

# Mennonite Business and Labour Relations: Friesens Corporation of Altona, Manitoba, 1933–1973

Janis Thiessen, *University of Manitoba*

Business has been one of the most underrated, ignored, and misunderstood topics in Mennonite life. Although Mennonites have always been deeply involved in business, there is little explicit discussion of business in writings by or about Mennonites. In fact, Mennonites have been described as antipathetic toward business.<sup>1</sup>

Calvin Redekop's comments on business in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* present a curious paradox in Mennonite life. Historically, many Mennonites have been economically successful. Yet there has been a reluctance to discuss that success, an unwillingness to examine the manner in which a people with a strong commitment to social justice and community have accepted the values of a capitalist society.

The success of Mennonite-owned business may be attributed in part to the effective integration of religious belief and economic practice. The most well known presentation of the synergistic relationship between religion and capitalism is that of Max Weber.<sup>2</sup> Weber argues that the Calvinist notion of work as a divine calling developed during the Reformation and culminated in the Protestant work ethic. Mennonites, it is true, do not consider work a calling or a means of salvation; however, they do have their own religiously based work ethic. Where the Protestant work ethic emphasizes individualism and personal success

as a proof of God's blessing, the Mennonite work ethic stresses collective effort as evidence of one's relationship with God. The Mennonite work ethic thus incorporates the collective values of honesty, trustworthiness, cooperation, and joint effort. This ethic was reinforced by the Mennonites' history of persecution at the hands of state and religious authorities. Hard work was found to provide not only economic stability for Mennonites, but it also served to convince state authorities to extend social tolerance to Mennonites. The Mennonite work ethic therefore enabled Mennonites to be active participants in capitalist economies. Ironically, Mennonite church leaders may have further enabled such participation by encouraging the community to accept their authority. In this century, the willingness of Mennonites to accept managerial authority, even as they accepted the authority of their fathers, husbands, and church leaders, made them model employees from an employer's perspective.

This paper explores the history of one particular Mennonite business between 1933 and 1973: Friesens Corporation (formerly D.W. Friesen & Sons), a printing firm in the Mennonite West Reserve of southern Manitoba and today one of Canada's largest printers. I am suggesting that during the company's early years, management was able to use a paternalist management style to equate the Mennonite work ethic with corporate values. With the company's success and expansion, paternalism was no longer able to meet the needs of the employees. The collapse of paternalism in the early 1970s was brought about by the dramatic expansion of the company in the previous decade.

Obedience to authority is a necessary component of paternalist workplace relations. Canadian labour historian, Joan Sangster defines paternalism as the interaction of company values with class and gender inequalities.<sup>3</sup> In her study, male employers often sought to establish a community feeling in the workplace, "often by equating the factory with an actual or imagined family" with themselves as the dominant father figures.

Paternalism was intended to avoid labour unrest, to preserve managerial authority, and to satisfy a patrician sense of philanthropy. While often cloaked in a rationale of obligation, duty or honour, paternalism essentially justified, extended, or at most modified existing power relationships.<sup>4</sup>

Sangster equates paternalism with the Gramscian notion of hegemony. Ideology, defined as "the production and articulation of systems of social meanings, values and belief systems," is reinforced by social practices.<sup>5</sup> The power relationships established within the workplace by managers and owners are duplicated in the community and so become reified or naturalized. Class consciousness, the awareness of class inequality, is discouraged by the promotion of the "illusion of community."<sup>6</sup> Paternalism thus encourages "consent to economic hierarchy as [an] inevitable part of daily life."<sup>7</sup>

Critical to an understanding of paternalist relations is the notion of deference provided by British historian Patrick Joyce. He argues that deference is the "moral legitimization of class domination."<sup>8</sup> While deference is not the immediate result of the existence of community, it is nevertheless "inexplicable" without

an understanding of its connections to and involvement in community.<sup>9</sup> Its roots may be found in the community and, specifically, the home.<sup>10</sup> There are two aspects to deference: behaviour and attitudes. Joyce warns that the deferential behaviour of employees is often calculated, and that an examination of attitudes must focus on their social context and not on personalities. Historians must be careful not to misinterpret the subordination of workers, because their self-esteem is often very strong.<sup>11</sup>

Deference is rooted in dependence, in the economic necessity of work and the stability of the population.<sup>12</sup> It legitimates the existing social hierarchy by converting "power relations into moral ones."<sup>13</sup> The present arrangement of power is hegemonized: *is* becomes *ought*.<sup>14</sup> There are, however, limits to hegemony because there is always "the danger of deference being 'seen through'." If paternalism fails to "deliver the economic goods," deference will collapse.<sup>15</sup> Employers must be careful not to extend their power too far. The use of coercion, for example, erodes the moral basis of deference.<sup>16</sup> Joyce notes that employers may encourage deference by providing social activities for employees. These activities contribute to worker identification with, and loyalty to, their firm, and are a "powerful antidote" to trade unions.<sup>17</sup>

Henry P. Dick opened Altona's first printery shortly after the First World War.<sup>18</sup> D.W. Friesen, a "Kanadier" Mennonite and private school teacher from Lichtfeld, Manitoba, had moved to Altona in 1905.<sup>19</sup> After unsuccessfully operating a Massey-Harris implement business bought from John B. Schwartz, in 1907 he purchased Jacob Schwartz's confectionery store, which had been established ten years earlier.<sup>20</sup> This business, which would later develop into the printing and stationery firm D.W. Friesen & Sons, is today the only business in Altona that can trace its origins to the town's early years.<sup>21</sup>

The business underwent modest expansion, with the purchase of a retail bookstore from school inspector G.G. Neufeld in 1923.<sup>22</sup> Commenting on his father's interest in expanding the business in its early years, son Ted Friesen remarked:

I don't know if he had the interest or not, but I don't think he had the, well, let me tell you about my father. He was a man of very little education. He had three months of English education — he was a self-educated man, as so many of that generation were. He started off in business. He was the postmaster, he had the telephone office, and he owned a general store. A growing family. The only deacon in the [Altona Berghthaler Mennonite] church,<sup>23</sup> which in those days was a considerable amount of work. And I think the fact that he was, that he had so many things that he was involved in, there was no time for expansion on his part. There was a bit of growth, but he was just busy looking after what he had.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike D.W., son D.K. Friesen was eager to leave the community for the big city to "imitate Horatio Alger's climb from rags to riches."<sup>25</sup> To prevent this, D.W. bought a car in 1930 that enabled D.K. to sell school supplies in the surrounding area.<sup>26</sup> In 1933, D.K. ventured into the printing industry. He bought a small hand-fed Gordon press and operated from the basement of his father's store,

hiring his friend, David J. Harder, to assist with the job printing.<sup>27</sup> Dick's Altona Printery was "rarely open for business" due to the illness of the owner, and thus provided no serious competition to Friesen.<sup>28</sup> In 1935, D.K. purchased a second press, rented the building that had housed the Berghaler Mennonite Church "Waisenamt" (trust company), and hired his cousin D.G. Friesen.

D.G. Friesen recalls that the work was difficult but rewarding. On early winter mornings, he would start a fire to soften the ink so the presses would be ready to roll by noon.

...I'd help set type because that was all done by hand, taking little characters off of trays to set them together in lines—very primitive. I remember one job we did, it was an arithmetic book. And we had to, we set up two pages, and then we had to disassemble the copy, the type, the letters, put them into drawers, and set up two new pages. And that's how we did the printing of a hundred arithmetic books for the school.<sup>29</sup>

A year later, in 1936, H.P. Dick died and D.K. bought his printery, using money borrowed from a retired farmer. The building was enlarged, Peter Wolfe was hired, and a Linotype was purchased.<sup>30</sup> D.G. Friesen explains:

...D.K. bought a Linotype, that was setting type from an ingot of metal — it was melted down and then letters were formed in a line. It was an advance already in printing procedure. I did that, too, set type occasionally when the other typesetters were busy with something else. Primarily, my job through the years, most of the years, was pressman, operating presses.<sup>31</sup>

Friesen Printers would owe much of its later success to the willingness of both management and staff to adopt new technology.

The environment for employees in the early years of the business can be best described as familial or collegial. The owners knew the workers and their families by name. The staff was small and the employers were actively involved in the business. Management and employees worked side by side in the print shop; everyone knew what everyone else was doing. Until 1947, D.K. and his wife lived on the premises of the printery. His mother lived next door.

During the hot summer days, when the windows were left open for ventilation, the workers in the printing end of the building would at times hear D.K.'s mother call out from her house: 'Dave, it is morning and time to get up and go to work.'<sup>32</sup>

In such a situation, labour-management relations were bound to be relaxed. There was no need for formal procedures, committees, or negotiations. Darnton-esque tales of printer camaraderie are not lacking in these early years.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Peter Wolfe once offered Jack Baxted a cube of gelatin glue to chew, which he accepted, thinking it a piece of fudge.<sup>34</sup>

In 1940, D.K. Friesen decided to start a paper, the Altona *Echo*, which later merged with the Morris *Herald* to become the *Red River Valley Echo*, and hired Elizabeth (Isby) Bergen as reporter.<sup>35</sup> Father D.W. Friesen resigned as Manitoba Telephone System agent and postmaster in 1946, and two years later, his sons bought his share of the business for \$88 132.88.<sup>36</sup> The business was incorporated as a limited company in 1951 as "D.W. Friesen & Sons," later to become

"Friesens Corporation." Historian Gerhard John Ens gives credit to Altona's two largest employers of the time, Cooperative Vegetable Oils and D.W. Friesen & Sons, for Altona's post-war survival and growth. "The one tied Altona firmly to its agricultural hinterland and the cooperative ethic and the other was a tribute to the business acumen and ambitions of the Friesen family."<sup>37</sup>

Historian Ted Regehr notes that early Mennonite business ventures emerged from a rural agricultural context, with family and community as the primary focus.<sup>38</sup> This argument is clearly valid for the development of business in Altona. While many Mennonite businesses had their origins in the pre-1945 era, during the next two decades of the "Great Disjuncture," the transformation from agriculture to agribusiness, from "pastoral refuge" to "one large production unit," Mennonite entrepreneurship blossomed.<sup>39</sup> The shift to business principles on the farm encouraged such entrepreneurship. Mennonites succeeded in businesses where "their traditional values and family and community patterns could be applied with relative ease," such as labour-intensive businesses where a reputation for honesty and integrity was important, and where workers were fellow Mennonites who would transfer their community loyalties to the business.<sup>40</sup>

Regehr comments on the "remarkable flowering of Canadian Mennonite entrepreneurship and economic diversification in the late 1940s."<sup>41</sup> Most of these entrepreneurs were former farmers, so they knew and understood the needs of the rural community they serviced.<sup>42</sup> Their background in the Mennonite farming community provided them with "natural contacts," as well as the "unique market and labour advantages in the rural communities."<sup>43</sup> These "market advantages" resulted from the fact that those living in rural communities like Altona did not have the retail choices that were available in urban centres like Winnipeg. Firms that established themselves in small towns thus had an almost guaranteed market. Even though the automobile was decreasing the distance between country and city, rural consumers still found local shopping to be more convenient.

The "labour advantages" Regehr speaks of resulted from the fact that Mennonite young people were finding it increasingly difficult to establish farms of their own, and thus were compelled to go out and find wage labour.<sup>44</sup> The impact of agribusiness made it easier to attract workers to the new businesses being established by these Mennonite entrepreneurs. Other advantages accrued from the fact that these labourers were mostly fellow Mennonites. Canadian economist John Godard notes that "if workers come from a conservative culture, in which obedience and deference to authority are strongly encouraged, and if the culture in the workplace is one where workers are highly committed and defiance or sabotage are frowned upon, then the level of conflict and work avoidance is likely to be relatively low, and most managerial actions are likely to be interpreted in a positive light."<sup>45</sup> Post-World War II Mennonites had just such a conservative culture. The sixteenth-century Anabaptist doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers," the commitment to the belief that in matters of church life, all members hold equal authority, did not extend into twentieth-century work-

place relations. Here a clear pattern of deference to authority existed. Regehr explains that the Mennonite employers "were the bosses, rewarding employees according to what they believed was fair and equitable, much as the head of a farm family expected every member to contribute to the success of the farm and then to be rewarded as the head of the household saw fit. Employees were expected to think first and foremost of the business and, beyond that, to trust the goodwill and generosity of their employer."<sup>46</sup>

Economist Roy Vogt also argues that the willingness of Mennonites to accept managerial authority, even as they accepted the authority of their fathers, husbands, and church leaders, made them model employees from an employer's perspective.<sup>47</sup>

YEAR	TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	SALES
1952	—	—	\$198 918.00
1956	—	32	\$318 427.00
1959	16 500	—	\$568 534.00
1964	22 500	150	\$1 098 818.00
1967	33 500	150	\$1 940 509.00
1976	—	250	\$8 286 487.00
1981	85 000	360	\$22 100 128.00

**Figure 1. Growth of Friesens Corporation, 1952-1981.**

(Source: *Friesens Corporation records*)

During the tremendous expansion of Friesens Corporation following its incorporation in 1951 the Mennonite work ethic began to be equated with company values (see Fig. 1). It could no longer be assumed that all staff were aware of management's values and expectations. The connection between the Mennonite work ethic and the values of the company was made through an emphasis on the heritage of the company's founder. The company's official history, written by Ted Friesen, states that D.W. Friesen had come from "a simple, rural background. Hard work, plain living, conforming to the religious and social community, were not only expectations but necessities."<sup>48</sup> Effort, frugality, honesty, social conformity and acceptance of authority were attributes of the founder that were now sought from the employees. The principles espoused by the founder were to be "renewed and magnified" in the lives of the three sons and their employees.

We as Management want to renew and magnify that heritage. It is important that every employee fit into the pattern of this aim and policy. You are identified with the organization you work for; therefore, your conduct directly or indirectly will be

a reflection on D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd. We are confident that you will be happy and find satisfaction in working for our firm if you are in harmony with its objectives.<sup>49</sup>

In exchange for the loyalty and conformity of their employees, management promised to “make [employees] feel at home,” to respect employees, and to provide financial security and the opportunity to develop individual talents. Management made a commitment to staff to meet their needs for “economic security, emotional security, recognition, self-expression, and self-respect.”<sup>50</sup> “Last but not least,” the company promised “the development of a healthy community through the providing of goods and services, through deepening of spiritual values, and the strengthening and stabilization of the economic base.”<sup>51</sup>

The spiritual values of the founder were promoted by management. At a shareholders’ meeting in 1955, company president D.K. Friesen read a statement of corporate objectives on behalf of the three brothers:

It was pointed out that the Christian principles that guided their founder and father are in every way and sense their own. It was stressed that it was the wish of the executive that the employees of the company live a life consistent with these principles and thus honor the memory of the founder after whom the firm has been named.<sup>52</sup>

The Christian value mentioned most frequently in these tributes to the founder is that of service to others. In a staff memorandum two years later, D.K. mentioned having read a “creed” which he wished to apply to himself and share with the staff.<sup>53</sup> He quoted:

I believe in the work this business is doing, and in the fellowship of those who work with me in it, and in what it produces. I am willing to serve faithfully, to get together in solving problems, and to work harmoniously in getting the work done.

The quotation, couched in the language of a religious confession of faith, no doubt served to elevate the values espoused. D.K. went on to elaborate that there is “more to business than just dollars and cents. Business, if successful, must serve a purpose. That purpose is to serve fellow men. In serving others we find the greatest happiness, a service that makes life worthwhile.”<sup>54</sup>

The personal work experiences of two long-time employees are helpful in examining the impact of the interaction of the Mennonite work ethic and corporate values on labour relations at Friesens. D.G. Friesen was a press operator and proofreader. Elizabeth (Isby) Bergen was a newspaper reporter. Both were hired in 1935, and both were employed by the company for fifty years.

Staff relations were “very congenial,” according to D.G. Friesen. “We were all under one roof, so we got chances to mingle with other departments’ workers.” Management, he claimed, was both understanding and tolerant. “Public relations were a priority, resulting in a more or less smooth system of operation from supervisor down to floor manager down to novice. Allowance was made to correct errors in work: learn by experience but don’t make a mistake too often.”

By the way, throughout the years, efforts were made by outside organizations to unionize the shop. It never took hold. The management would not allow that to happen. And they would introduce plans for the benefit of their employees so that they would not have any reason to go to something else than what they had there. The number of employees attests to that fact: there are [today] over four hundred employees in the plant. They offered good wages and benefits which invited employees to stay on indefinitely.<sup>55</sup>

D.G. Friesen acknowledged the connection between the provision of employee benefits and the employer's strategy for avoiding unionization detailed by Sangster.<sup>56</sup>

Isby Bergen also began working with the company in 1935. The casual family atmosphere of the company is the most treasured memory of her employment. Her description of labour relations at Friesens emphasized the family feeling of the workplace, and the importance of the small size of the business in maintaining that feeling. She stated that the working environment was "very different from what it is today. Very informal. I found the workers were very good, very congenial." When asked to describe her interaction with her employer, she replied:

It's not like today. Our way of life has changed so much. There wasn't that difference at all; we were all in it together. Immature, in a way. None of us had experience putting together a newspaper. And there were only very few employees [so D.K. worked side by side with them]... I have to say we were very close friends, not just workers. I guess today it might be different. I can see with a larger staff of four or five hundred that you don't become quite so close. With us, we were all friends together, and it makes a difference.<sup>57</sup>

Throughout her description of her employment at Friesens, Isby Bergen relied on the metaphor of a family. Even today, she identifies very strongly with the company:

[T]hinking back now and talking to some of the staff, there is a difference. It's not quite as close, which I can understand. With a bigger staff, that changes things. I guess it's like a family, when you're small you're very close, but if you have many kids, and it gets to be twelve or fourteen sometimes [you lose some closeness]. But I still feel we—my goodness, I always say 'we' and it's not 'we' anymore!<sup>58</sup>

The efforts which the three brothers made to communicate with the staff and become involved in their lives were appreciated by Isby Bergen.

"And [D.K.] had an excellent head on him. I'm not saying that just because he was a friend of mine, he was.... [A] lot of people went to him for advice. He was very much like his father. He had a congenial way of working with people. I think that he was very understanding. And he never made people feel just because he was owner and manager, that he was above the rest. I know all the staff would say when Dave [D.K.] comes in, when Ted comes in, they greet everyone by their name, they take the time to say good morning. Little things, it was just little things. But somehow, to the staff, it just made a difference. It showed their consideration for everyone."<sup>59</sup>



Isby Bergen still gets together with members of the Friesen family for birthdays and anniversaries. "[W]e were very close and still are. I feel so much a part of that family." She described the Friesens as "more like relatives than employers, really," and commented on a physical resemblance between herself and D.K. Friesen's sister: "And his sister, some people think we're sisters."<sup>60</sup>

The paternalist industrial relations at Westclox (a clock factory in Peterborough Ontario), as described by historian Joan Sangster, offer insight into the corporate culture at Friesens. Westclox and Friesens provided a variety of employee benefits in order to secure a stable labour force and to avoid unionization.<sup>61</sup> Westclox planned production a year in advance to "regularize employment, thus creating workers' loyalty."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Friesens management had justified their expansion into box-making and calendar production in part by promising that it would allow for the year-round employment of seasonal yearbook workers.<sup>63</sup> At Westclox, the physical needs of employees were met by the provision of a cafeteria, tennis courts, and an infirmary.<sup>64</sup> Sangster argues that "discretionary benefits," such as the offer of loans by Westclox to "deserving" workers for the purchase of houses, served to reinforce "ties of loyalty and obligation between boss and worker."<sup>65</sup>

According to Sangster, employee loyalty to the company was especially encouraged by social activities that served as "company rituals." Picnics, Christmas parties, and retirement dinners were activities that promoted identification with Westclox.<sup>66</sup> A variety of company events served a similar function at Friesens. The staff Christmas banquets that began in the 1950s originally were held in the three Friesen brothers' private homes. Annual picnics were begun in the 1970s.<sup>67</sup> A River Rouge cruise and buffet dinner for all staff, their spouses and children were held to celebrate the provincial centennial in 1970.<sup>68</sup> Sports activities, like other corporate events, further promoted employee loyalty. Sangster comments on the importance of company athletics: "Sports were meant to create a sense of company loyalty, suggesting competition with the outside, but team effort inside; they were supposed to create a loyal, disciplined, and committed workforce that strove to give its best performance on and off the job."<sup>69</sup> She concludes, "sport teams could create a sense of harmony in small communities, even temporarily muting class differences."<sup>70</sup> In this light it is noteworthy that company sport teams — curling, baseball, golf, slow pitch, and hockey teams — existed at Friesens just as they did at Westclox.

Both companies, too, fostered corporate loyalty by in-house publications. Sangster argues that at Westclox such publications were deliberate efforts to convince workers that they were stakeholders, that they had responsibility for the company's success, and that the company cared about their welfare and personal lives.<sup>71</sup> At Friesens a variety of employee newsletters, some produced by employees but most produced by management, existed over the years. The monthly newsletter *Friesen Informer* contained information regarding curling bonspiels and other sports activities, introduced staff by naming their spouses

and children and detailing their hobbies, and commented on the success of various departments in meeting deadlines.

At both companies, paternalism was assisted by the social structure of the towns in which they operated. As Sangster argues, hierarchies in the workplace are reinforced by hierarchies in the congregational, political and social organizations of the community. Paternalism at Westclox was reinforced by the fact that owners and managers had status and power not only on the job but also in the community.<sup>72</sup> Such was certainly the case with the three Friesen brothers, who held positions of authority not only locally, but also nationally.<sup>73</sup> And it was an authority bolstered by charitable donations made by the company. Friesens has been active in the local community, making significant financial contributions for (among other things) the creation of the Altona Public Library.<sup>74</sup> While undoubtedly benefiting the community, such donations, in the words of Canadian labour historian Joy Parr, create "a deep sense of loyalty and personal indebtedness" toward the employer on the part of the community.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, the respective compositions of Peterborough and Altona played a crucial role in the success of the paternalist strategy of corporate management. Sangster argues that in the "small-town atmosphere" of the ethnically-homogeneous city of Peterborough, the success of paternalism was made simpler "by the geographical proximity of worker and manager in some neighbourhoods and churches, close knowledge of family networks, and a stable social hierarchy [which] bolstered the ideological hegemony operating within the factory, creating the illusion of an 'organic community' in which class and community interest were one and the same."<sup>76</sup>

The existence of these conditions in Altona served paternalism at Friesens in a similar manner. The labour history of Peterborough and Altona was also significant. The absence of labour unions from Peterborough before the 1940s, and from Altona to the present day, "meant that workers did not have at hand institutional or ideological alternatives to the paternalist bargain."<sup>77</sup> Instead, workers manipulated the paternalist arrangement for their benefit.

Though on the surface paternalism seemed to symbolize deference to one's employer, a more negotiated accommodation was involved. While the paternalist bargain meant acquiescence, at least to some extent, to economic inequality...at work, a distinct notion of 'dignity owed' to workers and the respectability of their aspirations and lives...was promoted and defended by the workers themselves.<sup>78</sup>

It was only when the benefits of paternalism to workers were on the wane that employees at Westclox and Friesens took a serious interest in unionization.<sup>79</sup>

By the late 1960s, a series of dramatic changes altered the workplace at Friesens and encouraged employee activism. Shiftwork was introduced in September 1969.<sup>80</sup> A year later, employees were reminded of the economic difficulties facing the company and the benefits employees received from Friesens.<sup>81</sup> High unemployment and competition were problems that Manitoba's economy faced, management pointed out. These difficulties affected Friesens: the printing department was showing a loss and the stationery department profits

were down over the previous year. Despite these problems, the company told its workers, fringe benefits had increased and profit sharing was still in operation. Employees were reminded that wages had increased by two percent in March. Friesens management argued that they paid the highest wage scale in Altona and that wages were "in line with the industry — taking into consideration many factors that vary between rural and city living conditions." Though business was described as "slack," there had been no layoffs, and so it was necessary to shorten hours.<sup>82</sup> The memorandum that announced the change in working hours to staff stated:

The above change has been discussed fully with all Foremen and Sub-foremen and unanimously agreed to. If any employees have any questions that cannot be answered by their Foremen, Management would be pleased to discuss them with any employee individually.<sup>83</sup>

More changes took place in 1971. A new addition was completed, which included new workspace and a mezzanine, and new equipment was purchased.<sup>84</sup> Time clocks were introduced.<sup>85</sup> The stationery department expanded into business machine repairs. Employees were transferred from one division to another. These changes caused some concern among employees, which management sought to assuage:

Much planning has gone into these changes, and we know that they are not perfect.... The changes have not always been to everyone's liking, but we have kept the 'human element' uppermost in our minds, considering also what is in the best interest of the business. People are the most important element everywhere. No matter how well we build the physical facilities, if people are not satisfied in their jobs or their environment, they will not be happy or productive. Therefore, we have tried to make the surroundings as satisfying as possible. Any suggestions for improvement will be welcomed, and will have our most serious consideration.<sup>86</sup>

The upheaval produced confusion about job descriptions. At a time when the business was becoming more hierarchical, and when management was seeking to define the roles of departments more clearly and to provide divisions with separated physical facilities, employee responsibilities were relatively ambiguous. D.K. Friesen cautioned staff:

It is not always easy to define everyone's duties exactly. Sometimes the definition must be quite general. It is, therefore, imperative that we all do the things that have to be done, without questioning too much whether or not that is 'my job.' This also applies between departments. There frequently is friction between departments, and this should not be. It is all 'ONE BUSINESS.' If one department suffers, the whole business suffers. The profits of the *whole* business are grouped together to arrive at the profit-sharing figure, from which you benefit.<sup>87</sup>

The continual expansion of the company throughout the 1960s resulted in communication problems between management and staff. An effort to improve the situation was made in 1968 when a staff newsletter was initiated, albeit with trepidation.

We have started an Employee's Bulletin [sic] on numerous occasions. It has come out so infrequently by many past editors that we hesitate to start another. But the need for such a publication is vital, as we feel that communication between front-office and staff is often sadly lacking, so we will try again.<sup>88</sup>

The newsletter was to appear once or twice a month.

Management realized that company growth was causing problems in the sphere of industrial relations. D.K. told employees that, regrettably, "relations become more impersonal no matter how hard we try," as the size of the staff has increased. Though the monthly staff memorandum was designed to "supplement the personal relations," management was aware that it was not a substitute.<sup>89</sup> Even the "open-door policy" for addressing grievances was questioned.

I can say 'My door is always open. Come in and discuss any of your problems with me.' But I can understand this is not easy for you to do, and management decisions are therefore not always understood the way they were intended. This creates misunderstandings and sometimes resentment.<sup>90</sup>

Management was aware of employees' frustration. D.K. Friesen reminded staff that "We all get 'fed up' with our job at some time or other. This applies to anything we do, wherever we work. But, on the whole, we should like the work we are doing, and should take pride in it." He concluded, "If the job is worth doing, it is worth doing well."<sup>91</sup>

The weakening of personal relationships with the expansion of the company, together with the many changes brought about by management at the turn of the decade, made Friesens fertile ground for union organizers. Winnipeg Local 191 of the International Typographers Union (ITU) responded. The local had shown interest in Friesens as early as 1952.<sup>91</sup> A former union leader of ITU Local 191 recalled that Friesens was "not fruitful ground to work on."<sup>92</sup> Altona was a "tight knit community" and "people were not interested in unionizing." He described employees as being happy with the company. He gave Friesens "full marks for being progressive." The company bought equipment in the 1950s that printing plants in Winnipeg at the time were "not willing to touch."<sup>93</sup> Efforts to organize on behalf of the Winnipeg local of the ITU must have begun as early as April of 1972.<sup>94</sup> Management found it necessary, in a draft memorandum to staff, to couple a discussion of wage increases with an explanation of their attitude toward unions. The weekly wage of journeymen and apprentice printers would be raised to the level of the Winnipeg Lithographers' and Pressmen's International Union (LPIU) scale. Management hastened to point out that "the Lithographers scale is higher than [that of] the ITU."<sup>95</sup> The memorandum continued: "[i]n addition to equaling the union weekly wage rate our employees receive many additional fringe benefits," which included profit sharing and employee share ownership.

The memorandum concluded with "some reasons why we are non-union." A union, it was argued, could not provide "skilled employees" in a small town. "We have much more sophisticated equipment than most commercial plants and unions in Winnipeg have no trained staff they can give us to operate this

equipment.”<sup>97</sup> It also was feared that the existing “good liaison” between management and employees “would suffer if we were unionized, because management would have to deal only with the shop steward, or the union organizer.” Wages were described as similar to or higher than weekly wages in Winnipeg union shops although Friesens’ employees worked “slightly longer hours.” Besides profit sharing and sick leave plans, management provided employees with “job security, and actually guarantee the employees an annual wage — have never put them on short hours, or let them out when we are not busy.” Management claimed that “[i]ndications from our employees are that they are not interested in a union, as long as we treat them as fairly as we have in the past.” The rarity of unionized printing plants was also mentioned as a justification for Friesens’ non-union status. Few Winnipeg printing plants were unionized, and “to the best of our knowledge” no industry in the Pembina Triangle was unionized. Management assured employees that they were not prejudiced against unions: “We have employed union members in our plant, and many of our present employees were former union members.” Management concluded:

We have no objection to unions, if they could guarantee our employees a job here, higher annual wages or other benefits. *This is up to employees.* However, it is up to management to generate jobs, unions offer no help there.<sup>98</sup>

It was within this environment that Ray Rudersdorfer, union organizer for Winnipeg Local 191 of the ITU, met with company president D.K. Friesen, vice-president Ray Friesen, and director Harold Buhr in D.K.’s office in Altona on 17 November 1972. Rudersdorfer explained that he had sent literature to some Friesens’ employees, advertised in the Altona *Echo* under a box number, and discussed unions with some employees. Company management was aware of most of his activities. According to D.K. Friesen, Rudersdorfer “also said that he could see no way of organizing our employees except with the assistance of management, and requested our assistance.”<sup>99</sup>

Rudersdorfer provided copies of negotiated wage scales and agreements with other plants. “In comparing them with our own scale, we pointed out that we were paying comparable weekly wages, and in many cases, much higher weekly wages than their scale in Manitoba.”<sup>100</sup> Company management argued it would be difficult to find skilled employees, “which would be [the union’s] obligation, especially to run our sophisticated machinery, much of which they do not have in other Union plants.”<sup>101</sup> Management’s summary of the interview was presented in a staff memorandum eleven days after the meeting, which pointed out the many employee benefits provided at Friesens. There were no union dues or strike pay, no layoffs of permanent employees, and no short hours for permanent staff. Staff was retrained rather than laid off when technology changed. Profit sharing and sick leave plans were further benefits. “Our working conditions are excellent, and we try to maintain good cordial relations with each individual member of staff.”<sup>102</sup>

The memorandum asked the rhetorical questions: why were so few Winnipeg printing plants organized? Why were the largest American printing plants non-union? Why did some Winnipeg plants have company unions or employee associations instead of unions? D.K. Friesen, author of the memorandum, explained that management had told Rudersdorfer that "our main concern was the welfare of our employees, and that much of our expansion had been done to provide more jobs in the community. Unless he could satisfy us that the employees would be better off with a union than they are without one, we would oppose his organizing to the best of our ability."

D.K. suggested that both sides, union and management, prepare a page to be distributed to staff which would outline their position. D.K. would outline current benefits, and Rudersdorfer would describe the advantages of unionism. Rudersdorfer agreed to the suggestion. The memorandum concluded: "To date we have heard nothing further from him, and I thought our employees would be interested in what happened, as many of them knew of his visit."<sup>103</sup>

Rudersdorfer's recollection of the meeting with D.K. Friesen differs in some significant aspects from Friesen's memory. Rudersdorfer stated that D.K. Friesen suggested a joint presentation about the pros and cons of unionization at a meeting with all staff. Rudersdorfer prepared his presentation but made what he termed "a mistake" in allowing Ray Friesen to see his notes before the meeting. The union's presentation was a "three-pronged approach" which compared unions, cooperatives and credit unions, emphasizing that all three were member-driven. Altona had a history of commitment to cooperatives and credit unions, and the three Friesen brothers served as directors of such organizations. According to Rudersdorfer, when Ray Friesen saw Rudersdorfer's presentation and realized it "had a fifty-fifty chance," he cancelled the meeting. Despite the failure to organize Friesens, Rudersdorfer claimed one success: wage increases took place shortly thereafter. There were negative consequences, however. Employees who had been interested in unionization told Rudersdorfer that they felt they were being watched and checked on. Those loyal to the company continued to show no interest in the union, and D.K. "declined to consider any joint [management-labour] effort after that."<sup>104</sup>

The origins of the attempt to organize Friesens are in dispute. According to Ray Rudersdorfer, the initiative for the union drive at Friesens came from a nephew of the three Friesen brothers who was president of an ITU local in Alberta in the 1970s.<sup>105</sup> Press operator D.G. Friesen recalled that the attempt to unionize was the result of "outside influence" and not "local [organization]."<sup>106</sup> Newspaper reporter Isby Bergen disagreed with both of these views. Asked to clarify if printers at Friesens or someone from outside had wanted the union, Bergen replied:

It was somebody, no, it was one of the staff with Friesens who came from outside. I don't know if he was asked to leave or whether he left on his own. I've met him since, that was a while ago. Anyway, he was the instigator. [But other workers weren't interested in the union] which I think says an awful lot for the company.

Oh, you hear rumblings, but there are always rumblings. You've got a staff of over five hundred, there are always going to be some that are unhappy, but not too unhappy to leave.<sup>107</sup>

One month after his meeting with Rudersdorfer, D.K. delivered one of his lengthiest Christmas party speeches. Addressing the staff as "fellow employees," D.K. observed that "No one is always happy with his environment, or day-to-day work. And they shouldn't be, or there would be no progress."<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, company policies existed and rules and regulations must be followed. When they were not followed, management was "apt to scold and admonish a bit, but like a parent, we try to do this gently and instructively, bearing in mind that we all make mistakes, and do it confidentially with each employee, to benefit both himself and the Company." D.K. mentioned that he was "concerned about any friction between employees, or between management and staff," and encouraged employees to discuss all grievances with the Board of Directors.

D.K. used his Christmas speech to launch an appeal to the employees. "There has been some discussion of late about Unions, and we feel this matter should be discussed.... *We sincerely believe* that outside unions are not in the best long-term interest of the employees." He suggested instead the formation of an "employees' association" to which employees would elect their own representatives "without cost to you of Union dues, strike pay, loss of wages, and without destroying the personal relations we now have with each other."<sup>109</sup> The association, set up with management assistance, would negotiate wages and hours of work. "I am certain we would deal much more sympathetically with your representatives than we would with an outside organizer," D.K. concluded.<sup>110</sup>

Though D.K. Friesen was committed to the cooperative movement, that commitment did not translate into similar support for unionism. Friesens Corporation management had enjoyed the benefits of a non-union labour force for years, and were happy to maintain their company's non-union status. As Gerhard John Ens observes, both Friesens and Cooperative Vegetable Oils Ltd., the Altona-based oil-seed crushing plant established in 1943, benefited from "an overabundant supply of non-union labour." The presence of other large industries "would only create competition for available labour driving wages up."<sup>111</sup>

Altona business leaders had worried that the development of other large businesses in the town might introduce labour difficulties to the community. D.K. Friesen noted at a Chamber of Commerce meeting in 1978 that many large firms were attracted to southern Manitoba because of the non-unionized labour force, but these very businesses might prove to be the perfect breeding grounds for union activity. He wondered whether this was desirable.<sup>112</sup>

D.K. commented to Winnipeg *Tribune* reporters in 1976 that "[t]he fact that there are only so many jobs available in Altona has a steadying influence on the labor force."<sup>113</sup> This opposition to the organization of workers was not atypical of Mennonite business people, and even of Mennonite employees.

In Mennonite communities in the past, it was not just employers who did not welcome organized labor unions, but the employees too tended to think of them as an unnecessary intrusion. As recently as 1989 it was the employees not the employers, who appealed to the Manitoba Labour Board and had the union thrown out of a Steinbach-area cooperative poultry-killing plant.<sup>114</sup>

Roy Vogt comments on the willingness of Mennonite employees to accept labour discipline. The Mennonite work ethic is dependent on "the workers on the whole being fairly passive in demanding their rights. I think the businessmen have to some extent taken advantage of that. I think it's one of the reasons for the success of Steinbach."<sup>115</sup>

The Mennonite work ethic is one of hard work, honesty and responsibility to the community. Communally oriented work, "subject to community norms and surveillance," emphasizes the importance of the role of people in success, and defers to community values.<sup>116</sup> Entrepreneur Walter Smucker elaborates: "I think some of the principles you learn through the Mennonite faith contribute to success. You're taught honesty, trustworthiness, high principles and morals, respect for people, and [how] to work with people."<sup>117</sup> Another aspect of the Mennonite work ethic is the commitment to hard work and success.

Seeing something getting organized and seeing it work are dear to the psyche of Mennonites. Even though this practical and creative urge can be considered a universal trait, we submit that there is an almost unique historical component to the Mennonite drive for work.<sup>118</sup>

Mennonites, during the many years when they suffered persecution, discovered that work produced social tolerance and the ability to establish themselves socially and economically. "The Mennonite work ethic thus has existential-historical roots and explains to a large extent the universally acknowledged reputation of Mennonites for honesty and hard work."<sup>119</sup>

An emphasis on hard work and honesty, coupled with the deference of Mennonite employees to their employers, contributed to the early success of Friesens Corporation. In the years following incorporation, management made an effort to connect this Mennonite work ethic with the founder's values and thus with the values of the corporation. As the business expanded in size and the familial relations which had existed between management and staff became increasingly difficult to maintain, the paternalist bargain was no longer tenable. Communication problems between management and staff, together with changes in the organization of the work process, precipitated the union drive. The failure of the ITU's efforts meant that there was no significant gain in bargaining power by labour at Friesens. However, the events of 1972 did alert management to the need to improve labour-management relations. D.K. Friesen, in his final years as company president, expanded opportunities for employees to purchase voting stock in the company.

The authority exercised by Mennonite business owners is in part derived from a larger community authority. As long as the owners' behaviour is seen to be compatible with Mennonite values (respect for workers, appropriate use of



profits), its authority over workers is accepted and worker resistance is unthinkable. As Joyce notes, employees negotiate within paternalism, making use of it for their own benefit, even as their employers do. When this system of deference breaks down, when paternalism is no longer able to "deliver the goods," labour relations are re-negotiated. The tremendous expansion of the company in the years following incorporation resulted in just such a breakdown. Workplace conflict, in the form of an attempt to unionize, emerged at Friesens in the early 1970s when expansion made the family atmosphere of earlier years impossible to maintain.

## Notes

I am grateful to Ted Friesen and David Glenn Friesen of Friesens Corporation for their interest in and assistance with my research, as well as former employees Isby Bergen and D.G. Friesen for consenting to be interviewed. For a more detailed history of the company, see Janis Thiessen, "Friesens Corporation: Printers in Mennonite Manitoba, 1951-1995," M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1997.

<sup>1</sup> Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, volume V, s.v. "Business."

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. 00000 by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); "The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60," *Labour/Le Travail* 32 (Fall 1993): 167-199.

<sup>4</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 169.

<sup>5</sup> Sangster, *Earning Respect*, 163-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>7</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 172.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980), xvii.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi-xxii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Italics mine.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>19</sup> Mennonite Heritage Centre (hereafter MHC), Vertical File, Industry, "Legend: How It All

Began," unpublished manuscript, 1982, 1. This reference gives the town name as Litchfield, which I have assumed is an Anglicism of Lichtfeld, a village southwest of Altona. William Schroeder and Helmut T. Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1990), 62.

<sup>20</sup> Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Altona: The Story of Prairie Town* (Altona MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1982), 64; Frank H. Epp, "D.W. Friesen and his Life Work," *Mennonite Life* 11 (July 1956): 118. Jacob Schwartz had established this confectionery store in 1897. MHC, "Legend," 1; University of Manitoba Archives (hereafter UMA), Winnipeg Tribune Collection, "Altona," MSS 24 no. 181, "A Brief History of Altona by Peter Funk," typescript, 17 July 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Epp-Tiessen, 64.

<sup>22</sup> MHC, "Legend," 2.

<sup>23</sup> The Berghthaler Mennonite Church traced its origins to the Berghthal colony in South Russia. William Schroeder, *The Berghthal Colony*, (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1986), 9-11, 17-19. Bishops, elected ministers and deacons formed a central Lehrdienst or ministerial. A move to congregational autonomy and the use of the English language in the 1950s and 1960s led ultimately to the church's dissolution in 1971. Epp-Tiessen, 136-137, 274-275, 337-8, 341-2.

<sup>24</sup> T.E. Friesen, interview by author, 6 January 1995, Altona, transcript, MHC.

<sup>25</sup> Epp-Tiessen, 154.

<sup>26</sup> A similar situation arose at Brigden's, a printing and engraving firm founded in Toronto in the 1870s. In 1894, founder Frederick Brigden "tried to persuade his younger son to give up his hopes of becoming an artist and to settle, instead, for being an "art-workman" as he had done." Angela E. Davis, "Business, Art and Labour: Brigden's and the Growth of the Canadian Graphic Arts Industry 1870-1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 1986), 66-67.

<sup>27</sup> The most successful model of the Gordon or platen press was the Chandler & Price Gordon, developed by George A. Gordon in the 1850s. Marie Tremaine, ed., *Canadian Book of Printing: How Printing Came to Canada and the Story of the Graphic Arts, Told Mainly in Pictures* (Toronto: Toronto Public Libraries, 1940), 93.

<sup>28</sup> Epp-Tiessen, 155.

<sup>29</sup> D.G. Friesen, interview by author, 27 March 1996, Altona, transcript.

<sup>30</sup> MHC, "Legend," 2, 4; T.E. Friesen, *A History of DWFriesen: A Unique Company, 1907-1993* (Altona: DWFriesen, 1993), 18; Epp-Tiessen, 154, 155; UMA, Winnipeg Tribune Collection, "D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd.," MSS 24 no. 3170, "D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd.," promotional booklet, n.d.; Friesens Corporation, DWFriesen 1990 Staff Book (Altona: DWFriesen, 1990), 6; Julius G. Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein, eds., *Manitoba Mennonite Memories: A Century Past but Not Forgotten* (Altona: Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee, 1974), 211; Friesens Corporation, *DWFriesen and Sons Ltd. Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, 1907-1982* (Altona: DWFriesen, 1982).

<sup>31</sup> D.G. Friesen, interview by author, 27 March 1996, Altona, transcript.

<sup>32</sup> MHC, "Legend," 5. The building in question was the former H.P. Dick printery, which had been purchased in either 1937 or 1938 and moved to another site. D.K. lived in this printery until 1947. Friesens, *Seventy-Fifth*; Friesens, 1990 *Staff Book*, 7; Friesen, *A History of DWFriesen*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Such incidents may be nothing more than simple fun, or, as Robert Darnton points out in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984) and "History and Anthropology," chap in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), they may be demonstrations of class identity. Darnton explains that "a ritual slaughter of cats was hilariously funny to a group of journeyman printers in Paris around 1730" in part because it reinforced the workers' identity as printers but also because it was a subtle comment on employer-employee relations. Lamourette, 330.

<sup>34</sup> MHC, "Legend."

<sup>35</sup> Epp-Tiessen, 226; Toews and Klippenstein, 212.

<sup>36</sup>Epp-Tiessen, 237, 252.

<sup>37</sup> Gerhard John Ens, *The Rural Municipality of Rhineland, 1884-1984* (Altona: R.M. of Rhineland, 1984), 191.

<sup>38</sup> T.D. Regehr, "From Agriculture to Big Business: Canadian-Mennonite Entrepreneurs After 1940," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988): 62-3.

<sup>39</sup> Royden K. Loewen, "Rurality, Ethnicity, and Gender: Patterns of Cultural Continuity During the 'Great Disjuncture' in the R.M. of Hanover, 1945-1961," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1993): 169.

<sup>40</sup> Regehr, "From Agriculture to Big Business," 64.

<sup>41</sup> T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, Volume 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996): 149.

<sup>42</sup> Calvin Redekop has conducted interviews of one hundred randomly selected Mennonite entrepreneurs in Canada and the United States in 1985 and 1986. He found that 69% of the entrepreneurs' fathers were farmers. Calvin Redekop, Stephen C. Ainlay and Robert Siemens, *Mennonite Entrepreneurs* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 72.

<sup>43</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 149.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 149, 152; Redekop, Ainlay and Siemens, 73.

<sup>45</sup> John Godard, *Industrial Relations: The Economy and Society* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, Ryerson, 1994), 89.

<sup>46</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 158.

<sup>47</sup> Roy Vogt, "Entrepreneurs, Labourers, Professionals, and Farmers: A Response to *Mennonites in Canada, A People Transformed*," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 15 (1997): 136-138.

<sup>48</sup> T.E. Friesen, "Philosophy, Policy and Practices," unpublished manuscript, draft copy, n.d.,

<sup>49</sup> MHC, Vertical File, Industry, DWFriesen Employee Handbook, "1981, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Friesen, "Philosophy," 3.

<sup>51</sup> MHC, "1981 Employee Handbook," 3. Not all employees chose to conform. When one employee refused to "conform to Company policies even after several discussions of them with the management," he was fired. A memorandum to foremen explaining the decision concluded: "[W]e feel hurt that we have to take action of this kind, and sometime[s] examine our own actions. Have we as supervisors failed in proper training, in keeping the employee informed as to his duties and responsibilities? We expect everyone to do his best, but oftentimes we can assist an employee to do better, in his position, his work, and his attitude. This we should strive to do." Memorandum to foremen from D.K. Friesen, 18 February 1969. The description of the supervisors' responsibility for restoring errant employees to the conformity of the workplace community is reminiscent of the biblical approach to correction of transgressing church members (Matthew 18:15-18).

<sup>52</sup> Shareholders' meeting minutes, 25 April 1955. A curious departure from Mennonite norms was the company's purchase of Victory Bonds during World War Two. These bonds, amounting to \$600, were sold in 1954 "since these only carried 3% interest and we were paying 6% on our overdraft at the bank." Board of Directors' meeting minutes, 5 March 1954.

<sup>53</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, August 1957.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* A brochure announcing the fiftieth anniversary of the company in 1957 states "To God the Creator and Giver of all good things we give the honour and the glory for the achievements that have been accomplished through him. On this occasion we are also mindful of the confidence placed in us by many people whose patronage has sustained our growth. To them also we extend our thanks." Anniversary brochure, in Friesens Corporation collection of Christmas party speeches delivered by D.K. Friesen.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 179.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Bergen, interview by author, 28 March 1996, Altona, transcript.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 179. Peterborough remained nonunionized until the late 1940s. *Ibid.*, 179 note 55. The provision of benefits was one of the arguments against unionization provided by Friesens management during the organization drive at the Altona plant by the Winnipeg Typographical Union in 1972.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>63</sup> Friesens Informer, staff newsletter, February 1971.

<sup>64</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 180. Friesens provided a cafeteria as well.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-182. Joy Parr agrees that loans by employers to employees were a method of securing a stable workforce. Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 47.

<sup>66</sup> Board of Directors' meeting minutes, 17 March 1965.

<sup>67</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 189.

<sup>68</sup> Friesen, *A History of DWFriesen*, 74.

<sup>69</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, 17 June 1970, 3 December 1970.

<sup>70</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 190.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>72</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 193. Sangster notes that the main purpose of such publications is to "create support for company objectives." *Ibid.* Graham S. Lowe asserts similarly that company newsletters are important in creating a "feeling of community [which coopts] worker resistance to managerial authority." Graham S. Lowe and Harvey J. Krahn, eds., *Working Canadians: Readings in the Sociology of Work and Industry* (Toronto, Methuen, 1984), 166.

<sup>73</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 182.

<sup>74</sup> Company president D.K. Friesen was mayor of Altona from 1970 to 1975. He also served as general manager of CFAM radio station, director of the Canadian Weekly Newspaper Association, president and general manager of the Altona Cooperative Store, vice-president of Cooperative Vegetable Oils, member of the Altona town council, member of the Red River Valley Water Commission, director of the Ebenezer Home for the Aged, member of the Finance Committee of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute, member of the Finance Committee of the Altona Berghaler Mennonite Church, and director of the Berghaler Mennonite Church Administrative Board. Ted Friesen acted as secretary of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Manitoba from 1956 to 1977, treasurer of MCC Canada from 1964 to 1977, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada from 1980 to the present, and director of the Winnipeg Bach Festival. Ray Friesen was Altona mayor from 1952 to 1953, president of the Red River Valley Mutual Insurance Company from 1971 to 1989, and director of the National Association of Printers and Lithographers. Ens, 160, 184, 194; Friesen, *A History of DWFriesen*, 60. D.K. Friesen ran unsuccessfully in a provincial by-election in 1959 as a Liberal-Progressive. Vic Penner and T.E. Friesen, *Altona: A Pictorial History* (Altona: DWFriesen, 1990), 146.

<sup>75</sup> The company has donated over the years to such organizations as the Altona and District Parks Board, Mennonite Central Committee, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, United Way, the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Mennonite Radio Mission, the Education Board of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba, the

Mennonite Collegiate Institute, the Ebenezer Home for the Aged, and the Canadian Mennonite Association-D.W. Friesen Memorial Fund. Board of Directors' meeting minutes, 15 June 1966.

<sup>76</sup> Parr, 37.

<sup>77</sup> The company has donated over the years to such organizations as the Altona and District Parks Board, Mennonite Central Committee, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, United Way, the Canadian Mennonite Bible College, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Mennonite Radio Mission, the Education Board of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba, the Mennonite Collegiate Institute, the Ebenezer Home for the Aged, and the Canadian Mennonite Association-D.W. Friesen Memorial Fund. Board of Directors' meeting minutes, 15 June 1966.

<sup>78</sup> Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 198.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>81</sup> Two shifts were created, which would affect a number of offset pressroom employees. The first shift was from 5 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; the second was from 2:15 p.m. to 11:45 p.m. Both shifts included a half hour lunch break, and a shift differential was paid to those working before 7:30 a.m. and after 5:30 p.m. "The shift work is on a trial basis and Management will evaluate it from time to time as the need arises." Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, 16 September 1969.

<sup>82</sup> Proposal for wages, 1 September 1970, draft copy, in staff memos.

<sup>83</sup> The length of the workday was decreased by half an hour. Male employees were scheduled to work from 7:30 am to 5 pm; females from 8 am to 5 pm. *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, 21 September 1970.

<sup>85</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, 6 December 1971.

<sup>86</sup> These time clocks later were removed. Ted Friesen explained: "[W]e did have time clocks once, but we threw them out. We simply felt that our staff could be trusted. If anyone would be abusing it, I think that people would somebody would be alerting their supervisor. It's difficult to goof off in a business like ours. Maybe in the city it's a little different, but certainly in a small town. And it was a deliberate choice on our part, not to have time clocks." T.E. Friesen, interview by author, 6 January 1995, Altona, transcript, MHC. In a company that emphasized loyalty and a strong work ethic, and in a small town where people knew each other well, labour discipline among workers was thoroughly inculcated.

<sup>87</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, 6 December 1971.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Staff newsletter, July 1968.

<sup>90</sup> Christmas party speech by D.K. Friesen, 14 December 1973.

<sup>91</sup> Christmas party speech by D.K. Friesen, 13 December 1968.

<sup>92</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, 4 July 1970.

<sup>93</sup> Brother Jack Simons enquired into the situation at Altona; "The Executive are awaiting information on wages and conditions, etc., at this plant." Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), Winnipeg Typographical Union Local 191 records, MG 10 A29, Box 5, Folder 5, monthly meeting minutes, 23 February 1962. In 1968, "a point was made that action should be taken against the plants in Altona and Steinbach. Tom Downie stressed the point that patience had to be displayed insofar as success in organizing concerns. It is a proven fact that it takes lots of time to get finally results." PAM, Winnipeg Typographical Union Local 191 records, MG 10 A29, Box 6, Folder 1, Executive committee minutes, special meeting, 21 March 1968.

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous ITU Local 191 union leader, Winnipeg, telephone interview, 6 September 1995.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> A major strike by the ITU against Toronto newspapers, begun in 1964, ended in defeat in 1972. The failed strike seriously weakened the union. Walter Stewart, *Strike* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 117-119.

<sup>97</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, draft copy, 1 April 1972.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Memorandum to staff from D.K. Friesen, 28 November 1972.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Ray Rudersdorfer, Vancouver BC, telephone interview, 6 November 1995. Rudersdorfer observed that it is difficult to organize in a community like Altona, presumably because of its close-knit nature. Higher qualified people, he claimed, usually left Altona for unionized plants.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> D.G. Friesen, interview by author, 28 March 1996, Altona, transcript.

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Bergen, interview by author, 28 March 1996, Altona, transcript.

<sup>109</sup> Christmas party speech by D.K. Friesen, 15 December 1972.

<sup>110</sup> D.K. again acknowledged, however, that personal relations were not what they had been at Friesens. "I often catch myself preaching what I do not practice. I walk through the plant, forgetting to say "good morning," as I may be deep in thought or do not have my glasses on to recognize someone at a distance. Or I forget to congratulate someone on a job well done, on an anniversary, or an event in your family. It was much easier to do this when we had fewer employees, and I apologize for and regret these shortcomings." *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Ens, 241.

<sup>113</sup> Epp-Tiessen, 299.

<sup>114</sup> UMA, "Printing firm's roots still 'small town'," 28 May 1976.

<sup>115</sup> Gerald Wright, *Steinbach: Is There Any Place Like It?* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1991), 61.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>117</sup> "References to the ethical and moral aspects of business life and management [on the part of respondents], even if limited to references to an ethical mother or father, point to a communal orientation, since work and its rewards are hemmed in by the claims of fair play, honesty, and integrity." Redekop, Ainlay and Siemens, 103-104.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.