

Janis Thiessen, *Necessary Idealism: A History of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 247. Softcover, \$24.99.

When a history book was suggested by the planning committee for Westgate Mennonite Collegiate's fiftieth anniversary in 2008, Janis Thiessen proposed a peer-reviewed academic work that would address the positive and the negative dimensions of the Winnipeg private secondary school's past, instead of the type of celebratory monograph or pictorial institutions often commission. As Thiessen observes, that the school agreed to this critical approach is consistent with its history. For a half-century the administration, faculty, and supporting churches of Westgate debated questions concerning the school's identity and mission, debates that formed part of broader deliberations about the meaning of Mennonite identity in postwar, urban Canada, and whose study contributes to an analysis of the connection between ethnic and religious private schooling and Canadian cultural pluralism.

The founders of Westgate were motivated by the desire to preserve and transmit their Mennonite faith and heritage. Much of the tension in this history centres on differences about what this meant. Thiessen quotes Victor Peters, who with his wife and fellow educator Elisabeth initiated the school idea, to describe the vision behind the school. Peters emphasized the value of openness toward aspects of the secular world and inward-directed criticism, remarking that "each cultural group should try to preserve that which is good in its own culture and take on the good aspects of other cultural groups, at the same time discarding the less valuable aspects of its own culture" (22). Thiessen explains that the founders believed the existing Manitoba Mennonite schools "provided too narrow a perspective, both religiously and socially" (14). Thiessen refers repeatedly to the reputation for liberality held by the school and by First Mennonite Church, the congregation of the original founders, by which she seems to mean a position of openness toward the world as well as the necessity of individual freedom, particularly in decisions about faith.

Discussions about Westgate's mission and purpose are addressed extensively in the first three chapters. Chapter 1 situates Westgate in the limited historiography of private schooling in Canada, before describing the founding of the Mennonite Educational Institute, as the school was first called, presenting the perspectives of early teachers obtained through oral history interviews. Changes in location, name, and governance model are detailed, and the evolution of

its current mission statement is summarized. Religious instruction and German language education were the priorities of the founders and are the focus of chapter 2. Despite its original importance, the teaching of German was debated within Westgate's first decade, and in time German would be taught as a world language rather than as a key element of Mennonite heritage. Most of the chapter examines how Westgate addressed the question of how to teach the faith in the secular city, and how to navigate a course between the "extremes of religious indoctrination and unquestioning conformity to secular society" (61–62). Criticism by churches of the school's approach to religious education resulted in the creation of a more evangelical "Statement of Aims" in 1966, followed by a revised statement a decade later that was less dogmatic and more in keeping with principles of Anabaptist voluntarism. Chapter 3 explores the relationship between Westgate and its supporting churches. Although the school was owned and governed by an educational society, financial challenges led it to seek greater support from the churches, support which increased conflict over the school's religious identity. Churches regularly challenged the "spirit" and adequacy of Westgate's religious teaching, in addition to its permissive discipline and its administration. The 1966 "Aims" and their revision are again addressed here.

Finances were the other major source of ongoing concern. Chapter 4 outlines the school's relocations and building projects, and the zoning battles that accompanied the latter. The Ladies' Auxiliary, whose fundraising was crucial to the school's survival, is given its due in a long section. The final two chapters address the experiences of students and staff, respectively. These might have been the main subjects in a different book, perhaps veering into nostalgia, but the institutional approach is maintained. Chapter 5 focuses on the development of the music and arts program, extracurricular activities, and organized social activities, and highlights changing attitudes toward art and student behaviour. In chapter 6, Thiessen brings her expertise as a labour historian to a study of professionalization and changes in staff work life, examining the politics of staff evaluation, discussions of negotiations around salary and benefits, and the ramifications of an incident when parents and board members sought the resignation of two teachers in 1990. Both chapters rely in part on interviews with students and staff, though the experiences of the latter are related in greater detail. Thiessen concludes with the observation that the recurrence of communal deliberation about identity and purpose in Westgate's history should "resonate strongly with Mennonites, given their emphasis on voluntarism and the 'priesthood of all believers'" (237).

Thiessen, a professor of history at the University of Winnipeg, was a teacher at Westgate when she began her research, as well as a former student. Her insider's perspective seems mainly to have provided insights that enhanced her analysis. Effective use is made of oral history interviews, the subjects of which are often candid. Some repetition might have been eliminated, although the thematic organization of the book makes it hard to avoid, and the uninitiated would benefit from a discussion of the religious and cultural diversity between and within Mennonite church groups, and the relative significance of terms like "evangelical." Overall, this is a fine institutional history that helps illuminate both the history of Mennonites and the history of education in Canada.

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Judith C. Kulig, *Caring for the Low German Mennonites: How Religious Beliefs and Practices Influence Health Care*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019. Pp. 152. Softcover, \$29.95.

Dr. Judith Kulig is a well-known rural health researcher who has spent twenty years of her academic career studying Low German (LG) Mennonites, who are descendants of the original Old Colony Anabaptist group that migrated to Canada from Russia during the late 1800s. Her findings come from fieldwork undertaken on 217 LG Mennonites from Belize, Mexico, and Canada and the over 80 health and social service providers who cared for them. She adeptly portrays the complexity of this group, noting that they are primarily a faith-based (not cultural) community with common features (e.g., reliance on the Bible) yet with diversity in terms of religious affiliations/beliefs, degree of separation from mainstream society, restrictions imposed on members, and the pursuit of higher education. The book addresses four health topics: general health and illness, women's health, death and dying, and mental health. Despite diversity in beliefs and practices across geographic areas, communities, and individuals, common themes emerged from a synthesis of the findings across the studies in these topic areas. One common theme was that of suffering, which was seen as a natural learning opportunity sent by God, and best addressed by engaging in daily prayer. Another theme was community responses/views on certain issues where stigma or perceived divergence from God's plan exist, which