

‘Mennonite Religion was a Family Religion’: A Historiography

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Both oral and written renditions have invoked the family as a central feature of Mennonite communities. To quote from *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1928, “Mennonite religion was a family religion.” In 2001 an article in the same journal notes that “virtually all of the groups related to the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition have come to regard family ties as being at the very center of individual identity and spiritual formation.”¹ Another description of early Anabaptist families, however, also argued that they “reflect[ed] the prevailing milieu” and described most contemporary Mennonite families as “conventional and Western.”² Sociological works from the 1950s to the 1990s lament the lack of an empirical study of the Mennonite family.³ One historian notes the absence of historical studies of Mennonite family ideologies.⁴ In contrast, Mil Penner reflects on a Mennonite family farm in Inman, Kansas, and closes with a reverie on “the generations . . . there with me. . . they were pleased with what they saw.”⁵ Poet Julia Kasdorf limns another strand of family life in central Pennsylvania’s Big Valley.

. . . Grandpa offers Mom
a store-bought dress if she’ll stay home
from college to take care of her mother.
She doesn’t want a dress that much,
but stays . . .
.....
This is the part I cannot stand to see
another time. Here I edit the scenes
and reverse all their consequences. . . .⁶

Contrasts yield valuable historical understandings of Mennonite families. But to avoid facile framing of renditions of Mennonite family life as simply contradiction between praise and criticism, let me suggest common ground. American historian Richard White’s moving portrait of his mother, an early twentieth-century Irish immigrant woman, emerges from conversations between her memories and his historical research. That conversation, I think, speaks both to Men-

nonites gathering stories that build community life and to historians and other academics who often appear to “haul pieces into the present” from the “junkyard of the past.” “I imagine a past,” White writes,

in which some truth lies. This past is a place that yields a dense, almost impenetrable, imaginative growth. Historians can only hope to tap this fertility and trim and discipline what grows so luxuriantly. . . . History cannot afford to dismiss its rivals . . . or history will weaken its own ability to understand the strange worlds we live in.⁷

The past conceived as a conversation takes note of the richness of historical sources on Mennonite families. Published works by individuals researching their own families go back to the mid-nineteenth century and maintain vitality in the contemporary period.⁸ Autobiographies, memoirs, and biographies of Mennonite leaders abound. Attention to personal life and to years outside the productive and public ones may be frustratingly slim but asides, omissions, and silences themselves are suggestive.⁹ Intergenerational families are at the center of literary renditions of Mennonite experience, from epic historical novels to imaginative biography to the distilled images of poetry or the even more compact folk sayings.¹⁰ Families described by artists are messier than those of biography or family genealogy, pointing the direction in which family historians are more ponderously headed.¹¹

Sociological surveys and interviews, most collected since the mid-twentieth century, reveal recent demography of Mennonite families. Official denominational statements suggest ideological stances.¹² More recent Mennonite women’s and gender history sometimes emphasizes the family. Making women’s experiences visible, seeing the community with their eyes, and documenting unequal power between Mennonite women and men requires attention to the institution of the family.¹³ This work has been instrumental in challenging undifferentiated and idealized families.¹⁴

With these sources in mind, let me turn to six areas of study in current family history--life course, diversity of family composition, family ritual life, families and social position, neighbors, and nation building.¹⁵ My organization provides an opportunity to profile suggestive and seminal works on Mennonite families, to draw on my own research, and to note areas of Mennonite family history I see as largely unstudied but fruitfully probed.

Life Course

Family life might be best symbolized as a river. The post-World War II emphasis on a father, mother, and their children is, in fact, a snapshot, frozen in time. The term *life course* conceives of the family as a continual reconfiguring of relationships from birth to death.¹⁶ Much of the sociological study of Mennonite families has been from the perspective of adult parents with dependent children, yielding few clues on how children might experience family life.¹⁷ Similarly, youth are more apparent in adult dreams and fears than in their own shaping experiences. Not only Mennonites have slighted the young as historical actors. Perhaps, however, the central Anabaptist doctrine of adult faith and membership, “a great strain on the Mennonite family,” in Calvin Redekop’s words, has accentuated fears of “the uncertain group” rather than interest in its particulars.¹⁸ The wonder, yearnings, and fears of children and young people, however, are significant within community life. Anna Barr, remembered her early nineteenth-century childhood in Lancaster County: “Father . . . [h]aving plenty of land . . . gave the children plenty to do. . . I liked to work in the garden and in the field. . . Yes . . . I loved the earth. I loved to put seeds in it and take good care of them.”¹⁹ Novelist Ingrid Rimlaud, remembers the 1943 to 1945 retreat of Mennonites from the Soviet Union with the *Wehrmacht* as the boredom and “inner hunger” of a child under ten.²⁰ Writer Laura Weaver, growing up as a plain child in the same period, remembers noticing her doll’s worldly clothes and inventing imaginary radio programs to match those that her classmates recounted.²¹

Similarly, over the years, Mennonite youth have troubled adults not only in their search or lack of search for God but also, in John Ruth’s words, “in youth’s other great drama of finding a mate,” two searches, he notes, which are not unconnected. Ruth makes the comment in his discussion of eighteenth-century courtship, marriages, and elopements in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.²² The literary societies of Dutch-Russian Canadian Mennonite youth in the interwar years suggest other searches that also concerned some church leaders. Might the documents of these organizations also be mined for community life from the eyes of youth?²³ In the 1960s and 1970s, Lancaster Country Mennonite youth culture included road rallies, nighttime pranks, and run-ins with the police. How did such youthful vitality and indiscretion mark Mennonite history? In sum, what did it mean to be eighteen and a Mennonite in the 1820s, the 1930s, and the 1970s?

Moving to the other end of the life course, what can we learn from of the ordinary days, the dreams, and the disappointments of the patriarchs and matriarchs so prominent in family genealogical history? What is the relationship between the “Daddy house” and the retirement

community? What is the significance of courtship and marriage in the later years?²⁴

Intertwined with an individual's life course are the shifting relationships of mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, siblings, adults and their parents, grandparents and grandchildren. Interestingly, two recent fine-grained portraits of Mennonite men by their daughters--one a biography in Steinbach, the other, a fictional rendition in Lancaster--depict fathers as vulnerable mentors.²⁵

Diversity of Family Composition

Attention to life course suggests the fluidity of family life but also points to diversity of composition. Mennonite historians have become increasingly attentive to complexity in the origins, spread, and historical particulars of diverse Anabaptist and Mennonite groups. By and large, a standard strong and independent intergenerational family or its converse, a family in decline or dominated by an authoritarian patriarch, has been posited across this great historical expanse.²⁶ The institution of the family, however, has housed amazingly diverse aspects of human life--sexuality; gender expectations; friendships; economic production; nurture and care of the young, the old, the hurt; intergenerational pathways of wealth; and symbols of group identity and prowess.²⁷ Given these tasks, the chance of finding actual families that are anything other than a bewildering mix of particularities is slim.

Historian Marlene Epp's detailed attention to one group of Mennonite families illustrates what we might find if we look closely. Epp's study of Mennonite families--dismembered first in the Soviet Union, then as refugees in World War II--follows reconstituted immigrant families in Paraguay and Canada. The new families--often headed by women and sometimes established without certain knowledge of the fate of older family members--were at odds with postwar North American domesticity and with Canadian Mennonite leadership.²⁸ How might the church's history change if we study with similar care other apparently atypical families: complex families divided and united by death, discord, divorce, remarriage, race, migration, conversion, sexual orientation, and denominational affiliation; farm and artisan households with hired help; families on national and denominational frontiers; female-run families of church leaders; educated families that encouraged familiarity with the arts and literature, and single parent families.²⁹ Taken together, these diverse families suggest flexibility necessary in persistent communities.

Family Ritual

Intertwined with family composition are the symbols and rituals of families and the intangibles of sentiment. Despite all the measurable changes in structure, “the family and the home . . . remain at the center of daily experience.” As such, families are key to transmission and interpretation of ethnic identity and religious belief. In my work on the persistence and the loss of the Brethren in Christ peace witness over three generations, for example, untidy families served as key conduits in both cases.³⁰ What appears incoherent may, in fact, reflect lack of attention to the symbolic life of families. Family historian John Gillis writes--and here he is writing to academic historians--“Family legends, rites of passage, and icons have been treated as the ephemera of an ephemeral subject.” We pay attention to these aspects of life in other cultures but not in our own, where, he contends, relatively new rituals have deepened the importance of family time.³¹

Two family rituals have received sustained attention among Mennonites: family worship and prayer before meals.³² Pamela E. Klassen’s 1990s interviews with two Mennonite immigrant women presents “domestic religion” as much more extensive. For women—who do much of the ritual work of families--but also for men, Klassen argues, such religious ritual is as important as that practiced in church structures. “In their homes, their food is blessed by God, they are watched over in their sleep, and they offer hospitality and love to visitors. In their kitchens and living rooms, they sing hymns, they pray, and they praise and critique their church and community.”³³ Klassen’s list is interesting in that it includes critical thinking, along with worship and hospitality, as central to religious life. She has hit on an important, amorphous, and little-studied aspect of families: how they conceptualize difference and conflict within the family itself and within the church. One Kansas woman noted that her parents avoided “serious subjects” with the children, “so we did not learn to speak up about things.”³⁴ In interviews for a 1992 study on domestic abuse in Mennonite families in Lancaster County, inevitable disagreements and unequal decision-making power were key ingredients in a process leading to abuse.³⁵ One woman who grew up Mennonite remembers “learn[ing] very well from my father how not to express all of my understanding of the spiritual life, lest I offend more traditional believers.”³⁶ The Dutch-Russian maxims collected in Western Canada suggest other approaches--humor, understatement, and affection--in daily symbolic life in the family.³⁷

The material world of family ritual life might also shed light on Mennonite history more generally. Home furnishings, the accouterments of weddings, birthdays, holidays, funerals, vacations, and

entertaining help to define family life.³⁸ Much study of material life among Mennonites has focused on items that were forbidden and on church objections to the amassing of material goods in general. What was allowed has been less studied. When Bethel College's Kauffman Museum surveyed visitors on their memories of early twentieth-century home furnishings, particularly in parlors, many responses reflected a common North American desire to own modern industrially produced household items.³⁹

Family and Society

Perhaps those common aspirations reflect the fact that Mennonites have always had non-Mennonite neighbors. While North American Mennonites have often understood the world in terms of the large forces of individualism, militarism, and nationalism, for many Mennonites the world was no farther away than the non-Mennonite neighbors and relatives or the more liberal Mennonite relatives and neighbors. My use of Brethren in Christ obituaries made clear the loosening of boundaries in the face of death. Once I noticed the mixed company at gravesides, its omnipresence in daily life became unmistakable. Laura Weaver's childhood play included trying out a worldly identity by dressing up in her Lutheran cousin's clothes.⁴⁰ Anthropologist Elmer Miller remembered the relatives "who . . . smoked cigars, attended movies, and participated in state and local politics."⁴¹

These checkered worlds existed in families long before Mennonites left farms, moved to cities, or pursued advanced degrees. Three deeply researched historical works on Mennonites establish these intimate worlds in different times and settings. John Ruth's narrative of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference presents evidence, more than analysis, of consistent interaction between Mennonites and non-Mennonite families over three centuries. Steven Nolt's suggestive study of Mennonites within the larger eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Pennsylvania German culture considers the makings of family life as well as intellectual and political moorings. Dialect, dress, demeanor, folk artistry, marriage partners, holidays, domestic architecture, food preparation, child rearing, healing rituals, and law and order established by extended families tied these particular Mennonites to other Pennsylvania Germans and to a region.⁴² Finally, Royden Loewen's work on a variety of Mennonite communities in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century connects them to a variety of neighbors. In both the United States and Canada, other rural families and other ethnic communities were neighbors who constituted the world and with Mennonites faced larger economic and political forces.⁴³

Amid the diversity of family cultures and family practice, one particular distinction includes wealth and status among Mennonite families. Anyone working for any amount of time in Mennonite history will quickly spot notable intergenerational families: those prominent in church institutions, on farms, and in businesses. Failure in business or simply failure to prosper marked other families.⁴⁴ In addition, the growth of Mennonite denominations has reached into much less prosperous areas than those of the North American Mennonite heartlands.

Who hired domestic and business help and who served as that help in households and in commercial ventures? How often did marriages serve as ladders up or ladders down? Who led in local congregations and in denominational structures? All of these areas might serve as arenas in which to consider the ability of Mennonite families to pass on wealth and status. In my research on the Brethren in Christ, discomfort with the wealth of certain families informed the debate on a paid pastorate. In 1919, one writer argued that in an unpaid system, church leaders were largely wealthy farmers who did not set their hands to the plough but rather had inherited wealth and sons who did the actual farming. Less prosperous farmers were disenfranchised.⁴⁵

On the other hand, Royden Loewen's work on a variety of Mennonite communities in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century suggests that partible, bilateral inheritance maintained a rough equality in the community, gave women economic resources, and symbolized religious beliefs.⁴⁶ His conclusions are important in light of his sustained attention to the daily life of families and communities. He has done the long slow work of immersing himself in the documents of the everyday life. He has considered a multitude of overlapping contexts from the 1820s to the 1930s, giving an embodied sense of daily practice. His detailed empirical work, which charts the way for other time periods and other Mennonite communities, yields a complex portrait of persistent cultural distinctiveness enmeshed in diverse host societies.⁴⁷

To return to inheritance practices and prosperity, neither has yet been adequately studied in North American Mennonite history. The inheritance practices placed land-hungry Mennonite families at the heart of a main prong of European conquest--that advanced through settler societies.⁴⁸ Those earlier Mennonite families are not immaterial at the start of the twenty-first century. Many contemporary North American Mennonite families are lodged in the comfortable classes of Canada and the United States and in a miniscule elite in terms of world population.⁴⁹ Studies, such as Loewen's, help to detail how Mennonite families reached those positions.

Like Mennonites, nations are vitally interested in their families, as producers, symbols, and enforcers. Across North America, Mennonites

share much culturally but live in two nations, which have had distinct visions of the proper role of government, pluralism, immigration, national security, internationalism, marriage rules, and family policy. These distinctions have impact on Mennonite families and are important to probe in a history that will combine and compare the national experiences. Let me briefly list three examples. In 1980, Canadian and American Mennonite divorce rates mimicked differences in national averages, those of the former lower than those of the latter.⁵⁰ Canadian Mennonites have come to accept governmental family allowances that go to all families.⁵¹ I have not seen any studies, but I would guess that very few American Mennonites applied for the means-tested Aid to Families with Dependent Children.⁵² Similarly, U.S. society placed on a permanent war footing since 1948 and undergirded by a militarized foreign policy has created a very particular challenge to the Mennonite peace witness, its practice often worked out in families.⁵³

Conclusion

This cursory look at possible approaches for capturing the centrality and the daily lives of families might, I hope, lead to a more thorough study of North American Mennonites. May whatever pieces such study might haul out of the “junkyard of the past” shed light on the strange worlds in which Mennonites have persisted.

Notes

- ¹ Ernst Correll, “The Value of Family History for Mennonite History,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (hereafter *MQR*) 2 (1928): 67; John D. Roth, “Family, Community and Discipleship in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition,” intro. to issue, *MQR* 75 (2001): 148. In his introduction, Roth offers three theological models for understanding families in Anabaptist and Mennonite history: church above family, family as the center of “transmission of faith,” and fallen families. Also see *Mennonite Encyclopedia* (hereafter *ME*), vols. 1-4, ed. Harold S. Bender et al. (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955-1959), vol. 5, ed. Cornelius J. Dyck and Dennis Martin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), vol. 2, s.v. “family in Mennonite history and life;” Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), chap. 10, esp. 157.
- ² C. Redekop, *Mennonite Society*, 158, 161, 166.
- ³ *ME*, vol. 2, s.v. “family;” John F. Peters, “Traditional Customs of Remarriage Among Some Canadian Mennonite Widow(er)s,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (hereafter *JMS*) 10 (1992): 119.
- ⁴ Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 140.
- ⁵ Mil Penner, *Section 27: A Century on a Family Farm* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 222.

- ⁶ Julia Kasdorf, "The Mean Words of Jesus," in *Sleeping Preacher* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 10.
- ⁷ Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagan: A History of Stories* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 21, 303, 302. In the indented quotation, I have reversed the order in which White presents the sentences before and after the first ellipsis.
- ⁸ *ME*, vol. 2, s.v. "family history;" Correll, "The Value of Family History," *MQR* 2 (1928): 66-79, 151-54, 198-204; Lois Ann Mast, "New Notes: Mennonite Family History," *MQR* 55 (1981): 384; John L. Ruth, foreword to *The Merging: A Story of Two Families and Their Child*, by Evelyn King Mumaw (Telford, PA: Dreamseeker Books, 2000), 11-12; Cornelius J. Dyck, review of *The Blumstein Legacy: A Six Generation Family Saga*, by Leland D. Harder and Samuel W. Harder, *MQR* 75 (2001): 138-40; Lawrence Klippenstein, review of two family histories, *MQR* 77 (2003): 490-92.
- ⁹ We can hope Robert S. Kreider's willingness to spend an entire volume on his first thirty-three years of life as well as his extensive use of letters home might be suggestive to others tracing an individual life. *My Early Years: An Autobiography* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2002). As an example of the brevity of coverage of early life, Albert N. Keim covers H. S. Bender's first twenty-three years in approximately eighty-four pages in a book of over five hundred pages. Keim does attend more to Bender's family life in later years. More about Bender's childhood and adolescence and its context would be telling. What, for example, did he make of his younger brother's Ku Klux Klan club in 1920s northern Indiana? *Harold S. Bender, 1897-1962* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), chaps. 1-3, esp. 31.
- ¹⁰ Consider the novels of Sandra Birdsell, Christmas Carol Kauffman, Al Reimer, Miriam Toews, Rudy Wiebe; the prose poems of Janet Kauffman; the poetry of Di Brandt, Jean Janzen, Julia Kasdorf, and Sarah Klassen; the maxims of Dutch-Russian Mennonites on marriage, raising children, housewives, farmers, and daily behavior. Victor Carl Friesen, *The Windmill Turning: Nursery Rhymes, Maxims, and Other Expressions of Western Canadian Mennonites* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1988). See *ME*, vol. 5, s.v. "Mennonites in literature."
- ¹¹ Novelist Al Reimer argues that "women historians and critics," although producing valuable studies, have "come across as muted, lacking the passion and drama that vividly drawn literary voices can provide." See Reimer, "Where Was/Is the Woman's Voice?: The Re-Membering of the Mennonite Woman," *Mennonite Life* (hereafter *ML*) 47 (1992): 20.
- ¹² *ME*, vols. 1-4, s.v. "birth," "courtship," "divorce," "family," "marriage," "sexuality," etc. Also see entries in *Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (hereafter *CMEO*), <http://www.mhsc.ca>. For a brief summary of information on Mennonite families from three denominational surveys published 1972 to 1989 as well as of denominational statements on families, see J. Howard Kauffman and Thomas J. Meyers, "Mennonite Families: Characteristics and Trends," *MQR* 75 (2001): 199-209. For a more detailed discussion of these studies as well as of more localized studies in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Indiana, Kansas, and Mexico, see Paul Redekop, "The Mennonite Family in Tradition and Transition," *JMS* 4 (1986): 77-93. Also see Donovan E. Smucker, *The Sociology of Mennonites, Hutterites and Amish: A Bibliography with Annotations*, vol. 2, 1977-1990 (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991); J. Winfield Fretz, *The Waterloo Mennonites: A Community in Paradox* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), chap. 10. In contrast, the cumulative index of volumes 1-74 (1928-2000) of the *MQR* included three entries under the heading of "family."
- ¹³ Kimberly D. Schmidt, Diane Zimmerman Umble, and Steven D. Reschly, eds., *Strangers at Home: Amish and Mennonite Women in History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). The essays in this collection present work of the most prominent historians currently addressing Mennonite women.

- ¹⁴ See Ami Regier's critique of Jeff Gundy's work as conflating "I" with "we" in "text, self, history, community, and family;" Regier, "The Dream of Self as a 'Community of Memory': Jeff Gundy and the Ancestral Voices, A Review Essay," *ML* 53 (1998): 28.
- ¹⁵ Literature on family history in Canada and the United States is extensive. See, for example, the *Journal of Family History: Studies in Family, Kinship, and Demography* (hereafter *JFH*). Recent articles, forums, and special issues have focused on topics relevant to Mennonite family history: fatherhood, elderly women, alcohol and the family, family law, families' responses to disability within the family; family networks and geographic mobility; and, Canadian families. For recent books on the family see: Nancy Janovicek and Joy Parr, eds., *Histories of Canadian Children and Youth* (Don Mills, Ont., Oxford University Press, 2003); and, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *Mapping the Margins: The Family and Social Discipline in Canada, 1700-1975* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Joseph M. Hawes and Elizabeth I. Nybakken, eds., *Family and Society in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
- ¹⁶ See Michael Gordon, ed., *American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 179-81. Royden Loewen's work on diverse Mennonite families attends to the importance of life course in family size and land accumulation; see, for example, his selection of diaries, *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 13-15, part 3.
- ¹⁷ *ME*, vol. 5, s.v. "children," "childrearing;" William Klassen noted the absence of children in synthetic overviews and journal literature, "The Role of the Child in Anabaptism," in *Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues*, ed. Harry Loewen (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), 17. J. Howard Kauffman's 1956 questionnaire to 149 Mennonite families in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois included questions for the oldest child in each family about relationships with his or her mother, father, and friends; see Kauffman, "A Comparative Study of Traditional and Emergent Family Types Among Midwestern Mennonites," *MQR* 35 (1961), 171-44. This is an abstract of Kauffman's 1960 Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Chicago. Also see P. Redekop, "The Mennonite Family," 85-87.
- ¹⁸ C. Redekop, *Mennonite Society*, 159-60, 385. With the term "uncertain group," Redekop is quoting Gideon G. Yoder, *The Nurture and Evangelism of Children* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956). R. Loewen notes another explanation for the focus on middle-aged adults: "status derived from productive work," which is usually at its height in at mid-life; see Loewen, "'The Children, the Cows, my Dear Man, and my Sister:' The Transplanted Lives of Mennonite Farm Women, 1874-1900," *Canadian Historical Review* 73 (1992): 359.
- ¹⁹ John Landis Ruth, *The Earth Is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 438.
- ²⁰ Ingrid Rimland, "The Wanderers Revisited," in *Mennonite Images*, ed. H. Loewen, 269.
- ²¹ Laura H. Weaver, "Forbidden Fancies: A Child's Vision of Mennonite Plainness," *ML* 43 (June 1988): 21. Weaver's doctoral dissertation, interestingly, considered the "divided-self" of a British playwright and novelist, idem, "Writing About the Covering and Plain Clothes as a Mennonite 'Family' Possession," *ML* 49 (Dec. 1994): 4. In another example, Sarah Buhler interprets her grandmother's story of speaking up for the right to save one item from the sale of her dead parents' goods as a story of women's work to subvert powerlessness. In fact, the story is perhaps just as much that of early twentieth-century children claiming traces of a lost family life as adults moved the children into other families, "I Chose Some Cups

- and Saucers': Gender, Tradition, and Subversive Elements in My Grandmother's Life Stories," *Ethnologies* 21 (1999): 47-63.
- ²² Ruth, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 366-67, also see 343-44, 414-16. My own research on the Brethren in Christ community two centuries later yielded similar themes. Conscripted men chose assignments and trifled with draft rules because they were attracted to certain women as well as because of church doctrine or their own high ideals; see Mary Jane Heisey, "Seeking Community: Brethren in Christ Nonresistance and American Society, 1914-1958" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1998), 248, 251-53.
- ²³ Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1982), 455-59.
- ²⁴ Buhler notes that collecting her ninety-year-old grandmother's stories helps to challenge stereotypes of how elderly women function in their communities; see "I Chose Some Cups," 50-51. R. Loewen notes the importance of partible bilateral inheritance for elderly women among the Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska and Manitoba. With land or capital, older women could maintain "small retirement houses in the back yards" of their children's homes; see Loewen, "The Children," 363. See also John F. Peters's suggestive sociological study on remarriage, "Traditional Customs of Remarriage," 118-29, especially 128.
- ²⁵ Miriam Toews, *Swing Low: A Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001); Janet Kauffman, *Rot* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2001). Toews's moving and imaginative biography of her father and his struggle with bipolar disorder is also a portrait of family and community life in Steinbach. Rather than reinforce family ties, the Mennonite community—self-consciously separated from and intimately connected to the 1970s and 1980s North American world—weighs heavily on and shatters Toews's families, also portrayed in her award-winning novel, *A Complicated Kindness* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2004).
- ²⁶ For an historical rendition of the strengthening of the patriarchal family setup, as well as women's resistance to that movement, among Amish Mennonites in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Steven D. Reschly, "'The Parents Shall Not Go Unpunished': Preservationist Patriarchy and Community," in *Strangers at Home*, 160-81.
- ²⁷ For an historical study of sexuality among Mennonites see: Brenda Martin Hurst, "The Articulation of Mennonite Beliefs about Sexuality, 1890-1930," (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education), 2003, esp. 33-11, 68-83. Among late nineteenth-century Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska and Manitoba, R. Loewen notes that "[u]sually . . . marital relationships are described not in terms of emotional bonds of love and affection but in common identification with a household;" see Loewen, "The Children," 368.
- ²⁸ For works illustrating the fragility of family during times of migration see: Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men*; Sandra Birdsell, *The Russländer* (McClelland & Stewart, 2001); Monica Mutzbauer, "'It Is Painful to Say Goodbye': A Mennonite Family in Europe and America," *Pennsylvania Folklife* 46 (1996): 47-54; Esther Epp-Tiessen, "Gains and Losses: The Experience of Mennonite Women Immigrants of Late Nineteenth Century," *JMS* 18 (2000): 148-49.
- ²⁹ For descriptions of nineteenth-century households that went well beyond the nuclear family, see Lynn Bender, "The Yellow Creek Mennonite Settlers: A Study of Land and Family," *MQR* 46 (1972): 76-77; John W. Meyer, "Reflections on a Half-Century of Mennonite Change," *MQR* 77 (2003): 266-68; Mary Jean Kraybill, "Reflections on Growing Up Mennonite in Lancaster County," *MQR* 77 (2003): 219-20; A. Orley Swartzentruber, "From New Congregations to the Ancient Church," *MQR* 77 (2003): 197-99; Lucille Marr, "Ontario's Conference of Historic Peace Church Families and the 'Joy of Service,'" *MQR* 75 (2001): 257-72; Kauffman and Meyers, "Mennonite Families," 204; Elizabeth M. Goering and Andrea Krause,

- "Odd Wo/Man Out: The Systematic Marginalization of Mennonite Singles by the Church's Focus on Family," *MQR* 75 (2001): 211-30.
- ³⁰ M. J. Heisey, *Peace and Persistence: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Witness through Three Generations* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003), 18-19, 135-36, 158-59.
- ³¹ John Gillis, "Making Time for Family: The Invention of Family Time(s) and the Reinvention of Family History," *JFH* 21 (1996): 5, 7. Gillis notes that much of this ritual work is carried out by women of families, which R. Loewen illustrates with substantial detail among the writing women Russian Mennonite immigrant women in the late nineteenth century; see Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 59-67. In contrast, his study of three generations of women in Meade County, Kansas, serves as an example of lessening attention to family and home as more women work outside the home; see Loewen, "Household, Coffee, Klatsch, and Office," in *Strangers at Home*, 272-78.
- ³² *ME*, vol. 5, s.v. "family worship."
- ³³ Klassen draws on Susan Sered's idea of "domestication of religion" in a chapter on "Being Mennonite." Klassen's fine-grained portrait of Mennonite religious practice in both private and public settings is also a study of ideologies of the family within one Mennonite community; see Sered, *Going By the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994), chap. 4, esp. 91-92.
- ³⁴ Rachel Goertz Razlaff as told to Suzanne Lawrence; see "De Schtella Yeatza," *ML* 50 (1995): 12.
- ³⁵ Myrlliss E. Demastus, "The Influence of Patriarchy on Spouse Abuse in Mennonite Families: An Exploratory Study" (Master's thesis, Smith College School of Social Work, 1992), 54-55. Also see Isaac I. Block, *Assault on God's Image: Domestic Abuse* (Winnipeg: Windflower Communications, 1991).
- ³⁶ Lois Frey, "Becoming a Mennonite Quaker," *MQR* 77 (2003): 325.
- ³⁷ See note 10.
- ³⁸ For descriptions and photographs of Mennonite weddings in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth centuries, see *ME*, vol. 4, s.v. "weddings, United States and Canada," Rosemary Moyer and David A. Haury, "Weddings of Yesterday," *ML* 39 (1984): 17-22. For more recent wedding ritual, see *ME*, vol. 5, s.v. "weddings."
- ³⁹ Rachel K. Pannebecker, "Mennonite Parlors and Living Rooms: Objects, Memories, and Meanings," *ML* 44 (1989): 10-14; Frances Swyripa, "Ancestors, the Land, and Ethno-religious Identity on the Canadian Prairies: Comparing the Mennonite and Ukrainian Legacies," *JMS* 21 (2003): 49-53.
- ⁴⁰ Weaver, "Forbidden Fancies," 21.
- ⁴¹ Elmer S. Miller, *Nurturing Doubt: From Mennonite Missionary to Anthropologist in the Argentine Chaco* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 11. Articles on individuals "raised in Mennonite families" who never joined the church or left after joining also provide references to the importance of non-Mennonite relatives in the family, *MQR* 77 (Apr. 2003): 163, 201, 213, 296. I am not suggesting non-Mennonite relatives as a causative factor in individuals choosing to leave the Mennonite community. My reading in Brethren in Christ autobiography and biography suggest the omnipresence of non-Anabaptist relatives in many families.
- ⁴² Steven M. Nolt, "Finding a Context for Mennonite History: Pennsylvania German Ethnicity and the (Old) Mennonite Experience," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 21 (1998): 2-14. Nolt's article arose from his larger study of nineteenth-century German Lutheran and Reformed church members, *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early Republic* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).
- ⁴³ R. Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, chaps. 4-5. As does Nolt, Loewen does not downplay a distinct Mennonite identity. Rather he suggests that acknowledging multiple

Mennonite contexts helps to better establish the particulars of Mennonites in North America. See chap. 4 in which Loewen describes important common values of simplicity, land acquisition, and household economies between the two main strands of Canadian Mennonites. For a shortened version, see Loewen, "Dutch and Swiss Mennonites Take Root in Canada: Two Peoples, One Identity," *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* (April 2004), 9-11.

- ⁴⁴ R. Loewen notes the importance of the wealth women brought to a marriage in Mennonite communities in Nebraska and Manitoba; see Loewen, "The Children," 359-63. He also provides detail on wealth stratification in his study of the *Kleine Gemeinde in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 83-86, 150-69, 172, 250-51. For descriptions of wealthy Mennonite families in the history of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference from the early nineteenth century, see Ruth, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 401-416, 474-75, 481-82. For notations on the wealth of leaders of the 1874 migration from South Russia to Nebraska and Manitoba, see Epp-Tiessen, "Gains and Losses," 146-47. For a description of leaving the farm to work in a turkey processing factory owned by a Mennonite Iowa business owner in the 1930s, see Hope Nisly, "A Mennonite Woman in 'Thanksgiving Town': Edith Swartzendruber Nisly's Work Experience, 1935-1941," *Labor's Heritage* 3 (1991): 26-29. For a note on wealth in Steinbach, Manitoba, see, M. Toews, *Swing Low*, 93.
- ⁴⁵ M. J. Heisey, "A Sense of Place: Brethren in Christ Transitions, 1914-1919," (Paper delivered at the Amish, Old Orders, and the Media Conference, Young Center, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, June 14-16, 2001), 5-6.
- ⁴⁶ R. Loewen, *Hidden Worlds*, 33-49; idem, *Family, Church*, 44-48; idem, *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863-1929* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999); Lynn Bender's study of mid-nineteenth-century Mennonites of Swiss-South German ancestry in Elkhart County, Indiana, also notes "children were to be equal heirs," "Yellow Creek," 80. Without attention to inheritance, Kimberly D. Schmidt notes that in the 1980s many young Mennonite couples in Lewis County, New York, did not inherit the farms they worked; see Schmidt, "'Sacred Farming' or 'Working Out': The Negotiated Lives of Conservative Mennonite Farm Women," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 22 (2001): 92.
- ⁴⁷ See previously cited articles by Loewen.
- ⁴⁸ For a detailed case study of inheritance, wealth, and land among the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Manitoba and Nebraska, see, R. Loewen, *Family, Church*, 12, 83-91, 156-163, 172, 186, 241, 262-69. Loewen describes New Russia, for example, as "a huge, sparsely settled frontier" in the late eighteenth century. By 1850, there was a shortage of land, *Family, Church*, 12, 263. Also see, *ME*, vol. 5, s.v. "capitalism," "inheritance," "land distribution," "property;" Richard MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1985), chap. 4; L. Bender, "Yellow Creek," 81; R. Loewen, "The Children" 352-53; idem, *From the Inside Out*, 3. Again, a novelist provides one of the most intimate and detailed studies of inheritance, wealth, and land, albeit in the pre-migration Ukraine context; see Birdsell, *The Rusländer*.
- ⁴⁹ For information on income, occupation, and education in the late 1980s, see J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 38-41, 113-15.
- ⁵⁰ P. Redekop, "Mennonite Family," 89; *ME*, vol. 5, s.v. "divorce and remarriage;" *CMEQ*, s.v. "divorce and remarriage." Divorce rates of Mennonites in both countries fall well below those of national percentages.
- ⁵¹ T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 150-51.
- ⁵² For attitudes on "poverty and its remedies," see Kauffman and Driedger, *Mennonite Mosaic*, 204-05.

- ⁵³ Interestingly, very few observers of Mennonite families correlate pacifism and family life. Ivan J. Kauffman, who grew up Mennonite and became Roman Catholic, however, argues that the fact that Mennonite men do not serve in the military is significant. He notes that masculinity and relationships between men and other men, men and women, and men and children are different; see Kauffman, "On Being a Mennonite Catholic," *MQR* 77 (2003): 238. For the roles of families—both their presence and absence—in the decisions of Mennonite draft resisters during the Vietnam War, see Melissa Miller and Phil M. Shenk, *The Path of Most Resistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Ppress, 1982), 25-26, 58-59, 66-67, 76-77, 82, 84, 88, 97, 82, 84, 88, 97, 110-11, 120, 132, 135, 141-43, 155-57, 159-60, 173-74, 188-89, 200, 210-11.