royden Loewen explains, non-resistant masculinity itself was not static and in some communities was starting to experience a shift as the Second World War erupted. New ideals were ushered in by urbanization and therefore were more pronounced in the towns. In spite of new emphasis on individuality and self-made business success, Mennonite men continued to understand hard work and the centrality of the church and church attendance and key traits of being a man.¹⁷

Masculinity as Expressed in the CO Memoirs

¹⁵ Nagel, “Nation,” 402, 407.

¹⁶ Bruce Hiebert, “A Crisis of Masculinity: North American Mennonites and World War I,” (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2008), 110.

¹⁷ Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 146-162.

The memoirs that these men, who had served as COs, wrote in their later years are a rich source for testing conceptions and conflict over views of masculinity. Memoirs as a genre are written with a backward glance but still written in a current context and these two “eras” can inform each other.¹⁸ Memoir and other biography writing has become to be seen as a “representation of identity,” according to Julie Rak.¹⁹ Memoirs provide “the means of individual and communal memory and history,” according to Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms.²⁰ As people age there is a natural interest in the past that emerges for many people. Memoirs are written often to impart knowledge, values, and understanding to younger generations. In the process authors often address current values and events even as they write about their past. While memoirs are subject to the ephemeral nature of memory, they also describe what the author is experiencing in his or her own immediate context. Memoirs offer a wider view, a synthesis of life, and an attempt to make sense of the past in a way that a diary cannot.

The collection of CO memoirs examined in this chapter indicates a literary response to several social factors. The men now long past retirement age wanted to leave a record that would depict them not as they were (70-80+ years old) but as they had been: strong, in the prime of life, and able to work. In this way the value of being doers and hard workers continued to be a value for these Mennonite men. The COs wrote their memoirs because they wanted to leave a record for the younger generations and to challenge the more pro-war stories being told by the general public and its government. The CO memoir can be embedded in a larger life story of an individual or there are examples of CO stories compiled in single volumes. Three such

¹⁸ Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms, “Auto/biography? Yes. But Canadian?,” *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review* 172 (2002): 5.

¹⁹ Julie Rak, “Introduction – Widening the Field: Auto/biography Theory and Criticism in Canada,” in *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions*, ed. Julie Rak (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 1.

²⁰ Egan, 9.

compilations are John M. Dyck *Faith Under the Test: Alternative Service During World War II In the US and Canada*, 1997, A. J. Klassen ed., *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, 1998, and John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger eds., *Alternative Service Memoirs*, 1995.

These compilations act as a text written by men who served as conscientious objectors and written as they would like to be remembered. Within these texts are hints of how men viewed their masculinity, which has echoes of larger societal norms but also differences from those norms. The volumes find their roots in the CO reunions that began in the 1950s and continued into the twenty-first century. A.J. Klassen introduced his edited volume, *Alternative Service for Peace*, acknowledging that the genesis for the book was a meeting at the Mennonite World Conference gathering in Winnipeg in 1990. At a workshop he attended, he was reminded that the 50th anniversary of the WWII CO experience was fast approaching. Books narrating personal experiences were needed to augment the more general histories. In the subsequent book, *Alternative Service for Peace*, he gathered eighty-one personal stories, as he put it, “written for a future generation that a people not yet created may praise the Lord” with an eye on celebrating the 50th anniversary of the CO work in BC.²¹

Individual writers within these volumes also give voice to current circumstances for wanting to contribute their experiences. In his chapter in *Faith Under Test*, David Ratzlaff believes “all young men’s lives would be enriched if they could spend some years in [alternative] service.”²² This hope was shared by many in the Mennonite church, which gave rise to several service opportunities after the war. Peter G. Dueck of Altona, Manitoba hoped the stories

²¹ A.J. Klassen, *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada During World War II 1941-1946* (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee (B.C.) Seniors for Peace, 1998), vii.

²² David Ratzlaff, “One Big Experience,” in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II In the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997), 175.

presented would inspire people to “take up the cause of peace.”²³ Dueck and his CO cohort saw their actions rooted in a belief that peaceful living is what God was calling them to and that their examples would inspire others to do the same. Menno Klassen of Winnipeg stated that advocating for peace in current circumstances is more complicated than before,²⁴ and Ben P. Goossen believed the reason there had not been another world war for 50 years was the threat of nuclear annihilation.²⁵ Herbert Barkman worked in Seebe Alberta and wrote in his reflection piece that “In the complex world we are living in today, we do well to pause and consider God’s mercies of the past, and how He has led His people, particularly now in consideration of the young men called conscientious objectors during World War II. God has always been true to His word.”²⁶ For Barkman, studying the past was an exercise in learning about God and the writing he was doing was in the hope it would help the listener live a more faithful life.

The Second World War accelerated change in society and after the war was over the Mennonite church was more diversified further than ever. In his chapter in *Faith Under Test*, Frank F. Isaac of the more tradition-minded Holdeman Mennonite church voiced concern about these changes: “The unprecedented wave of technological advancements, spawned by the necessity of the war, has engulfed the Western world. The resulting prosperity and luxurious lifestyle are in danger of engulfing the pilgrim and stranger status of the church of God.”²⁷ As seen in the examples of Barkman and Isaac, the accounts by the COs at times provide a small

²³ Peter G. Dueck, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 56.

²⁴ Menno Klassen, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 111.

²⁵ Ben P. Goosen, in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997), 133.

²⁶ Herbert H. Barkman, “From my Diary of Camp Life,” in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997), 203.

²⁷ Frank F. Isaac., “Four Years of Minimal Sacrifice,” in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997), 150.

statement about why they are writing these memoirs in addition to focusing on their CO experience decades earlier.

For these writers the consequences for applying for CO status were not inconsequential. Ironically, as Frank Epp noted, following the First World War conscientious objectors were stripped of their right to vote at the same time the vote was being given to women.²⁸ A mere twenty years later when another war called for participants, old emotional wounds resurfaced. Many Canadian families remembered lost sons, brothers, and uncles from the Great War, but also the Mennonite young men who had been exempted from military service. Mennonite communities cringed, preparing for a reemerging backlash against their values and communities. Early into the Second World War churches were ransacked and burned. Individuals were intimidated, teacher's certificates were revoked, and barns were torched because Mennonites were not "properly" supporting the war effort. The fact that many spoke German – the language of the enemy – made matters worse.²⁹

Choosing to claim conscientious objector status had implications for their communities and for them personally. In his chapter in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, John C. Klassen of Morden, Manitoba wrote that it was the families and communities they left behind that made the biggest sacrifice, rather than the young men who performed alternative service.³⁰ Young able-bodied men were appropriated from the family farm. Young mothers were suddenly without their husbands, forcing younger and older family members to step into the breach left by the young men working in mines, forests, and hospitals. Churches spent a lot of energy discussing

²⁸ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, 372.

²⁹ Peter Dueck and Conrad Stoesz, "Alternative Service in the Second World War: Conscientious Objectors in Canada 1941-1946," Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre, accessed March 19, 2018. <http://www.alternativeservice.ca/sacrifice/index.htm>. See also T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970*, 41-42.

³⁰ John C. Klassen, in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, ed. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 27.

the war and the proper response. Ministers left their families, farms, and flocks to provide spiritual care to the COs.

Then, too, many of the COs recalled the emotional hardship of facing the hostile judges who were adjudicating CO claims and who cross-examined their position and questioned their masculinity.³¹ At times Justices of the Peace responded harshly and belittled the young men. Jacob J. Doerksen of Gem, Alberta recounts the being told “you are no good to this country... We can send you back to Russia, we can even shoot you.”³² Hutterite Mike Kleinsasser took a verbal thrashing from Manitoba Justice Adamson. “He verbally hammered away at us, used very rough language, there was no stopping him.”³³ Other men recall judges hearing applications for conscientious objector status who attempted to strike hard and to the heart of their understanding of masculinity; men who refused to take up arms were labelled cowards.³⁴ Peter Unger of Chilliwack, BC recalls appearing before

Judge Harvey of the supreme court of Alberta... and noticing that... on either side sat two other authorities... at the far end of the table [was] the stenographer... behind me stood an RCMP in parade uniform.... One of the men with Judge Harvey told me in no uncertain terms that I was shirking my duty to the country and [that I] was a coward.³⁵

The judge called into question Unger’s masculinity claiming he had no courage and was not doing his duty. Historian Bruce Hiebert has studied conscientious objectors in World War One and has noted that it was common for the judges to draw on gender roles that forced the men to

³¹ Kenneth Wayne Reddig, “Manitoba Mennonites and the Winnipeg Mobilization Board in World War II,” M.A. thesis University of Manitoba, 1989.

³² Jacob B. Doerksen, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 47-48.

³³ Ian Kleinsasser ed. *Hutterite Conscientious Objectors in World War Two*, Crystal Springs: Ian Kleinsasser, (ca. 2006), 9.

³⁴ When Peter Unger of Coaldale, Alberta, was on his way to a CO camp in Jasper National Park, some of his former classmates taunted him and called his manhood into question. Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995), 146. See also Amy Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

³⁵ Peter Unger, “My Personal Involvement,” in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 209.

examine their manliness. Questions such as “what would you do if German soldiers broke into your home and molested your mother?” were common.³⁶ The question always had a woman (mother, sister, daughter, wife) as the victim. The question was designed to appeal to the innermost concepts of masculinity and reveals what the judge believed was at the core of being a man. Being a man was to be a protector, endowed with strength, and ready to offer aid without concern for personal safety. Many of the authors recall that men did not know how to answer. Some like Abe Neufeld, responded saying they would help but not to kill the attacker, but others were dumbfounded and said simply they could not kill another person.³⁷ Willard James Burkholder of Edmonton, Alberta recalls being asked “what would I do if Hitler’s army would come after our family?” and answering, “I said that my life is no more sacred than theirs and I would not resist.”³⁸ Burkholder’s response is a verbalization of values he recalls having been socialized with; the Mennonite value of *Gelassenheit*, humble yieldedness, to God and his will. Sociologist Donald Kraybill says people who value *Gelassenheit* “surrender themselves to God, yield to the authority of the church, and defer to those in authority over them.”³⁹ George Kroeker of Winnipeg echoed Burkholder’s thoughts “if that is what the government wants me to

³⁶ Bruce Hiebert, 9.

³⁷ Andrew Wall, *The Last Objector* (Winnipeg: Refuge 31 Films, 2017).

³⁸ Willard James Burkholder, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 46.

³⁹ Donald B. Kraybill, “Gelassenheit,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010) 93. Another example of *Gelassenheit* comes from Henry C. Born who spent time in jail. He wrote: “I bear no grudge against the national authorities for their actions. Non-Christian governments cannot be expected to operate by a Christian code of ethics or morals. If those authorities decide to accommodate the unique convictions of some of its citizens, one can only be thankful, and if not, then one must accept the consequences. The Christian will always be in conflict with the world.” Henry C. Born, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 42. Dave Ratzlaff worked tree planting and performed his alternative service and wrote “my main concern at that time was to do the job that was asked of me, and to do it cheerfully and well.” David Ratzlaff, “One Big Experience,” 175.

do, so be it.” and acquiesced to authority,⁴⁰ provided that it did not run counter to the community’s understanding of God’s will.

The texts of the Canadian COs in the Second World War corroborate Bruce Hiebert’s argument that the American Mennonite church’s response to this central line of argument in the First World War was utterly inadequate leaving the young men unprepared, afraid, and damaged, which had multigenerational consequences.⁴¹ In both countries the young men faced the judge with grade school education and whose first language was not English. The question was designed to place the young men in a dilemma. The COs were being asked to choose between agreeing to allow their loved ones to be brutalized or renounce their beliefs and intervene. The question placed into sharp focus their beliefs but also their gendered identity. Hiebert argues that what the judges did not understand was that at this time the Mennonite nonresistance was not an active peacemaking resistance to evil, but a passive martyr tradition.⁴² Mennonite males were not socialized to be the “hero” and “save” people from violence but rather to be obedient to Jesus’ call to be non-violent even if that meant suffering in jail for not participating in active service.⁴³

Yet this was the cultural context that conscientious objectors faced. Not only when standing before the judges, but in many parts of society, including police forces who did not appreciate the Mennonite sense of masculinity. When CO John Goossen of Plum Coulee, Manitoba applied for CO status and was denied, he wrote that RCMP officers escorted him to

⁴⁰ George Kroecker, in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 18.

⁴¹ Hiebert, 9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴³ Post Second World War, some Mennonite groups did undergo a shift that moved them away from passive to active peacemaking.

prison telling him “he should be six feet under.”⁴⁴ When CO John Fretz, later of Salem Oregon, tried donating to Charles E. Fuller’s evangelical Christian radio broadcasts, which he and other COs enjoyed listening to, the money was returned with a note saying Fuller did not agree with conscientious objection and that the men should be supporting the military against the enemy.⁴⁵ It was an especially painful rejection as Fretz had helped collect over fifty dollars from his fellow COs even though they earned but a meager fifty cents a day. When S.D. Ramer of Zurich, Ontario and his fellow COs visited the United Church in near-by Banff, Alberta, they felt very welcomed the first Sundays they attended, but by the third Sunday, sermons singled them out and it became clear to them that they were not welcome in this church.⁴⁶ Goossen, Fretz, Ramer, and their fellow COs were reminded that they held a minority position and that even some Christians leaders showed animosity towards them.

These writings also reveal that the COs were men who, in working in alternative service, were attracted to adventure not unlike the men who entered the armed forces. Ervin Penner of St. Anne, Manitoba wrote “our hearts were fluttering with thrills on the way to the camp”⁴⁷ and John Siemens of Drumheller, Alberta revealed that “he harbored a youthful hankering for a broader experience.”⁴⁸ Gordon Dyck’s brother Arnold, from Carstairs, Alberta was “anxious for some adventure too” and joined the men in camp Q7, west of Campbell River on Vancouver Island.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ John Goossen, in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 154.

⁴⁵ John L. Fretz, “C.O. Memories,” in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 184-185.

⁴⁶ S.D. Ramer, “Alternative Service Experiences during World War II,” in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 207.

⁴⁷ Ervin Penner, “CO Days,” in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II In the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997), 186.

⁴⁸ John Siemens, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 180.

⁴⁹ Gordon Dyck, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 63.

The CO men were like other young men according to Mike Kleinsasser who said to justice Adamson: “My generation is very adventuresome ... I would love to see the world but my conscience will not allow me to go and become a part of this killing machine.⁵⁰ The non-resistant young men from the Mennonite and Hutterite communities shared the common masculine trait of adventure with many other Canadian young men. However, for many men their religious convictions and conscience overrode the urge for adventure and compelled them to opt for alternative service.

The men in alternative service describe not only the yearning for adventure, both also write about strength, not unlike young men in active service. Unlike the military men, however, the non-resistant man valued strength but altered this trait of masculinity so that the show of strength was not to kill, harm, or dominate. Some of the men in alternative service talked about strength also in terms of the hard work they could do and did do well. Abram J. Thiessen from the prairie town of Altona, Manitoba was stationed on the west coast fighting forest fires. He found himself in numerous dire situations and believed he had a guardian angel watching over him. The COs talked with a sense of pride about the quality and quantity of work they did. Thiessen claimed he had never worked so hard before or since. For their efforts COs were given respect from the forestry rangers.⁵¹ He wrote that they “were often told that in firefighting we had been more effective than fifty professional loggers fighting the fire.”⁵² Their work ethic helped ameliorate a difficult cultural situation for many COs. John M. Schmidt of Winnipeg told a similar story with reference to his deployment on a dairy farm for a First World War veteran, Colonel Vickers. Schmidt recounts that “I always got up on time, worked hard and made sure

⁵⁰ Kleinsasser, 9.

⁵¹ Abram J. Thiessen, “Memoirs by Abram J. Thiessen,” in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 38-40.

⁵² Abram J. Thiessen, “Memoirs by Abram J. Thiessen,” 39.

that my work would please him. He was more than satisfied.”⁵³ Jacob Toews of Abbotsford, BC worked at Kapuskasing, Ontario as a conscientious objector and recounts how his work ethic as a book keeper earned him respect. He was sent out of the CO camp and into a regular lumber camp full of men from various backgrounds. Here he worked at improving the record books of the lumber camp and store which were “inadequate to say the least.”⁵⁴

Other young COs such as David Ratzlaff of Linden, Alberta recall “we were young, healthy, and in top shape so we began to try for records.” The cutting of dead trees, called snags, in the Sayward forest on Vancouver Island was “very hard work.” Ratzlaff stood six feet and four inches tall and weighed 238 pounds and carried a “8-inch spike in his hand,” that he could drive through “a 1 ½ inch board with one blow.” His well-matched partner Ed Enns, was five foot, nine inches and weighed 160 pounds. Ed could do one handed chin ups and “suspend himself for 3 minutes with arm bent at a right-angle.” The pair “gave their bodies the ultimate test.” The two cut 98 trees in eight hours that averaged twenty-one inches in diameter for a total of 240 square feet of sawed wood. A record that was to have stood for the rest of the war.⁵⁵

Hard work was not dependent on physical stature. Andrew Steckley of Wellesley, Ontario recounted his CO experience at Montreal River in Northwestern Ontario where he was involved in cutting down trees, blasting stumps, moving rock, and shoveling gravel with no big equipment but all by hand.⁵⁶The COs valued a show of physical strength. John M. Schmidt boasted that in spite of his small five foot five stature, he proved the foreman wrong and worked

⁵³ John M. Schmidt, *The Lord's Donkey: The Autobiography of John M. Schmidt* (Winnipeg: Windflower Communications), 39.

⁵⁴ Jacob Toews, in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 63-65.

⁵⁵ David Ratzlaff, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 149. David Ratzlaff, “One Big Experience,” 174. Wesley Brown ed. “To the Editor,” in *The Beacon* 2 (March 1943): 2.

⁵⁶ Andrew Steckley, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 185.

the large “jumping jackass”, a 60-pound drill. “It was heavy, noisy, and kicked up a lot of stone dust. I stuck it out for the duration of the four months.” To keep the men active, games were provided including boxing gloves. Schmidt recounts at length the boxing match between his cabin and the “rival” cabin. Schmidt said there was no way he was going to “lose the honour of my camp.” As an example of how masculinity was altered, the match ended not with a knockout but in “good Conchie style it was decided that the fight was a draw.”⁵⁷ Andrew Steckley also mentions boxing matches but adds that: “We had a lot of good matches, being careful not to get anyone hurt.”⁵⁸

Not surprisingly the CO’s sense of masculinity measured by hard work was shared by their wives as they reflected on being newly married as their husbands served in alternative service, which reveals that the women, within their culture, were also conditioned as to what masculinity was. One woman, identifying as “Lottie, Mrs. David Penner,” shared on behalf of her husband, indicating that he had first worked in Riding Mountain National Park and by winter 1943, was stationed in Winnipeg where he biked to work every day. Exhibiting pride in her husband and his strength, Lottie Penner asked: “How many would do that today?”⁵⁹ Tena Wiebe of Altona, also commented on her husband’s strength, in fact Tena is more concerned with her husband’s masculine strength than her husband Jacob appeared to be. Tena’s husband, Jacob B. Wiebe’s narrative, includes mention of the tough conditions he endured, including eating lunch outside even when it was 60 below.⁶⁰ His wife Tena lived with Jacob while he was working in the M&S coal mine in Saskatchewan. She boasted that her husband “worked very hard” and

⁵⁷ Schmidt, 33.

⁵⁸ Andrew Steckley, in *Alternative Service for Peace*, 187.

⁵⁹ Lottie Penner, “Our Walk Together: Before and After,” in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997), 197.

⁶⁰ Jacob B. Wiebe, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 209.

shoveled thirty-three tons of coal a day.⁶¹ CO masculinity was not merely what the young men thought what it meant to be a man but included the whole Mennonite society. Women are part of the socialization process that created and maintained CO masculinity. In this example the women reinforced a Mennonite masculinity that valued physical strength and the ability to work hard.

A central feature of these memoirs is expression of spiritual growth through the support from the Mennonite churches. Ministers routinely visited the camps. One of the most well-liked ministers was Sommerfeld minister Jacob W. Friesen (1893-1945) of Rosenheim, Manitoba.⁶² Not only did he preach and counsel the young men, photos show him helping them in their daily work. Jake Krueger of Altona remembers Friesen encouraging the men to remember who they were; “You must always be thinking on that [sic] you are the Mennonite boys.”⁶³ Friesen was encouraging the men to be true to their Mennonite specific identity. The Mennonite ministers were part of the community fabric that socialized Mennonite men into the kind of men they were and were to become. As community leaders the ministers helped shape and showed what Mennonite masculinity was all about. Friesen not only preached to the men, challenging them to remember who they were, he joined them in their hard work, thereby telling them and showing them what being a man was about.

Connected to the value placed on physical strength was the ability and will-power to work hard. At a time when some in the Mennonite community began contemplating leaving rural life for towns and cities, others emphasized the importance of rural agricultural life, which some of the CO memoirs attest to. Cornie Thiessen of Tofield, Alberta was born in the Soviet

⁶¹ Tena Wiebe, in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee B.C., Seniors for Peace, 1998), 210-211.

⁶² Jacob W. Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives.

⁶³ Jake Krueger, 248.

Union and moved with his family to a farm in rural Alberta. During the war he performed his CO service as a medic within the military and noted that the rural farm boys were “hardier [and] had an advantage over many a city boy.”⁶⁴ While waiting for his CO papers, Mike Kleinsasser had to participate in preliminary military training which included physical tests. “There was a big difference between the farmers and the university boys, that soon 8 farmers had to run back again as the examiners could not believe the farmers were that tough. The city boys were puffing away around the course.” Kleinsasser then sets himself apart from not only the “university boys” but also his fellow farmers: “I had to run back the third time, running and jumping through the bars.” When checking Kleinsasser’s pulse, the nurse exclaimed “What are you doing anyway, your heart hasn’t even started beating!”⁶⁵

These texts also indicate that the men valued their roles as providers for their families. Historian Marlene Epp states that “COs felt discomfort over a sense that they were not doing their part to protect the country. But feelings of emasculation were even stronger when men found they were “unable to protect their families economically.”⁶⁶ In some cases the men were the oldest in the family and they spoke of how acutely the extraction of their labour from the family farm was felt. Others spoke of leaving a new wife with infant in arms and others of supporting their families on fifty cents a day was a hardship. Some men in the camps recalled taking a collection of money that was sent to a COs’ wife who was a new mother to buy diapers.⁶⁷ The expectation that the men provide for their families was acutely felt by the men. Families and the church pitched in to help the COs economically. Members of the Holdeman

⁶⁴ Cornie Thiessen, “The Conscientious Service Story of Cornie Thiessen, Tofield, Alberta. Interview conducted by Henry Goertzen,” in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 171.

⁶⁵ Kleinsasser, 5.

⁶⁶ Marlene Epp, 112.

⁶⁷ Jack “Johnny” Fransen, “Alternative Service Experiences,” in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, eds. John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 197.

Mennonite church recounted that the church matched their fifty cents a day wage and some families had a plan to help the men such as raising an extra flock of chickens for the men's economic gain.⁶⁸ Furthering the economic difficulties, the conscientious objectors received only a fraction of the pay the men in active service received, but in addition, the CO received no benefits after the war such as free access to higher education or pensions.⁶⁹ A common criticism that the conscientious objectors recall is that they did not do their part in a time of crisis. They write that judges claimed they were “shirkers”, evading their duty.⁷⁰ When they were asked to help, they sat on their hands and let others work, fight, and suffer in their place. This perception speaks to the understanding of men as “doers” and eroded the COs credibility as “real men” in the view of Canadians.

The CO memoirs speak to the charge of “shirking their duty,” as do related texts – letters, speeches, photo collections, and other media. Second World War CO reunions were held across the country as early as the 1950s, at times at the very site where COs worked, and continued into the twenty-first century when some of the men were 100 years old.⁷¹ John P. Dyck, of Springstein, Manitoba was a central organizer for several of these events in Manitoba. In a series of letters written in 1972, Dyck solicited people for pictures of their CO service, either in Russia (from the First World War) or Canada. A common request was for “photos of personnel, of their work and play, their living accommodation etc.”⁷² Dyck selected the images he wanted,

⁶⁸ Martin Barkman, “Thankful for God’s Presence,” in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997) 172. See also David Ratzlaff, “One Big Experience,” 175, and Walter U. Toews, “The Labor Camp Days, 1939-1945,” in *Faith Under Test: Alternative Service During World War II in the U.S. and Canada*, ed. John M. Dyck (Ste. Anne: Gospel Publishers, 1997), 176.

⁶⁹ The exception are the COs who served in the restricted enlistment once this was made possible in 1943. They received pensions and free access to training after the war. See Andrew Wall, *The Last Objectors*.

⁷⁰ Schmidt, 30-31.

⁷¹ John C. Klassen, 28. The most recent reunion was November 2017. Conrad Stoesz, “Partnership- A Way Forward,” *Mennonite Historian* 43 (December 2017): 6.

⁷² Letter from John P. Dyck, Committee chairman, “Forsteier and CO Reunion 1972,” Mennonite Heritage Centre, John P. Dyck fonds, volume 4672 file 12.

had them made into slides and returned the originals to families. Dyck created a presentation with these slides. Important to Dyck's selection process was showing the camaraderie in the CO camps, the spiritual attentiveness in the camps (Bible study, quartet singing, ministers visiting), and centrally, showing the work being done. Acts of cutting fire wood, widening roads, planting trees, or working at hospitals were the subjects of chosen photos for display. While these images are factual depictions of what took place, Dyck had a specific story he was trying to tell in answer to the question: "what did the COs do?" But Dyck's photo selection process did not paint a complete image of camp life.⁷³ A portion of the photos displayed by Dyck came from a fellow CO, Jake Krueger of Altona, whose own albums reveal what Dyck did and did not pick. These are the candid photos of young men acting silly, of boxing under the caption "not real," and even of a man dressed in women's clothing lying seductively on a pile of wood.⁷⁴ Dyck chose his pictures to show that these men were working, contributing to society, doing their part as real men! Dyck took the common understanding of men as doers and used the images to answer the COs' critics. The host Canadian society called into question the COs masculinity, but employing the kite analogy, the COs responded to this 'wind on the identity kite' by adjusting the 'identity string' and elevating the work performed by the COs proving that they were men.

A similar set of values is revealed in a speech Dyck gave in June 1974. Here, he once again promotes the CO experience, now stating that it was God who gave the men this service.

God gave you a service that you at that time considered meaningless, tedious, of no value to anyone. It was lowly at a time when heroes showed themselves on the battlefields, after whom schools and city streets have been named. Your names have remained obscure. You earned no decorations. But your hands are clean of blood. You are not haunted in the night by the vision of that young man, probably a boy yet, that you killed, because he would have done the same thing to you, had he managed to be ahead of you. Is that more meaningful than what you did? Does that mean [make sic] sense to you or to the generation that reads about it in books, that has not been touched by war mania, by

⁷³ John P. Dyck Slide Collection – Alternative Service, Mennonite Heritage Archives collection number 88.

⁷⁴ Jake Krueger photo collection, copy in author's possession.

the propaganda without [which] no man could be drafted? By the hatred that had to be brought into action to make man ready to fight man like himself[,] only on the other side of the boarder [sic]? Your service was noble compared to [that of] the other. Let's remember that and not be ashamed as other[s] would have you. Let's medi[t]ate [sic] upon the works of God also in this respect and be grateful.⁷⁵

Dyck was responding to critics who claimed that the CO work was meaningless. In addition, he encouraged the men not to be ashamed of their service, to be thankful that they bore no guilt of killing, and that they did not have to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder.⁷⁶

Some men in their memoirs highlight the risks they were willing to take as COs, even though they were part of a system that did not allow them to fully give of themselves in the service of others. John M. Schmidt recounts his conversation before a judge,

judge charged me [with being] a coward, that I was trying to evade the dangers of war. That is when I got hot under the collar and responded, 'did I not personally volunteer to go to the front and serve as a Medic? Sir, you can send me to the very front where the bullets fly the thickest and I will pick up the wounded. I will serve to save lives, but I will not kill!'⁷⁷

Schmidt was referring to the fact that conscientious objectors were not allowed to serve as army medics until 1943, when the government lifted the weapon's training component of basic training.⁷⁸ Schmidt worked in the forestry camps until 1943 when, true to his convictions, he signed up to serve as a medic.

These texts emphasize the showing of strength of character, braveness, and standing up for one's convictions, thus seemingly modifying what society saw as what being brave was about. The writers imply that being brave was not only picking up a gun and following orders into battle. For the CO, being brave was saying no to the governmental powers, and following

⁷⁵ John P. Dyck speech at the CO reunion, June 23-24, 1974, Mennonite Heritage Centre, John P. Dyck fonds, volume 4672 file 12.

⁷⁶ John M. Schmidt also makes reference to PTSD and being thankful he was not deployed as a medic overseas. Schmidt, 44.

⁷⁷ Schmidt, 30-31.

⁷⁸ Stoesz, "This thing," 102.

personal and community values that were contrary to the general population. Many of the men recount how they felt they had to be strong and stand up for their faith in a time of testing.⁷⁹ Such expressions combined faith conviction with a perceived masculine quality of strength. Klaas Isaac of Kleefeld, Manitoba wrote “Altogether it was 4 years, but when it is past the strength of it, it has been labour and travail. To God be the final honour and praise for the privilege of having been called to suffer such as very minor hardship for the cause of the Kingdom.”⁸⁰ Isaac believed it was a privilege to suffer for his faith performing alternative service for God. He believed that standing up for one’s faith convictions was a show of strength of character and *Gelassenheit* as he yielded to the wishes of the government. Klaas Isaac provides an example of Mennonite masculinity as taught by his community.

Sexual Identity

A significant part of gender is not only the idea of masculinity tied to strength and purpose, but sexuality. What were the sexual implications for a group of young, mostly unmarried men, of living together in close quarters for months at a time? Some of the men believed it was harder for the newly married to be away from home than for the unmarried men as it meant being separated from their sexual partners.⁸¹ How did the COs exhibit their sexuality? Christine Whitehouse’s research on Jewish internment camps in Canada problematizes sexual identities when men are confined. While there are important differences

⁷⁹ Klaas Isaac, “interview with Klaas Isaac,” in *Alternative Service Memoirs*, John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger eds. (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1995), 22.

⁸⁰ Klaas Isaac, 22.

⁸¹ Abram J. Thiessen, 30.

between an internment camp and the alternative service camps, conscientious objectors did spend months at a time in male-only camps. How should “normal” male desire be performed in such an environment?⁸² Whitehouse contends that some Jewish men responded to their desires with other men in the absence of women but continued to see themselves as heterosexual males. Other populations that Whitehouse references as having similar conditions are prisons and migrant worker camps where homosexuality was a temporary state used as a coping mechanism.⁸³ How did the COs cope with their sexual desires?

Little is recorded in the public memoirs documenting the conscientious objector experiences that hints at any kind of sexuality. This absence is not surprising since speaking about sex, especially in public, was taboo in many Mennonite communities. The Mennonite community placed a high value in holding members accountable to one another and maintaining community ethical boundaries. Exhibiting sexuality outside these boundaries was invariably met with swift correction.

However, there are a few hints about sexuality in the memoirs and what exists are all heteronormative. One of those hints about CO sexuality can be deduced from the CO photographs discussed above, the most ubiquitous and significant material culture markers created by the COs. Most COs did not keep a diary, not all wrote letters or memoirs, but most COs came home with photos of their time especially if they worked in the camps with other men. The photos, as noted above, include images of the men in their spare time,⁸⁴ and sometimes depict them in physical acts imbued with sexual meaning. They are also set in places that test

⁸² Christine Whitehouse, “‘Camp Boys’: Privacy and the Sexual-Self,” paper presented at the Civilian Internment Camp Conference, Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 18, 2015, 6. See also Christine Whitehouse, “‘You’ll get Used to It’: The Internment of Jewish Refugees in Canada 1940-1943,” (PhD., Carlton University, 2016).

⁸³ Whitehouse, 11.

⁸⁴ Jake Krueger photo collection, copy in author’s possession, includes images of men dressed as women striking suggestive poses.

sexual norms: many of the men who were stationed in the camps in national parks lived in rough bunk houses and even tents, at times built by the COs themselves. Certainly they took some pride in their carpentry skills building, but they also sought to personalize their living areas and so with reference to sexual partners.⁸⁵ Looking through photo albums one will find examples of men decorating their space with pictures of family and friends, and especially with wives and girlfriends “commanding the choicest locations.”⁸⁶ However, these exhibits also included “pinup-girls” such as actress Rita Hayward who was also a favorite of servicemen.⁸⁷ Peter E. Neufeld worked at one of the three camps at Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba. A photo with him and nine other young men shows Neufeld standing beside an unidentified CO showing off a Rita Hayward calendar.⁸⁸

In a few cases there is some reference to sexuality in the written memoirs. In his piece, Andrew Steckley of Wellsley, Ontario wrote about the boss’ daughter, describing her as “the most beautiful thing God ever created.”⁸⁹ Abram J. Thiessen of Altona worked on Vancouver Island, and is one of the few writers who overtly mentions sexual interests. He writes about hitch hiking to see a female friend in the area and wanting “companionship of members of the opposite sex.” He also describes an older female taxi driver whom the COs knew and wrote that he wanted to get to know her “five, count them, five beautiful daughters.” When Thiessen was injured planting trees and spent some time in hospital recuperating he met what he describes as a

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Suderman Klassen, “Alternative Service Work as Reflected in *The Beacon*: October 1942 – September 1945,” in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II 1941-1946*,” ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee (B.C.) Seniors for Peace, 1998) 23. See also J. Harold Sherk film, reel 1, 1942, Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Hist.Mss.26.6.26, minute 25:00-25:23.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Suderman Klassen, 23.

⁸⁷ The Editor of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Rita Hayworth,” Encyclopaedia Britannica accessed March 12, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rita-Hayworth>

⁸⁸ Mennonite Heritage Archives Facebook page post January 3, 2018. Accessed March 12, 2018 <https://www.facebook.com/MHCArchives/>

⁸⁹ Andrew Steckley, 185.

“redhaired Irish nurse” who could take his “mind off the pain,” indeed, as someone with whom he fell in love.⁹⁰ He is one of the few men who includes sexual interests in his memoirs.

The COs did not work in male-only situations. Some worked in mixed gender environments such as the COs who worked in hospital and at mental health facilities. In their free time some COs took the opportunity to visit the young women working at the health facilities. There are examples of not only dating but of COs marrying some of the female staff.⁹¹ The scant mention of sexuality likely speaks to the maintenance of inherited sexual boundaries, especially in a text meant for public consumption, that is, in texts meant to portray the men in the best possible light. The casual photos taken of the men in the camps perhaps provide another picture of the men’s feelings at the time than the measured and very public memoirs written fifty years later.

Conclusion

The various texts produced by the COs, their memoirs, but also their photographs, reflect the process by which a gendered identity emerges. Here pressures that existed in groups such as Mennonites within the context of the larger Canadian society are revealed. They confirm that gendered identity, such as masculinity, changes over time, within space and culture, demarcating the ways in which the conscientious objectors practiced their male identity in distinctive ways from other men in Canada. The memoirs of conscientious objectors speak to the context within which they were written and give evidence of what the men and their families understood what it meant to be a man. Mennonite masculinity, as shown by the conscientious objectors, clashed

⁹⁰ Abram J. Thiessen, 35,36,41-42, 47.

⁹¹ Conrad Stoesz, “‘Are you prepared to work in a mental hospital?’: Canadian Conscientious Objectors’ Service during the Second World War,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 29 (2011), 68.

with Canadian society as they appeared before the judge to apply for CO status or found work in the public sector. The masculine identity of young Mennonite men who served as conscientious objectors was formed by their own ethnoreligious community, including the women in their lives, and their church leaders. While the men may not have been able to verbally articulate their masculine identity, they exhibited a counter masculinity through their actions which was heteronormative and one that valued physical strength, hard work, danger, duty, character and action, providing that it was not participating in lethal violence.

Chapter 3:

Mennonite Archives, The Memory of Conscientious Objection, and Commemoration.

Introduction

The Mennonite community in Canada has been historically conscious and has valued the role of history for the community. Archives and archivists have played important roles in shaping identity including through commemorative projects. Within these archives, volunteer and professional archivists have collected and preserved community records including that of the conscientious objector. This chapter builds on the important role commemoration has had on the establishment of archives and how the Mennonite archives and archivists of western Canada have collected and used the story of the conscientious objector to aid in identity formation.

The keeping of records is as old as writing itself but in the past was limited to those who could read and write. The aggregation of documents was the privilege of the powerful and the learned, often to maintain their status. After the enlightenment-era move to make the archives publicly accessible institutions,¹ archives and their holdings continued to be understood as objective carriers of truth. The records, and the information they contained, were thought to be pristine, unadulterated, and historians proclaimed the “newly discovered” records they found in the archive without much thought as to how the records got there and how they were cared for. Archivists were seen as handmaidens of the historian, an invisible bridge, honest brokers between the records and the historian who had the expertise to interpret the records. Archivists were thought to have no impact on the record, the “sense” making of the past, or on social

¹ The opening of the archives to the public began with the French Revolution. Terry Cook, “The Archives(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists and the Changing Archival Landscape,” in *Canadian Historical Review* 90 (2009): 514.

memory, and identity formation.² Records were used to substantiate or refute claims, to gain or maintain power and possessions in the court room or on the pages of history books.

However, the understandings about archives and records has changed. In the post-modern framework, a single truth and objectivity itself is said to be a figment of each person's imagination. The records in the archives, the archivists, and the users of archives have agendas, biases, and strengths. The purposes for archival research has grown beyond "official/traditional" users to include a host of community members looking for information that addresses the needs of commemoration, identity formation, and creative pursuits. As new user groups have asked new questions of records, the meanings and understandings ascribed to the records have changed. The old records and what they meant were influenced by contemporary contexts and inquiries. The role of archivists has also changed to acknowledge their agency in the archival process. No longer do they see themselves as mere 'drawers of water and hewers of wood,' but as historians of the record, curators of context – as co-creators of the record.³

These conceptual changes coincide with new memory research, which has seen a resurgence of energies since the 1960s.⁴ Brien Brothman contends that memory draws from a reservoir of information in such a way as to address present issues and this new constituted truth includes a variant form of the original. In this way that past is always part of the present and the past is not static but is continually being reshaped. Understanding archives as memory, Brothman posits the life cycle of records in a helical, ever-evolving model, rather than a linear

² Terry Cook, "Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Role of Archives in Constructing Social Memory," in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory*, ed. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006): 169-170. See also Terry Cook, "The Archives(s) Is a Foreign Country," 499-506, 528.

³ Cook, "The Past is a Foreign Country," 505, 507.

⁴ Brien Brothman, "The Past that Archives Keep: Memory, History, and the Preservation of Archival Records," *Archivaria* 51 (2001): 59.

model.⁵ I suggest that an archive is less of a memory bank where valuables are deposited, later to be withdrawn, just as they were left, and more of a memory garden where the valuable records are nurtured, transplanted, pruned, watered, and cared for. In this model, the community gardener (archivist) plays a crucial role identity formation. As the archivists work in the “archival garden” they collect, accession, appraise, preserve, house, and describe historically significant documents. These materials are a community memory trust that can be used by individuals for personal or corporate projects that have the ability to shape identity. The archivist facilitates the construction of memory, which is the basis of identity.⁶

In his chapter in *From Suffering to Solidarity: The Historical Seeds of Mennonite Interreligious Interethnic, and International Peacebuilding*, Carl Stauffer gives three examples of how community memory shapes community identity. He describes the role of three mythico-histories used by the Canadian Mennonite community in the shaping of their peace identity that come from three different centuries. These foundational stories preserve and transmit history, world views, and socio-religious values. These mythico-histories are not myths in the traditional sense of the word because they are based in actual historical events. But neither are they history because of the way they have been told. They lack complexity, nuance, and contradiction. But these stories have been honed to explain who the Mennonites are and why they do what they do. For generations these stories have been told and re-told thanks to an interconnected village style network that shaped the Mennonite community’s worldview, actions, and values. In short, they have shaped Mennonite identity⁷ These stories are found in the records collected, preserved,

⁵ Ibid., 59, 63.

⁶ Jeannette Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean community lost its Archives and Found its History* (Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2003), 6.

⁷ Carl Stauffer, “Formative Mennonite Mythmaking in Peacebuilding and Restorative Justice,” in *From Suffering to Solidarity: The Historical Seeds of Mennonite Interreligious, Interethnic, and International Peacebuilding*, ed. Andrew P. Klager (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 140-161.

made accessible in the community archives. The community memory shapes community identity or said differently, the stories we tell shape us.

But narratives need to reside some place for the community to access them. Archivists hold the power to preserve identity building stories. This process of determining what to keep and what to discard is known as appraisal. Writers like Terry Cook, underscore the crucial task of appraisal that is performed by archivists. Through appraisal, archivists determine what is kept and what is discarded and thus determine what future generations can know about the past.⁸ A growing body of writing in the archival community acknowledges the agency with which archivists are empowered.

What archivists keep then is available to the community to use for various activities including commemorative events. Some studies describe the power commemoration has in relation to community identity. Barry Schwartz states “by marking events believed to be most deserving of remembrance, commemoration becomes society’s moral memory. Commemoration makes society conscious of itself as it affirms its member mutual affinity and identity.”⁹ Frances Swyripa has studied ethno-religious identity on the Canadian prairies and explores community commemoration projects that aid in building group identity. Cemeteries, monuments and cairns, gatherings, and community buildings help commemorate a group’s existence on the prairie and become touchstones for the “cultivation of group consciousness and sense of achievement around a particular interpretation” of the past.¹⁰ Archivist Terry Cook agrees that commemorative projects that communities undertake are significant in shaping identity. He notes that in the 1990s historians explored the theme of memory and commemoration. He notes

⁸ Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 169.

⁹ Barry Schwartz, quoted in Jeannette Bastian, *Owning Memory*, 53.

¹⁰ Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 9.

that societies commemorate the past with plaques, holidays, music, films, memorials, museums, galleries, libraries, and even zoos. To Cook, glaringly absent is a discussion about archives as commemoration and their roles in memory formation and identity creation.¹¹

Historians like Swyripa and archivists like Cook understand commemoration as foundational to the crafting of community identity that builds group cohesion and helps the community face current issues. However, Swyripa passes over the role of the archives. While her book is full of references to archival documents, the archives as an institution and how it is foundational to commemoration projects is an opportunity missed. Meanwhile archivist Terry Cook, who focuses on the agency of archivists in appraisal and how archives are absent from the commemoration discussion, does not discuss the power archivists themselves have in commemoration. Neither author contemplates the powerful aggregation of archivist and archive in an active community commemoration.

Peace and Archives in Western Canada

But it is not only historians who have forgotten the archives. Growing out of the peace tradition of Mennonites is a robust study and practice of conflict transformation studies. Andrew Klager's 2015 edited collection of essays in *From Suffering to Solidarity: The Historical Seeds of Mennonite Interreligious, Interethnic, and International Peacebuilding*, consists of seventeen essays and spans some four hundred pages. Throughout the book authors discuss the historic peace narratives, from the sixteenth century to the modern day, that form the basis of their research, writing, and peace practices. The Mennonite peace narratives of the past have shaped Mennonite group identity and are foundational to advancing a just-peace agenda in conflict

¹¹ Cook, "Remembering the future," 170.

zones around the world. The book shows “how a historical infrastructure that preserves and disseminates narratives, stories, memories, and myths of suffering and nonviolence... can inspire identity groups, whether ethnic, religious, or otherwise, to act in solidarity with those who suffer.”¹² But the book is silent about the role of archives and other memory institutions such as museums and libraries. The authors draw on a host of primary and secondary sources but, other than in the footnotes, the archives are completely left out of the discussion and no mention is made about how peace stories have been collected, preserved, and made accessible for the community. The role and power of archivists or story collectors are also left unnamed in all of the essays. There is a gap in research that historians, archivists, and conflict transformation studies have not adequately addressed.

When archivists combine their agency in collection and appraisal with commemoration their power is compounded and their role in the creation of identity for their community is enhanced. Archives have been seen as still, lifeless, and passive, but the archive is “a vector where identity is negotiated, performed, dissected and fragmented.” Historians Dominique Daniel and Amalia Levi affirm that “[this] process disrupts traditional patterns of understanding ethnicity as a static framework, and instead reconceptualizes it as a sense making process.”¹³ Borrowing from mathematical understanding, a vector is a force with direction.¹⁴ If the archive is a vector in identity formation, it is the archivist who points or directs that force. The Mennonite community has had archivists who have served the community by collecting, preserving, and commemorating the peace narrative such as that of the conscientious objector.

¹² Andrew P. Klager ed., *From Suffering to Solidarity: The Historical Seeds of Mennonite Interreligious, Interethnic, and International Peacebuilding* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 2.

¹³ Dominique Daniel and Amalia S. Levi, “Introduction: From Containing to Shaping to Performing Ethnicity in Archives,” in *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada*, (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2013), 1.

¹⁴ *Miriam Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vector>, accessed July 9, 2018.

The Mennonite community is fortunate to have had several community archives in Canada and committed archivists. The western Canadian Mennonite archival institutions are located in Abbotsford (BC), Calgary (Alberta), Saskatoon (Saskatchewan), and Winnipeg (Manitoba).¹⁵ Given the size of the Mennonite community in Canada, there are a high number of archives, at least one in each of the Canadian provinces where significant number of Mennonites live (BC – Quebec). Some of these archives are denominationally specific and others are geographically based. Some have paid staff and others are run by volunteers who not only do the archival work, but also raise the funds to operate the facility and programs. One of the reasons for this investment by the Mennonite community is the powerful role of commemoration. This religious group draws its guidance and inspiration from biblical texts, passages that highlight the importance and usefulness of remembering the past. Indeed at the foundation of the Mennonites' consciousness is the oft-quoted passage from Deuteronomy 32:7 “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.”¹⁶ Remembering the past is part of being a person of faith, for them, a Christian and an Anabaptist. An important ritual in the church is communion where participants are reminded of the sacrifice Jesus made through his death and thus many communion tables feature the words “In remembrance.” In addition, because Mennonites understand themselves as a sub-group that has suffered persecution and had to migrate to maintain the group and its values, understanding why they are separate and different is crucial.¹⁷ Mennonites have maintained a “usable past” with which to build and maintain community identity.

¹⁵ Other Mennonite archives in Canada not part of this discussion include the well-developed Mennonite Archives of Ontario in Waterloo, Ontario and some denominational archives such as the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg and other denominationally based archival collections cared for by the denominations.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 32:7 (New International Version).

¹⁷ An example of a commemorative monument is the monument to Mennonite delegate Jacob Hoepfner who helped negotiate the migration of Mennonites from Prussia to Russia in 1788. The monument was established in 1889, after Hoepfner's death and later moved to Steinbach, Manitoba. See C. Henry Smith, *Smith's Story of the*

The Mennonite communities' own commemorative projects that led to an expanded role for the Mennonite archival system and laid the ground work for the collection and promotion of the conscientious objector story in Canada had their beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s. In the lead up to Canada's Centennial celebrations in 1967, church groups were encouraged to become involved and to involve their communities in commemorating Canada's one hundredth birthday. Not only did Mennonites participate in their local communities, leaders used the occasion as a spring board to create long-lasting, historically focused organizations that promoted community values such as peace and they used the example of the conscientious objector as one way to express this value. For example, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada created a three-volume set of historical texts known as the *Mennonites in Canada* series, the first of which was published for the Manitoba Mennonite centennial celebrations in 1974. (See chapter 1).

The three-volume set was not only a commemorative work, it also was ground breaking in its own way – a product of the context in which it was conceived. Historian and former archivist, T. D. Regehr, noted that this volume marked a significant departure as it was the first Canadian Mennonite history book written in English by Mennonites from Russia and part of the sometimes-difficult language transition from German to English.¹⁸

The Canadian centennial gave rise to special commemorative publications, events, and memorials among Canadian Mennonites. These commemorations remembered “the pioneer dead, proclaimed the pioneers' descendants' own roots in the land, they symbolized the western (and Canadian) birthright of ethno-religious groups, and they reaffirmed these groups' ties to

Mennonites. Revised and expanded by Cornelius Krahn. (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981). 251–257. See also David H. Epp and Richard D. Thiessen. "Höppner, Jakob (1748-1826)." Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, January 2013, accessed July 30, 2018. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=H%C3%B6ppner,_Jakob_\(1748-1826\)&oldid=145466](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=H%C3%B6ppner,_Jakob_(1748-1826)&oldid=145466).

¹⁸ Ted Regehr, “Milestones and Tombstones: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan,” (lecture, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan Annual General Meeting February 6, 2004), 7.

larger diasporas.”¹⁹ Swyripa argues that commemoration has the power to infuse identity in people who have no personal memory of times past, or ever visited the places venerated.²⁰ Commemoration has the ability to make the past meaningful to people to the degree that the unexperienced past becomes part of them.

The Manitoba Mennonite Centennial and the First Archival building

After the country’s widely celebrated centennial, provinces and cities also celebrated other one hundredth birthdays, such as Manitoba in 1970 and the city of Winnipeg in 1973. These federal, provincial, and municipal celebrations were marked at the national, provincial, and local levels, providing inspiration for the creation of numerous family reunions, genealogical books,²¹ community history books, monuments,²² museums,²³ and libraries.²⁴ The Mennonite community of Halbtsadt, south-east of Altona, Manitoba, for example, held a typical reunion on July 19, 1970. On the cover of its reunion booklet were drawings entitled “then” and “now,” showing how education, business, and farming had changed. Near the bottom are the words “The only unchanged – God – Who makes changes.”²⁵ Underlying all the Mennonite celebrations was a deep faith in a steadfast God, and by corollary, His commandments which the

¹⁹ Swyripa, 200-201.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ An example is Helen E. Regier, *Jakob Buhr Family: 1805-1977* (North Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Press, 1977), 1. “The many preparations for the Centennial celebrations in 1974 in Canada and U.S.A., commemorating the coming of the Mennonites from Russia to America, also had an influence on me.”

²² Numerous monuments commemorating Federal, provincial, and municipal centennials were erected. For a listing see the “Historic sites of Manitoba,” key word search “Centennial,” *Manitoba Historical Society*, <http://www.mb1870.org/mhs-map/search?go=t&string1=centennial&op2=AND&string2=&op3=AND&string3=&m-name=&st-name=Monument&submit=Search> accessed July 9, 2018.

²³ The Mennonite Museum at Steinbach is one example. “Centennial News,” *Manitoba Historical Society*, <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/pageant/11/centennialnews1.shtml> accessed July 9, 2018.

²⁴ The Winnipeg Centennial Library is one example. “Historic Sites of Manitoba: Winnipeg Centennial Library/ Millennium Library,” *Manitoba Historical Society*, <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/millenniumlibrary.shtml>, accessed July 9, 2018.

²⁵ “Reunion” Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 4226 file 12.

Mennonites understood, at least traditionally, to include loving your neighbor as yourself and resisting service in war.

Adding to the new energy in the formation of Mennonite identity was the official federal adoption of a policy on multiculturalism in 1971.²⁶ Whereas in decades past minority groups, such as the Mennonites, were pressured to assimilate, now multiculturalism gave them free reign to celebrate their identity as they saw fit. While the government policy changed, the government also invested in the multiculturalism project. For the Mennonite community, a concrete example was the establishment of the Chair in Mennonites Studies at the University of Winnipeg in 1978, the second such ethnic program at a Canadian University.²⁷ The Chair created a successful program of teaching, publishing, and promotion of Mennonite history, including annual conferences and a peer-reviewed journal. After these large-scale commemorative activities, Mennonite leaders and grassroots members in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada began talking about the need for a dedicated archival building and staff and did so already by 1972.²⁸ There was a growing awareness of the need to house and care for the archival materials that had been collected by volunteer archivists since 1933.

The numerous events commemorating the 1967 and 1970 centennials planted and watered seeds for the Mennonite centennial of their presence in western Canada in 1974 that came to focus on the creation of an archival building with an enhanced program. Many Mennonites in western Canada had familial connections to Manitoba so the draw was well beyond the province; there was even a committee marking the centennial of Mennonites in

²⁶ Government of Canada, "Canadian Multiculturalism," accessed March 19, 2016.

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp>

²⁷ Harry Loewen, "Establishing a Chair in Mennonite Studies," *Mennonite Historian* 40 (September 2014): 8-9.

²⁸ Alf Redekopp, "Mennonite Heritage Centre: How it began 25 years ago," *Mennonite Historian* 24 (September 2003): 1-2.

Manitoba in BC, chaired by Rev. George Groening.²⁹ The celebrations in Manitoba began a full two years early (1972) and ran into 1977. A committee was established that acted as a catalyst for local initiatives and chose as its executive secretary, Lawrence Klippenstein, a resident of the southern Manitoba village of Gretna and the pastor at the nearby Altona Mennonite Church. Meanwhile, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) passed a resolution at the 1973 annual sessions in Edmonton, Alberta establishing an endowment fund and hoping to raise \$150,000 as part of its centennial commemorations. The conference saw the endowment as a way to “Thank God for the 25, 50, 100 years in Canada, ... [to] help collect and preserve information about our history [for] succeeding generations... [and] a way to fund the hiring of an archivist.” A special certificate was created to encourage donations.³⁰ In 1979, within a year of opening the new archival facility, there was another push to bring in donations to the endowment.³¹ In 1973, recognizing the need for a paid archivist, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada hired Klippenstein on a half time basis while carrying on with his Centennial Committee work.

The commemoration hype was contagious; local congregations and municipalities held events while special committees were formed to organize music festivals, art displays, and publications. Dramas and music was commissioned and performed. Weekly radio productions were aired on a number of local stations some of which were in the western Canadian Mennonite “heart language” of Low German.³² Tours and singing festivals were planned and the province’s

²⁹ Lawrence Klippenstein ed., *100 1* (April 1974): 2.

³⁰ “Mennonite Studies Endowment,” Heritage/Archives records – endowment. Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 816 file 7.

³¹ “Mennonite Studies Endowment Fund” brochure, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 816 file 7. By 1979 the fund stood at only \$20,000.

³² Ens was invited to create a weekly fifteen-minute Low German program highlighting Mennonite history and the centennial celebrations. Klippenstein was at times interviewed. Soon the program grew to 30 minutes and continued for 34 years and was heard on 3 radio stations. Conrad Stoesz, “Gerhard Ens: Historian, Minister,

largest concert hall was rented for events. Public institutions were brought in to give credence to the celebrations. A plaque was unveiled at the Manitoba Legislature in December 1974,³³ the government of Canada issued a commemorative stamp,³⁴ and the University of Winnipeg bestowed honorary degrees on three Manitoba Mennonites.³⁵ In many of these events, the centennial committee, lead by Klippenstein, was an important component.

One of Klippenstein's tasks was the production of a newsletter entitled *100*, highlighting the various church, family, and community activities celebrating the 100th anniversary. These events were established to highlight the themes of sacrifice of the so-called "pioneers," the importance of the Mennonite faith, and the thankfulness for life in Canada. Within these major themes was the reminder of their Anabaptist past that gifted them a biblical hermeneutic that understood the church, and its members to be non-violent people. History books like the *Mennonites in Canada volume 1*,³⁶ *Reinland an Experience in Community*,³⁷ *Blumenort: a Mennonite Community in Transition*³⁸ all mention to various degrees the important role of exemption from military service in the founding of the Mennonite communities on the prairies. And in the example of the *Mennonites in Canada*, peace and its role in Mennonite identity was the unifying theme of the book.

Educator," *Mennonite Historian* 37 (2011): 2. See also Conrad Stoesz, "Gerhard Ens (1922-2011): Historian, Minister, and Educator," *Preservings* 31 (2011): 85-87.

³³ "Manitoba Legislative Building," Manitoba Historical Society, accessed July 9, 2018, <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/legislativebuilding.shtml>.

³⁴ While the stamp is entitled "Prairie Settlers," the text explaining the stamp focuses solely on the Mennonite experience in coming to Manitoba. "Prairie Settlers," Canada Post Office Department. [Postage Stamp Press Release], 1974, accessed July 9, 2018, <https://www.canadianpostagestamps.ca/stamps/15936/prairie-settlers-canada-postage-stamp>.

³⁵ Stoesz, "Gerhard Ens (1922-2011): Historian," 85-87.

³⁶ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*.

³⁷ Peter D. Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Reinland: Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976).

³⁸ Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition 1874-1982* (Blumenort: Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983).

The Mennonite centennial commemorative events built on the Mennonites' historical consciousness while there was a significant cultural shift taking place in the community. The Mennonites were part of an urbanizing migration in Canada that saw thousands relocate from the farm to the towns, from the towns to the cities. For many Mennonites, being a rural and agrarian people was part of their self-identity and while the Mennonites as a group held out longer than other ethnic groups, the economic forces could not be ignored. The urbanization that took place from 1950-1970 in Canada was one of the largest migrations in Canadian history where half the rural population relocated to larger centres.³⁹ Along with urbanization there was a steady decline in the use of the German language that had been such a magnetic force used to keep the Mennonite community together and foster a version of Mennonite identity. Saturday German school,⁴⁰ German clubs,⁴¹ German education in many of the schools as the second language requirement, German and the use of German in the churches began to wane.⁴² Much of the language transition from German to English in western Canadian Mennonite churches took place in the 1960s but was not complete in some congregations with German still being used in some congregations into the following century.⁴³ These changes represented a loss of a preferable way

³⁹ Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) 6-7.

⁴⁰ United German School of North Kildonan fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 5628.

⁴¹ Victor D. Kliewer, *The Mennonite German Society (Mennonitischer Sprachverein) 1952-2003: a brief History* (Winnipeg: The Mennonite German Society, 2014).

⁴² See Gerald C. Ediger, *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition among Canada Mennonite Brethren, 1940-1970* (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2001).

⁴³ An example is Sargent Mennonite church. Its last German service was 2009, but a German hymn was still sung every Sunday as of 2018 as displayed in the weekly church bulletin. Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives. See also John Reimer and Marlene Epp, "Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. September 2010, accessed August 21, 2018,

[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Sargent_Avenue_Mennonite_Church_\(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada\)&oldid=154198](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Sargent_Avenue_Mennonite_Church_(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada)&oldid=154198). Some of the more tradition minded Mennonite groups that tend to be rurally based, maintain services in German but most also offer English services.

of life, a particular *Weltanschauung*, and their “heart language” represented by the German language, and an understanding of themselves as a separate people.⁴⁴

Mennonites nursed this sense of loss with the formation of historical societies and archival centres that promoted the collection, preservation, and telling of their stories. The archives became a place where many of the community’s German language documents could be saved from subsequent generations who could not read the archaic gothic script or even understand the language. By creating an archive, the institution building Mennonites of the 1970s provided a significant gift and burden to subsequent generations. Brothman talks about archives as gifts that transcend the programmatic, legal, and economic reasons for archives. He states that archives “form thresholds in time,” “[are] agents of openness to the dead and unborn generations,” “[and] a place through which communities and societies express their intergenerational conscientiousness and identity.”⁴⁵ Archives embody a “perfect gift” from one generation to another, he claims.⁴⁶ All very true, however, an archive can also be a burden. The weight of collecting, preserving, and providing access to one-of-a-kind historical documents to a volunteer organization or organization run by volunteers is a sober undertaking that has few good options if money and volunteers cannot sustain the program.

⁴⁴ Mennonite leader Gerhard Ens stated: “Mennonites of the Low German persuasion have no homeland in Europe they call their home. Low German has become a home where people can move in and out of and express themselves.” “Mennonite Historical Society of Canada 2008 Award of Excellence,” *Mennonite Historical Society of Canada*, accessed July 30, 2018, <http://www.mhsc.ca/index.php?content=http://www.mhsc.ca/mhsc/award.html> . The language switch from German to English also created a barrier for people who could not read the German archival records.

⁴⁵ Brien Brothman, “Perfect Present, Perfect Gift: Finding a Place for Archival Consciousness in Social Theory,” *Archival Science* 10 (2010): 142, 169.

⁴⁶ Brothman’s article, “Perfect Present,” unpacks the complicated social activity of gift giving. There are unspoken expectations around gift giving, the giver often expects and receives a benefit, be it social capital, relationships, or a gift in return. The archive represents a near perfect gift that one generation provides to subsequent generations with no chance for return to a generation that is gone.

While the Conference of Mennonites in Canada's (CMC) archival program officially began in 1933, the collection of documents suffered from a lack of dedicated or paid staff and facilities to properly house the collection. Volunteer archivists like Bernhard J. Schellenberg and Benjamin Ewert complained about not having enough time and support to give to the archival program that it deserved. When CMC established Canadian Mennonite Bible College in an old mansion at 515 Wellington Avenue in Winnipeg, it moved its archival materials to the new college. The archival materials were stored in the small compartments that once held wine bottles in the mansion's former wine cellar. While the facilities were large and grandiose, they were also located on the banks of the Red River and was inundated with water during the 1950 flood. Some of the archival documents in the basement were damaged beyond salvaging. In 1956, what was left of the archive was moved to the new Bible College facility on Shaftesbury Boulevard.⁴⁷

After Schellenberg's messy departure from the archivist position,⁴⁸ Benjamin Ewert became archivist in 1941, a post he held until 1956. Sadly, Ewert had been storing some of his collected materials in his home and after his death in 1958, his family discarded them.⁴⁹ Some of what has survived include some of Ewert's materials reflecting the Mennonite community's struggles during the First and Second World Wars. Ewert was a member of the delegation that was sent to Ottawa to lobby for military exemption in 1917, as had been promised to the Mennonites as an enticement for immigrating to Manitoba. Included in Ewert's archival collection are petitions, records of financial gifts, newspaper clippings, correspondence with

⁴⁷ Robert Poettcker, "History of the CMC Archives," 6. Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 5779 file 49.

⁴⁸ Schellenberg fell out of favour with his congregation which jeopardized his Conference position as archivist. Schellenberg refused to relinquish his position but rather demanded payment for the work he did collecting archival materials. He hid the archives in a friend's basement until the Conference and Schellenberg could come to an agreement at which time Benjamin Ewert became archivist.

⁴⁹ Poettcker, "History of the CMC Archives," 6.

other Mennonite leaders and politicians, even one with Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin of England, all related to the Mennonite community's resistance to military service.⁵⁰

No doubt the one-of-a-kind archival materials were at risk without committed space and staff. In 1976, Centennial Committee member and historian Rev. Gerhard Lohrenz reached an agreement with Winkler entrepreneur, Peter W. Enns, to bankroll the construction of a purpose-built facility to house the archives. The new facility was to be an archive for the Mennonite community at large, not denominationally specific. The centre opened on National Archives day on November 15, 1978⁵¹, and Klippenstein moved from part-time to full-time archivist in 1982.⁵²

One of Klippenstein's own personal centennial projects was a collaboration with his hometown paper in Altona. Starting in 1974, each week for six years, he wrote a column highlighting a Mennonite pioneer couple titled "Pioneer Portraits of the Past" in the *Red River Valley Echo*. Klippenstein used this avenue to create awareness in the public about the archives and to actively build bridges with people who had family materials and who might consider adding them to the archives.⁵³ "Pioneer Portraits of the Past" was a successful outreach strategy that provided publicity for the archives, acted as a conduit for the archival collection, and helped Klippenstein widen his network and building trust in the community that led to spearheading several events commemorating and collecting conscientious objector materials.

Klippenstein, however, was not only an archivist, but a scholar and one who sought to link his archives with the record of the conscientious objectors. In 1967, Klippenstein had begun

⁵⁰ Conrad Stoesz and Sharon Brown, "Benjamin Ewert fonds," Mennonite Heritage Archives, accessed July 17, 2018, <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/papers/Ewert.%20Benjamin%20fonds.htm>.

⁵¹ Conrad Stoesz, "P.W. Enns and a Mennonite Archive Building, 40 Years Ago," *Mennonite Historian* 44 (June 2018): 9-11. See also Alf Redekopp, "Mennonite Heritage Centre: How it began," 1-2.

⁵² Russell Sawatzky, "A History of the Program of the History-Archives Committee 1974-1988," 9. Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 5780 file 37.

⁵³ "Index to Pioneer Portraits of the Past," Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, accessed June 26, 2018, <http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/canada/pioneer/>. After the first 102 installments by Klippenstein, Elizabeth Bergen (Isby Bergen) continued the series with the last installment number 204.

a doctoral studies program with a dissertation on the experience of Mennonites in Russia and in particular, their compromise with the Russian government with regard to military service. That compromise saw the Mennonites pay for an alternative service program for thousands of men working in forestry and agricultural settings, and later, during the First World War, as medics on trains, treating wounded soldiers.⁵⁴ Klippenstein chose a topic that was of interest to him and a topic that was significant to the identity of his Mennonite constituency, that being a people of non-violence. The beginning of Klippenstein's research into the topic of peace and war viewed through a Mennonite lens, led him on a wide-ranging path exploring and promoting the peace identity. To aid his community he used his knowledge, position, and the archival materials to raise the peace identity kite to address current day realities. Klippenstein is an example of an archivist directing the archival vector, aiding in identity formation through commemorative projects.

In 1979, one year after the opening of the new archives, Klippenstein was invited by a Manitoba conscientious objector reunion committee to help compile and edit a book of recollections and photographs of the experience of Canadian COs. Reunions of conscientious objectors began as early as 1951,⁵⁵ and in 1966 First World War COs who had performed alternative service in Russia compiled a book, but 1979 was the earliest example of the Second World War era COs compiling their experiences in the English language. A committee aided Klippenstein in collecting interviews, photos, and data for the book. Just as important as the book itself for an increased Mennonite identity, was the archiving of the materials collected for the book. The book provided a larger picture of the CO experience. Most people had a very

⁵⁴ Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations, 1789-1936," (PhD. Diss., University of Minnesota, 1984).

⁵⁵ Lawrence Klippenstein ed., "Russo-Ukrainian Mennonite Studies," *Mennonite Historian* 7 (September 1981): 3.

narrow understanding of the CO experience and this book shared photos and experiences that broadened the understanding.

After the successful launch of the book, *That There be Peace: Mennonites in Canada and World War II*,⁵⁶ Klippenstein continued to collect documents related to peace and promote the peace identity as experienced by the conscientious objectors. In a lengthy 1981 letter to the editor of the widely-read *Mennonite Reporter*, Klippenstein commented on the upcoming 40th anniversary of the formation of the Canadian conscientious objection program of the Second World War. Klippenstein argued that the events to be held in 1981 should include commemoration of a centennial milestone for the alternative service program that began in Russia in 1880 and one that had become a model for the Canadian context in the Second World War.⁵⁷ In response, gatherings or reunions of conscientious objectors happened numerous times across the country in 1981. In September 1981, for example, a large reunion at the Springfield Mennonite church with 130 people in attendance commemorated the “long, quiet history of conscientious objection to war and military service.” Klippenstein chaired the event with Drs. Harry Loewen (Chair in Mennonite Studies) and Bill Janzen (Mennonite Central Committee Canada) speaking, as well as several men reminiscing about their service. At the event, the men challenged each other to not be quiet but to speak up about their CO experience as a way of witnessing to their faith and the peace themes within it.⁵⁸ The 40th anniversary in 1981, led to further commemoration ten years later and at the center was archivist Lawrence Klippenstein.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Klippenstein ed., *That There be Peace: Mennonites in Canada and World War II* (Winnipeg: Manitoba CO Reunion Committee, 1979).

⁵⁷ Lawrence Klippenstein, “Remembering Alternative Service in Russia,” *Mennonite Reporter* 16 February 1981, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Allan Siebert, “Lest We Forget,” *Mennonite Historian*, 7 (December 1981): 3.

Indeed, in the early 1990s, Klippenstein helped organize a symposium at the University of Winnipeg that brought COs and restricted enlistment veterans together, as well he organized a conference at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, and a CO reunion in Altona, Manitoba.⁵⁹ At these events Klippenstein used his profile and office to promote the telling and collection of stories from the CO experience so that the materials “could be a witness to future generations.”⁶⁰ But as important, in the summer of 1990, Klippenstein was an organizer of the meeting of Mennonite archivists and librarians at Mennonite World Conference held in Winnipeg. It was at this conference that A.J. Klassen was first inspired to begin collecting stories of conscientious objectors to share with subsequent generations.⁶¹ Another project just four years later coalesced around two former COs, John C. Klassen of Morden, Manitoba and Jake Krueger of Altona, Manitoba, who produced a 318 page book compiling 55 personal narratives of Second World War conscientious objectors.⁶² The hope of the organizers was to “reach out and to inspire new generations to consider seriously their non-resistant convictions.”⁶³

Along with Klippenstein’s organizing skills, he crafted a small display on the theme of Mennonite conscientious objectors. While modest in size it became a convenient travelling display that worked well as a discussion starter, according to reviewer Catherine MacDonald in *Archivaria*. MacDonald noted that among the various 50th anniversary commemorative events held around the conscientious objector theme, the “Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives played a leading role and is a case study of how a small archives can utilize both its formal and informal

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Falk, “COs and War Veterans Find Ambivalent Kinship,” *Mennonite Reporter*, 25 November 1991, p. 1, 8-9.

⁶⁰ Dave Schellenberg and Menno Klassen, “COs Share Stories at Reunion,” *Mennonite Reporter*, 25 November 1991, p. 9.

⁶¹ Abram J. Klassen, *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada During World War II 1941-1946* (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee (B.C.) Seniors for Peace, 1998), vii.

⁶² John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, *Alternative Service Memoirs* (Altona: John C. Klassen and Jake Krueger, 1994).

⁶³ John C. Klassen, *Alternative Service Memoirs*, 315.

contacts with other institutions to mount a cooperative outreach effort.”⁶⁴ McDonald recognized the leading role that an archives could play in these commemorative events about the conscientious objector.

The importance of the CO anniversary carried this theme beyond 1991. A reunion, symposium and banquet was planned for Abbotsford BC with Klippenstein as one of the three featured speakers. A fellow colleague on the archives committee, David Schroeder gave the banquet speech drawing on his personal experiences as a CO. He encouraged the gathering of CO stories so the examples could be remembered by future generations. In response, the reunion participants voted overwhelmingly in favour of asking the Peace and Social Service Committee of MCC British Columbia to prepare such records either in written or taped format.”⁶⁵ A.J. Klassen was chosen to spearhead the efforts of gathering and editing content for a book. By 1998, Klassen could proudly hold up *Alternative Service for Peace*, a 372-page book featuring personal stories and scholarly essays, including one from archivist Lawrence Klippenstein.⁶⁶

The Mennonite Heritage Archives has a good number of materials related to the CO experience in Canada, but they are scattered, in part due to the nature of the CO experience. The men spent as little as 4 months and as much as 5 years in service. Many of the young men worked on farms, some on their own farm, doing work they were very familiar with. On the farms life was somewhat normal and not many records were created by the young men. The men who worked in camps tended to produce more records about their CO experience. In the camps there was a concentration of conscientious objectors who were outside their comfort zones and

⁶⁴ Catherine McDonald, “Canadian Mennonites in World War II. MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE. Travelling exhibit mounted by the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg,” *Archivaria* 34 (1992): 248.

⁶⁵ Mennonite Central Committee News release, “Reliving the commitment to life,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, December 18, 1992, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Lawrence Klippenstein, “Canadian Mennonites in World War II,” in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II, 1941-1946*, ed. A.J. Klassen (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee (B.C.) Seniors for Peace, 1998), 2-9.

interacted with people who shared their peace position but differed on other issues. Letters, photographs, and even some diaries were created by a group of men not usually drawn to recording thoughts, feelings, and activities.⁶⁷

The experience of men who opposed military participation is not one that Canadian society has been interested in highlighting. Outside their CO circles, many COs felt their story and sacrifices were not valued and therefore they were often reluctant to talk about their war time activities with family and friends. This ambivalence about the CO experience makes a value judgement on the CO record created and ultimately what comes to the archives. If people perceive materials that they have are important, these materials are more likely to come to the archives. For this reason it has been necessary for people to actively look for and collect documentation about conscientious objectors while removing it from the life-long record created by these men. In archival terms these materials collected around the theme of conscientious objection is formally called a “collection” and not a *fonds*.⁶⁸ The contextual records (materials other than his CO related materials) of each man do not come with the deposit of CO related materials weakening the tools available to the researcher to understand the individual and his life. However, while some context is lost, other contextual opportunities are created when bringing materials together. Regardless, of any negative implications, without the active

⁶⁷ For examples of government sources see Conrad Stoesz, “Scattered Documents: Locating the CO Record in Canada,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25 (2007): 145-160. J.A Toews, *Alternative Service in Canada during World War II*, (Winnipeg: Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1959). There is an example of the kinds of records created by the alternative service camps preserved on microfilm see Library and Archives Canada, “Mennonite Collection,” accessed September 15, 2018, http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_mikan_106547.

⁶⁸ For archives the *fonds* is the basis of the archive. It represents the records created by a person or organization through everyday life and preserved in an archive. A document within a fonds will often have associated materials that help provide insight to the document in question. A collection is an artificially gathering of records on a theme. These documents have been removed from the other records of their creators reducing the contextual information available to interpret the document.

collection of CO documents, much of the documentary heritage of individual COs would not have survived.

The Mennonite Heritage Archives has preserved numerous personal collections that document the conscientious objector experience. Photograph collections include Jake Kreuger's two albums of photos from Radium Hot Springs and Glacier National Park, BC.⁶⁹ Henry J. Friesen brought a camera along with him while stationed at Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba and his photo album was donated to the archives.⁷⁰ William Kehler's album consists of 100 images created between 1943 and 1945 during his time at the Portage la Prairie Mental Hospital.⁷¹ Examples of smaller photo collections include those by Ed Brooks,⁷² John P. Hiebert,⁷³ David T. Wall, and David Jantzi. From the First World War, a good example is the Jacob Dick collection.⁷⁴ From these photos Lawrence Klippenstein produced another book on the CO experience in 2002.⁷⁵

While many men were confined to work camps, some were sent to jail for their CO convictions. While in Headingly jail Peter J. Friesen kept a diary of his experiences. A copy has been deposited at the archives and Centre volunteer Jake Wiens provided an English translation of it.⁷⁶ Other personal written materials include examples such as the letters John H. Enns of Ressor, Ontario who exchanged letters with family and friends while serving in the CO camps⁷⁷

⁶⁹ Jake Krueger fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, accession number 2003-127.

⁷⁰ Henry J. Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, accession number 2018-024.

⁷¹ William Kehler photograph collection, Mennonite Heritage Archives collection number 693.

⁷² Ed Brooks fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, accession number 2003-119.

⁷³ John P. Hiebert fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, accession number 2005-086.

⁷⁴ Jacob Dick Alternative Service in Russia photograph collection, Mennonite Heritage Archives photo collection 686.

⁷⁵ Lawrence Klippenstein and Jacob Dick, *Mennonite Alternative Service in Russia: The Story of Abram, Dueck and His Colleagues 1911-1917* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2002).

⁷⁶ Peter J. Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 1681.

⁷⁷ Enns-Toews fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 3467 and 3473. The John H. Enns example is a series (category) within the larger Enns-Toews Family *fonds*.

and collections of correspondence from governmental officials to COs giving specific instructions as collected by Peter J. Klassen.⁷⁸

The men who appeared before the judge to ask for CO status and then work in the camps or fields were most acutely aware of their situation, but their church communities also were involved. Organizational records at the Mennonite Heritage Archives include the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization lead by Bishop David Toews. The Board was established to oversee the migration of some 20,000 Mennonites from Russia starting in 1923. By 1930 the political climate had altered and immigration from Russia was suspended. The Board, and specifically Toews, became a leading voice for the alternative service program and mediator between the government and judges advocating for the young COs at a time when the public and many officials had little respect for conscientious objection. Communication from various church leaders and young men to Toews can be found in this fonds.⁷⁹ Toews was arguably the most significant Mennonite leader in western Canada at the time. Many letters from government officials and judges were addressed to him and at times threatened him for his support of the conscientious objectors and the alternative service program.⁸⁰ Other organizational materials that provide information about the COs and what was going on at home during the war would be individual congregational materials and the provincial conference records. Individual church leaders also created records relevant to the CO experience. Rev. Jacob W. Friesen of the Sommerfeld Mennonite church was a frequent visitor to the CO camps while providing

⁷⁸ Peter J. Klassen, Mennonite Heritage Archives, volume 5112 file 54.

⁷⁹ Letter to David Toews from Frank A. Wall, 30 January 1942, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volume 1322 file 936.

⁸⁰ Letter to Bishop David Toews from Justice J.F.L. Embury, 22 May 1942, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives Volume 1321 file 922. The files most relevant in the twenty-two meters of Board records are in volumes 1320-1323.

leadership to his congregations, and while trying to manage the farm. His records include a war-time diary and sermon preached at the CO camps.⁸¹

The materials listed above were created while the men were in their service. There are also records created after their service when the men are reflecting on their experiences years later. The compilation of CO memoirs discussed in chapter two are prime examples. These records that are based on memories have a different flavor to them and are created as a response to external pressures. The COs believed that the validity of conscientious objection was being questioned by society particularly in the geo-political milieu of the Gulf War. The memoirs reveal that the COs are writing to subsequent generations to show how men can be manly without taking up arms. Samples of memoir-style records at the Mennonite Heritage Archives include oral interviews with Henry J. Gerbrandt,⁸² Gordon Toombs,⁸³ David Goerzen,⁸⁴ and a series of interviews conducted by Lawrence Klippenstein and others featuring men with World War One or Second World War CO experience.⁸⁵ A survey of CO men taken in 1980, one year before the 40 year anniversary of the alternative service program is another example of records created for a purpose.⁸⁶ In this case it was to commemorate the CO experience.

Provincial Historical Society Archives

⁸¹ Jacob W. Friesen fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives volumes 4955 and 2108.

⁸² Interview with Henry J. Gerbrandt, Mennonite Heritage Centre collection, accession number 2004-026.

⁸³ Interview with Gordon Toombs, Mennonite Heritage Centre cassette tape 2386.

⁸⁴ Interview with David Goerzen, Mennonite Heritage Archives cassette tape 2516

⁸⁵ The Mennonite Heritage Archives lists no fewer than thirty interviews with COs, most conducted between 1977 and 1991. Some recordings of CO reunions are also included. Some of the recordings are duplicates from other archives such as the recordings by David Fransen which are held at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. Mennonite Heritage Archives recording numbers 12, 51-57, 78, 1187, 164, 198-199, 257, 264-266, 293-295, 1399, 1677, 2510-2519.

⁸⁶ Mennonite Heritage Archives collection volume 1015.

The Mennonite Heritage Archives was only one of the enduring projects that was formed from the commemorative and societal events of the 1970s in the Mennonite communities of western Canada and that cared about the CO record. While Winnipeg was a significant centre for Mennonites who had roots in Russia, communities farther west celebrated their own provincial centennials and had their own local leaders who saw the need for an archive that would collect and preserve the documents that capture the experiences of their Mennonite people. These archives in Abbotsford, Calgary and Saskatoon were formed by Mennonite historical societies that were volunteer driven. Each historical society developed a unique but connected organization, with much of the energy put into the establishment and operation of their archives.

The Mennonite historical societies in the three most western provinces began in 1972 as co-operative venture between Mennonites in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Alberta, all under the “Western Canadian Mennonite Historical Society.” As with the formation of the Canadian society in 1967, the organizing event was the meeting of historians and historically interested people in conjunction with Mennonite Central Committee meetings. The first organizing meeting took place on June 16, 1973 in Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The name soon changed to the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Alberta as the people from BC were considering their own historical society.⁸⁷ In July 1986, there was further reorganizing with a division along provincial lines forming the Mennonite historical societies of Alberta and Saskatchewan. A vast geography and divergent histories of

⁸⁷ Dick H. Epp, “The First Thirty Years,” *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian* 10 (April 2004): 3,5.

the Mennonite groups in the provinces were named as reasons for the creation of provincially based societies.⁸⁸

The two societies joined the Manitoba and Ontario societies as members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. The provincial societies, independent of each other have expended resources in collecting and highlighting the experience of their Mennonite communities including conscientious objectors and the peace value they embody. Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan's president, Leonard Doell stated in the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian* that "one of the unique parts of who we are as Mennonite people is our message of peace" and singled out the conscientious objectors as examples.⁸⁹ The Saskatchewan society has had several public programming events focusing on the peace theme, almost annually since 2006. In 2004, Dr. Bill Waiser from the University of Saskatchewan gave a lecture on conscientious objectors in the national parks of Canada during the Second World War and the society's newsletter carried an article by Isaac Andreas about his CO experience.⁹⁰ In 2006, the Saskatchewan society used the theme of "peace with neighbours" as a unifying motif for the next decade or more. In 2008, the title was "How did Muslims and Mennonites interact Peacefully?" and in 2011 "Truth and Reconciliation."⁹¹ The society used these events not only to promote the topic of the day, but to raise awareness of their society, its activities, and its need for financial support, while nurturing the peace value embodied in the example of conscientious objectors.

Leading the charge for the formation of the Alberta society was Henry Goerzen. While there was a dream of a Mennonite-focused museum, energies shifted to the collection,

⁸⁸ Irene Klassen, "Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. November 2011, accessed 2 Jul 2018,

http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_historical_society_of_alberta&oldid=140241.

⁸⁹ Leonard Doell, "President's Message," *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian* 10 (April 2004): 3.

⁹⁰ Isaac Andreas, "My C.O. Story," *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian* 10 (April 2004): 6-7.

⁹¹ "A Summary of Peace-related Activities of MHSS," email from MHSS past president, Jake Buhler, to Conrad Stoesz July 23, 2018. See also "MHSS – Time Line," email from Victor Wiebe to Conrad Stoesz April 10, 2018.

preservation, and accessibility of books and one-of-a-kind documents. Goerzen was a very active lay leader in his local congregation and beyond, who took it upon himself to collect church and provincial conference records before the archival program was established. He would become the first chair of the Alberta society, a position he held from 1986 to 1999 and then continued as vice chair until 2003. While the Society had members and a program, it lacked a place to store its archival documents. Goerzen took matters into his own hands by converting a metal 1650-bushel Westeel-Rosco grain bin on his farm to serve as the society's first archival facility. In 2018, at the national society's annual meeting Goerzen was recognized for his contributions to the Mennonite community in Alberta. It was noted that "He has possibly done more than any other individual to ensure the preservation of the history of Mennonites in Alberta."⁹²

Part of Goerzen's collection are oral interviews he conducted of men who served as conscientious objectors in the Second World War. He travelled the province interviewing people and created 16 cm of textual records and collected about 300 photographs from the men who represented various Mennonite denominations and performed alternative service rather than active military service. Also in the collection are reunion reports, essays, and correspondence COs received from the Canadian government providing them with instruction as to their CO assignments. Goerzen's work was an important part of A.J. Klassen's book of CO memoirs *Alternative Service for Peace*, discussed in chapter 2.⁹³

The theme of peace in the example of conscientious objection was also relevant to the archival collection of Mennonite Historical Society of BC's archive. An important spiritual

⁹² Dave Neufeldt, "MHSC Award of Excellence – Nomination," *Mennonite Historical Society of Albert Newsletter*, 21 (March 2018): 9.

⁹³ Jim Bowman, "Henry Goerzen's Collection on Conscientious Objectors," *Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta*, accessed Jul 2, 2018. <http://mennonitehistory.org/henry-goerzens-collection-on-conscientious-objectors/> .

leader in BC was Gerhard I. Peters who donated the materials collected for a project that culminated in the collection and publication of the stories of forty-five Mennonite men who provided forestry, agricultural, and hospital service as a form of alternative service to Russia in World War One.⁹⁴ Along with Peters was Waldemar Guenther and David P. Heidebrecht who collected and edited stories and photos in the book "*Onsi Tjedils*" : *Ersatzdienst der Mennoniten in Russland unter den Romanows* and commemorating alternative service in Russia. The men contributing these stories were born between 1885-1893 and by the 1966 publication date were roughly the same age as the men who would later write about their Second World War stories; both sets of men were interested in leaving a legacy.

While David P. Heidebrecht was the lead person on this project, committee member Rev. Gerhard I. Peters wrote a letter in 1967, encouraging people to buy the book and to be open to learning from these men's experiences. He implores readers to take heed Deuteronomy 32:7 and to "Remember the days of old" and to "Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you." The book, written in German at the height of the Mennonites' internal conflict over language, used the example of alternative service to encourage people to keep the faith of their ancestors, noting it does not come without cost, pointing out that in Russia the Mennonite community paid for the alternative service program before and during war time while in Canada, the government underwrote the program and paid then men a small amount.⁹⁵ While the book is in German, within the archival files are English translations that appear to have been added after deposit in the archives. There was a realization that these stories were significant but needed to be in English for a younger generation to learn from them.⁹⁶ Completely separate

⁹⁴ Peter Heidebrecht fonds, Mennonite Historical Society of BC, <https://archives.mhsc.ca/david-p-heidebrecht> accessed July 9, 2018.

⁹⁵ Gerhard I. Peters fonds, "Peace and non-resistance 1955-1987," Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., S35-1/1.

⁹⁶ David P. Heidebrecht fonds, Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., series 5 box 197.

from the translation in the BC archival files, Peter H. Friesen of Keewatin, Ontario translated the book and added his father's own First World War CO story in the book "Our Guys." Friesen says "my intent was to provide my children and my grandchildren... with an opportunity to read firsthand accounts of my ancestors, their ideals, and how they lived them, as well as revealing their feet of clay."⁹⁷ The dedication to translate and produce a 288 page book is substantial, revealing the significance of these stories to Friesen.

Each of the western Mennonite archives discussed here holds records from their respective provincial Mennonite Central Committees (MCC) and the Mennonite Heritage Archives also holds the records of Mennonite Central Committee Canada. After the Second World War many within the Mennonite community believed they needed to provide a peace witness during peace time as well as war time. A shift took place that vaulted the Mennonite community out of its separatist communities and into peace advocacy around the world. MCC became a primary vehicle through which Mennonites worked out their faith values. No surprise then is MCC's high value of peace. Many of its various material aid programs and programs aimed at the marginalized sectors of society which has included, women, victims and offenders, Aboriginal peoples, and refugees. The five meters of the BC MCC records are preserved in the Mennonite archives in Abbotsford. A separate MCC committee is the Peace and Service committee and one of its projects was the coordination of "Alternative Service reunions."⁹⁸ Similar MCC, and specific peace committee records, can be found in the Mennonite archives in Saskatoon,⁹⁹ Calgary¹⁰⁰ and, Winnipeg.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Peter H. Friesen, "Preamble," in *Our Guys* (Winnipeg: Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home, 1995).

⁹⁸ Mennonite Central Committee BC fonds, Mennonite Historical Society of BC, MHSBC 160.

⁹⁹ Mennonite Central Committee fonds, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, volume 4.3.6.

¹⁰⁰ Mennonite Central Committee Alberta fonds, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta.

¹⁰¹ Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives. And Mennonite Central Committee Canada fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Alternative service reunions have been important ways for the men to maintain friendships and find encouragement. It has often been out of these reunions that commemorative projects like books of collected memoirs have been born. Some reunions in the early 1950s included two generations of conscientious objectors. Members who had served in Russia and immigrated to Canada and the more recent Canadian Second World War COs. These events created a tradition of conscientious objection and a way of transferring the identity of conscientious objection from generation to the next. The John P. Dyck slide collection at the Mennonite Heritage Archive is an aggregation of images from men who served in Russia and Canada and used at a joint reunion in 1974.¹⁰²

Conclusion

Like the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg, the origins of the Mennonite archives in the three westerly most Canadian provinces have been closely tied to commemoration. The archival program of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada was able to fund an archival building in Winnipeg on the wave of support that successive centennial celebrations engendered. No doubt the Mennonite centennial of life in Manitoba was the most important catalyst for this project, but it was built upon wider social movements, including multiculturalism and centennial celebrations for Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg. The younger, smaller archival centres farther west, less closely tied to a particular Mennonite denomination and run by volunteers, also found a surge of energy for maintaining an archive with the commemorative activities. In each place they provided public programming that used the peace theme as a centering point and one that celebrated the life of the conscientious objectors.

¹⁰² John P. Dyck fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, volume 4672 file 12 and the John P. Dyck Alternative Service slide collection, Mennonite Heritage Archives, photo collection 88.

Without the initiative to record, preserve, and make available the CO story, society would have fewer texts to examine and learn from. These records were created in time of national and personal crisis and have been made available by archives for future generations who can be shaped by the examples of the men who performed alternative service. The archives provide an enduring and deep source of materials for the reinvention of identity. Depending on the cultural context, stories from the archives can be found and can act like a mirror, reflecting to the community their identity. For the Mennonite community that values the conscientious objector story, the value of peace can help the community adjust the kite string of identity flying in a Canadian context.

The archival materials that were collected from conscientious objectors became part of the community memory. How these records were used and viewed changed over time and within the greater Canadian and world context. The records and their importance rose and fell in the helical pattern that Brothman describes. The archivists, in collecting, preserving and commemorating the CO experience, exercised great agency in shaping the memory and identity of the Mennonites at a cross road in their history. Together archives and archivists played an important role in the self determination of the community.

Conclusion

Mennonites are only one example of a minority group within Canada but serve as an exemplar in this thesis showing that minority group identities do not have to fade and vanish. While the winds of assimilation can be strong the minority group has its own agency. Using the imagery of the kite, the community is in control of the kite string that responds to the identity-assaulting winds of the host culture. The Mennonites are a small minority group that has held the value of peace as one of its highest ideals. This value has been seen in their negotiations with governments who granted them conscientious objector status (CO), especially during the Second World War when many Mennonite men performed alternative service as conscientious objectors.

Using the example of conscientious objectors this thesis explored how the Mennonite community used the CO story to recreate its identity. In chapter one I considered the formation of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada that was designed to be a tool to build a bridge between two culturally separate Mennonite groups whose origins were in Switzerland and the Netherlands, coming to Canada mostly via Pennsylvania and Russia. In 1968 the Society launched the history book series *Mennonites in Canada*, that spanned three volumes and some 1500 pages. The authors Frank H. Epp, and T. D. Regehr approached history writing differently, with Epp's approach more activist in style, Regehr's more contextual. Epp saw the peace theme and the conscientious objector as the great unifying force between the Mennonites with roots in Russia and in Switzerland. Wherever he could, he drew the readers' attention to the peace theme, showing how it pushed and pulled, or how it was a liability or advantage to the Mennonites, and ultimately, how it was an important identity marker.

In the second Chapter I delved into the CO memoirs to read first-hand accounts of young men pleading their case before the judge, working in camps, mines, hospitals and farms, and then

reflecting on the significance and meaning of the CO experiences. Woven through the memoirs are glimpses of the men's masculinity. War is gendered, and the prevailing understanding of the true man was of a person who was strong, dutiful, and brave. However, Mennonite men were socialized with different values which at times clashed with ideas on Anglo-Canadian masculinity. But the memoirs not only reveal values, actions, and events during the Second World War, they are also a mirror of the men at the time of writing in the 1980s and 1990s. The men were in their 70s and 80s and, with their strength fading, they used the memoirs to show their bravery, their adventurous spirit, their strength, and dedication to the community value of peace. World events such as the 1991 Gulf War pushed the question of conscription into public discussion. The compilation of memoirs around this time responds to such events as the men hoped to pass on the community value of peace to next generations. The memoirs revealed truths about the men's alternative service and their context as they were writing as 80-year-old men.

In the third chapter I delved into four Mennonite archives revealing the quiet but significant role commemoration had in their founding and the powerful role of archivists when they exercised their agency in collecting and then using the CO record for commemorative purposes. Commemoration can rally community members around a cause or value and create events of heightened group cohesion and identity. Events within the larger society do not have to be negative assimilating forces but can also be harnessed to benefit minority groups. Large-scale commemorative events such as Canada's 100th birthday and Manitoba's centennial celebrated three years later, created positive energy that the Mennonite community built upon. In addition, changes to governmental attitudes towards minority groups embodied in the multiculturalism policy were all cultural winds the Mennonites used to their advantage. The

extended focus on the significance of history in these celebrations created the will-power to erect archival buildings and establish archival programs. Important in the early years of these archives were archivists who collected and created records by and about conscientious objectors. The CO record was created within specific contexts and in the case of the memoirs have two contextual layers. By preserving these records in the archives, the CO story has the ability to speak into future contexts and shape identity. The future contexts impact how the CO story will be viewed and in this way the CO story shapes and is shaped in a helical manner rather than a linear fashion. Susanna Egan says that our world is increasingly impacted by personal narratives,¹ so thankfully the COs, compilers, editors and archivists have preserved and made these narratives available.

Life is constantly changing and so are the challenges and opportunities for minority groups within a larger host society. The story of the Mennonite conscientious objector is an example that shows the agency the community holds in reinventing its identity. Just as the Canadian context is constantly in flux, so is the Mennonite identity. The archive is an important repository of identity shaping stories that can be accessed by the community to adjust the identity kite string. Whether through the writing of history books, the formation of historical societies, the creating and collecting of memoirs, the archives can hold this material for future use. The archival records are not static but are shaped as they influence the shaping of the community. The shaping or reinvention of identity is not some dishonest twisting of history, but rather a repositioning of the community in relation to the winds of the larger society.

¹ Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms, "Auto/biography? Yes. But Canadian?," *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review* 172 (2002): 5.

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