

The World Wars and Education Among Mennonites in Canada

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The aim of this article is to illustrate the experiences of Mennonites in relation to education during and between the world wars and during the years immediately following World War II. It is not the intent to provide a comprehensive account of such experiences, nor is the account necessarily balanced in relation to all of Canada. Most of the information I was able to locate in archives and libraries located in Winnipeg highlighted experiences in the prairie provinces. It also became apparent to me that some important incidents had not been collected and recorded, and it was necessary to ask a selected sample of persons to relate their experiences and observations. The impact of the world wars on education among Mennonites cannot be isolated from other determining factors, some of which may have had greater influence than the war itself. One can only speculate about how different the current state of affairs in education among Mennonites might have been had Canada not been involved in either of the two major wars.

Prior to World War II (WW II) most Mennonites in Canada were rural people; today most are urban. Mechanization and automation would in any case have reduced the need for manpower on farms. Young people would have had to seek employment elsewhere, and would necessarily have sought training in order to qualify for employment other than on farms. Industrial development, apart from its impact on agricultural methods, promoted the service vocations and accelerated the urbanization of a nation. Rural people everywhere migrated to the towns and cities for training and employment, and quickly accommodated to urban life. By now large numbers of second and third generation Mennonites are urbanites. No doubt the war economy accelerated the urbanization process.

Prior to WW II most Mennonites who aspired to an education beyond that of the elementary school entered what were seen as service-giving vocations, such as teaching and nursing; some became doctors and dentists, and a few became lawyers. Most of the teachers taught in "Mennonite" public

schools, that is in one-room rural school communities which were either totally or predominately Mennonite. The formation of larger administrative school units since WW II brought most teachers into centralized multi-room schools. Today, urban Mennonites exemplify a cross-section of employment in a variety of professions and trades, such as may be found in larger towns and cities. Obviously, urbanization itself has wrought an impact on education among Mennonites. Some Mennonites have become totally assimilated in the general cultural milieu, and most have been affected by the acculturation process.

Events Related to World War I

Manitoba's first school legislation, *The School Act* of 1871, provided for a provincial Board of Education with equal representation of Catholics and Protestants. The Protestant section of this Board offered subsidies to Mennonite private schools, to be available without any interference on the part of the province. Some schools accepted the subsidy.¹ Though publicly supported denominational schools were abolished by *The Public Schools Act* of 1890, provisions were made in 1897 for bilingual schools, which would include English and any other second language. In his office as provincial inspector of Mennonite schools, H.H. Ewert persuaded many of the private schools to become public bilingual schools. Other Mennonite schools retained their German-language private school status.

The "absolute majority of the dominant group," those of British origin, was threatened by the mass immigration from the Continent at the turn of the century.² Bilingual schools proved to be a hindrance to assimilation as well as creating administrative difficulties. During WW I the resentment of the dominant group was directed not only at the more recent immigrants, but also at the French for whom the school language accommodations were primarily introduced through a compromise negotiated between Prime Minister Laurier and Premier Greenway in 1897. The school legislation of 1916 prohibited public bilingual schools and established English as the sole language of instruction.

Some of the Mennonite public schools reverted back to private status. The obligation to attend English-language only schools, whether public or private, became a reality through the passing of compulsory school attendance legislation in the same year. Similar legislation was passed in 1917 in Saskatchewan. Attendance at German-language private schools was not acceptable any longer. Severe enforcement in Manitoba and Saskatchewan did not occur until the end of the war, when noncompliant fathers were fined and some went to jail. According to Adolf Ens as many as 5493 prosecutions were carried out in Saskatchewan alone between 1918 and 1925.³ The Mennonite *Privilegium* was found to stand on contested ground, and the courts ruled that Mennonites too were subject to provincial school legislation. As a con-

sequence large numbers pulled up roots and emigrated to Mexico in the 1920s.⁴

When WW I began, Mennonites were largely a rural people and generally attracted only a passing interest of the general public. However the Rosthern German English Academy (GEA) was not insulated within a Mennonite settlement and did attract the attention of its neighbors. Some students attended the GEA in order to be out of sight from their own communities. As a demonstration of its loyalty, the school had hoisted the British flag in 1915. It may also have helped that a non-Mennonite Anglo-Saxon teacher had been engaged in 1913 to teach English courses. Nevertheless, in 1915 the customary property tax rebate was refused by the town of Rosthern.⁵ In some communities the names of school districts were anglicized.⁶

J.T.M. Anderson, a Saskatchewan school inspector and later premier of the province, deplored segregated settlements, parochial and bilingual schools, including those of the Mennonites. He stressed the public task of Canadianization and assimilation of new Canadians — that is, immigrants whose mother tongue was other than English.⁷ (He did not foresee the eventual impact of the French fact in western Canada.) At one time Anderson also resolved to bar further Mennonite immigration.⁸ E.K. Francis summed up the situation succinctly as follows:

For, it was no more a question of educational standards which prompted the authorities to destroy them [the parochial schools] once and for all, and to replace them by English public schools. It was part of a consistent national policy aimed at the assimilation of ethnics to safeguard national unity and cultural uniformity. In this policy the school figured prominently as the most effective means to wean the children of immigrants away from the traditions of their group and to indoctrinate them with the ideals and values of the dominant majority.⁹

Such was a “national” policy only insofar as English Canada was concerned, as a policy directed to the assimilation of ethnics also applied to the French in western provinces and in Ontario. Predominately, these were provincial policies, not necessarily articulated in policy papers, but part of the debates in provincial legislatures, supported by the majority press, undergirded in school law, and enforced — not always with success — by school inspectors and other officials of departments of education.

In Ontario, as pointed out by Frank H. Epp, an emphasis on German was no longer a point of contention for Mennonites, most of whom had resided in the province for several generations. But in Manitoba and Saskatchewan the reaction of some Mennonite groups was not dissimilar to that of the French:

The more the government tied anglicization, patriotism, militarism and education together in a single cultural package, the more the Mennonites were convinced that German, religion, and the private school also belonged together, inseparably linked.¹⁰

Most of the Mennonites who remained in the prairie provinces accepted the English language public school. Religion was taught in most of these schools in German and towards the end of the school day as permitted by school law. Some of the schools also provided additional instruction in German, usually as an extension to the regular school day. The new wave of immigrants during the twenties accepted the status quo. The children attended the public schools. Those who continued high school education in the private schools in Gretna and Rosthern, though covering the provincial program of studies, generally also became proficient in German through the added curriculum provided by the schools.

As yet proportionately few Mennonite students attended the universities, and most of those who did were teachers enhancing their education after having obtained certification through preparation programs in the provincial Normal schools.

Antecedents to Public Attitudes Towards Mennonites during WW II

Frank Epp made an extensive analysis of the degree of empathy expressed in the Mennonite press towards Germanism and National Socialism.¹¹ Kirkconnell compared the presses of several European-Canadians, including those of the Mennonites. He found Walter Quiring expressing one of the more extreme positions. Quiring accused ninety percent of the Mennonite clergy of not recognizing "the signs of the times" — that is, a German "liberation" of Russia and stated his personal view as, "I intend to remain German, and I intend to have my children and children's children also remain German."¹² On the other hand, Kirkconnell reported B.B. Janz as saying: "Be warned, O my people! Have nothing to do with propaganda from over yonder!" and H. Goerz as declaring: ". . . it was not Germany that saved us from Communism but Canada, because it opened its door to us and offered us a home."¹³ Kirkconnell found Mennonite papers lacking in editorial opinions, suggesting that its editors did not provide leadership in challenging their readers to weigh the issue at hand with greater caution and reason. However, he explained the sentiments expressed by the writers in their papers as follows: "As might be anticipated from their background of European experience, bitter hatred of Communism colours all that is written. In the case of Mennonites, there is frequent insistence on noncombatancy (*Wehrlosigkeit*)."¹⁴

The Mennonite immigrants of the twenties had fled the communist regime which had deprived them of their lands and property. A new kinship was felt for Germany, particularly by those who had experienced its hospitality while waiting for clearance to enter Canada. The Russian language, which many of them had never mastered, would have no further relevance. Culturally they were more in tune with the German than the Russian language. The German language would continue to serve them well and the ac-

commodation to the English would become essential mainly for their children. With a sense of betrayal by their former homeland, but without a thought of disloyalty to Canada, they felt sympathetic to Germany which stood as a bulwark against advancing communism. Furthermore, most of the immigrants left behind family members and relatives with whom they had hoped to be eventually reunited. The communist regime terminated all communication with their kin. It appeared to them that a restoration of contact, and any possible release of their relatives might only come about through a victory of Germany over Russia.

Kirkconnell also examined the press of other German papers, and those of several other European-Canadians, finding, for example, that "Up to March 1939, the *Ukrayinskiy Robitnik* was openly favorable to Herr Hitler, as the natural 'liberator' of the Ukrainian nation. . . ." ¹⁵ Also Britain's Lloyd George, following a visit to Germany in 1936, expressed positive convictions about Hitler. ¹⁶ Keyserlingk stated that Mackenzie King and his closest advisors "showed marked sympathy for Hitler and his demands for changes in the 1919 Versailles settlement. King had visited Hitler in 1937 and came away with a clear impression that Hitler was a man of peace . . . and was concerned with the good of his people." ¹⁷ Keyserlingk further concluded that in 1939 German Canadians "although classified legally as enemy aliens or persons of enemy origin . . . were at the same time seen as opposed to Hitler as other Canadians." ¹⁸

For many German Canadians, as well as Mennonites, German national socialism meant opposition to a threatening communism, a new idealism, a social and moral awakening, healthy employment for the young and a restoration of old conservative values all of which impressed and found advocates also among non-Mennonite religious leaders such as Oswald J. Smith. ¹⁹ Kirkconnell concluded that "It is evident that Mennonite opinion has been in a turmoil, and that National Socialism has been tending to split that religious community wide open." ²⁰ The same dilemma had been faced by Mennonites in Paraguay and other countries. ²¹ Any public (though not all private) pro-German sentiments obviously ceased at the outbreak of WW II and the possibility of any "split" related to German political sentiments was averted.

Kirkconnell had been "an officer under the Federal Department of Justice in the handling of interned aliens in Canada during the Great War" and was a professor at United College, Winnipeg, at the time he published his book *Canada, Europe and Hitler* in the fall of 1939, a few months after the outbreak of war. ²² His completed manuscript was amended with some additions before going to print, including a chapter on "Why Britain is at War," in which he expressed the view that

A clear distinction has been drawn between the German nation and the Nazi incubus that bedevils it . . . Britain seeks to save not only the world but Germany

itself from Hitler and Naziism . . . The present tragic conflict is not directed against our Germanic kindred but against the aggressive menace of Nazidom.²³

While not justifying the pro-German sentiments of some Mennonites during the 1930s — some of which extended into the early years of the war — from the perspective of saner minds, such as those of Kirkconnell, these must be judged in the context of the times. Even so the reaction of Canadians of British extraction to German speaking people, including the Mennonites, during a time of war must also be understood in that context. It is not surprising that suspicions would be aroused against people who espoused the German language and at the same time requested exemption from war service.

Expressions of anti-Mennonite Sentiment Affecting Education during WW II

In Alberta, Canadian Legion branches lobbied for the abolition of German language courses in high schools and universities. Under public pressure some city councils terminated the employment of “aliens” (German, Italian, and in some cases also Ukrainians). Though sentiments were directed mainly against Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors, this anti-German sentiment was “relatively benign” compared to the treatment Japanese Canadians received.²⁴ The latter continued following the conclusion of hostilities.²⁵

Editors of local newspapers in Alberta queried whether the German language should be allowed to be used. In Vauxhall, Alberta, two Mennonite churches burned down on June 18, 1940.²⁶ Public opinion was directed against anything German in relation to Mennonites, whether this be in their churches, their private schools, or any other church-related instructional activity. All instruction in the Menno Bible Institute (Didsbury, Alberta) had been in German until the war began, and the surrounding community was displeased with “a German Bible School run by pacifist Mennonites.”²⁷ The Bible School in Drake, Saskatchewan, was raided by members of the Canadian Corps Association, and one teacher was driven out of town.²⁸

Police investigated a rumor about weapons being kept in the Niagara United Mennonite Church and also requested a justification for its Saturday German School.²⁹ Bishop J. H. Janzen reported that even prior to the outbreak of the war, police had searched the Mennonite church in Virgil following rumors alleging that it stored explosives.³⁰ In several public schools in the Niagara area some Mennonite children suffered verbal abuse from classmates.

Similar events occurred in the USA, where some teachers resigned rather than sell war savings stamps. One school district superintendent ordered the principal not to speak to his pupils about his nonresistant principles. Some persons lost jobs because of their refusal to buy war bonds. Some churches were treated with yellow paint and a nuisance bomb was exploded on the front porch of a Mennonite bishop.³¹

In April, 1987, I sent letters to thirty-four persons across Canada about two-thirds of whom had retired — all persons who had first-hand experiences during the WW II years, and most of whom are well known in Mennonite circles. As there is no complete record available of the experiences of all who were involved in education during the war years, the responses of the twenty-two persons who replied may serve to illustrate the nature of their experiences.

In the fall of 1942 all teachers in Manitoba were specifically directed by the Minister of Education to sell war savings stamps in schools, and were warned by Department officials that a record was being kept of those who did not do so.³² At the time, early in 1943, I explained in writing my reason for not doing so, and was immediately called before the Discipline Committee of the Department, which recommended to the Minister that my certificate be cancelled.³³ During the rest of that school term a number of teachers lost their certificates for no reason other than their declaration as conscientious objectors to participation in war. Subsequently the Minister changed the Department's policy, and beginning September of 1943 Mennonite CO teachers were "frozen" to their positions with part of their salaries being designated to the Red Cross.

Some teachers were harassed by provincial school inspectors for any teaching in German, albeit as permitted under school law, and some stopped such teaching upon the insistence of the inspectors. Some were visited by the RCMP who investigated the extent of German teaching or involvement. Upon the pressure of a school inspector a teacher in southern Manitoba was relieved of his position because he had taught German, although not in contravention of school regulations. A Saskatchewan Normal school student was advised to accept a teaching position after only three months of preparation, as the principal explained to him that as a conscientious objector he would not receive a certificate upon completion of the term. Other male students were refused admission to Normal School, but directed to enlist. An Alberta student was not permitted to continue his education due to his confession of faith, even though he had been declared medically unfit for service.

Several Mennonite students and teachers, including myself, refused an offer to receive free university training, which inevitably would have led to an obligation to join the services, but instead chose to work on farms, in mines, or in the forest service.

A soldier intent on interrupting the Bible School in Didsbury changed his mind when the students helped him get his mired car out of the muddy road at the school. A heavy tax imposed on the same school was dropped when the principal appealed to the local member of the Legislative Assembly.

One respondent wrote that proportionately few teachers in southern Manitoba had been admonished for their teaching German in the schools. Apparently the experience of teachers was determined in part by the character of the incumbent school inspector and the attitudes prevalent in the school

community. Schools located in communities which included non-Mennonites, or which were adjacent to non-Mennonite districts, were more likely to be subject to suspicion or criticism.

At an annual meeting of the Manitoba Teachers' Society during the war years a motion had been put forward by one local association that all Mennonites be barred from teaching. A Winnipeg school principal rose to defend the courage of Mennonite teachers who were able to live by their convictions. The motion then was defeated.³⁴ An Ontario respondent who taught during the war years and also served in the forest camps responded as follows: "I did not experience any problems from non-Mennonite people. It was apparent we had to keep a low profile and as long as there was no provocation people generally remained as friendly as before." It must be understood that most negative experiences of Mennonites were not due to an inherent malice on the part of their non-Mennonite neighbors and officials. Such are the anticipated concomitants of a nationalistic and patriotic fervor evoked in the citizens of a country at war.

Mennonite Accommodations During WW II

The accommodation of Mennonites to external pressures depended on the particular circumstances. Some teachers left their schools to be directed to alternative service in forest camps and hospitals. Some schools dropped the instruction of German for the duration of the war. The Bible School in Didsbury continued instruction in German, but also introduced English instruction in some courses. Teaching of pacifist doctrines was continued. In contradiction to his earlier teaching, a Bible School teacher in southern Manitoba actively supported the purchase of war bonds. Some teachers, like myself, enlisted under the noncombatant service provisions introduced in order to accommodate conscientious objectors. Others joined active military service.

Some Mennonite schools had received assistance in the supply of German literature for school use through German consulates and other German agencies. Other literature materials had been purchased from German publishers. Some of this material contained highly patriotic content which exalted the Third Reich. Such now became an embarrassment to the schools.

I was a Grade XII student at the Gretna Mennonite Collegiate when the war broke out. I recall Principal G.H. Peters, who taught the senior German literature courses, directing our class to cut out and discard the portion of the literature book which reflected Hitler's Germany. Though pro-German in culture and language, Peters was most emphatic about one's loyalty to one's country of citizenship and his teaching bore no hint of German nationalism. The annual graduation ceremonies and school festivals (*Schulfeste*) had English content, but continued to be predominantly German during that year. However, the Wednesday "German day" (*Deutscher Tag*) during which students had been exhorted to speak only German during the forenoon and af-

ternoon recess periods, was discontinued. Yet the alumni newsletter *Ich Sende Euch*, which originated about 1942, continued in German during those years and into the 1950s. Religious instruction at the MCI continued to stress the Mennonite pacifist position.³⁵ Concern was expressed also at the Elim Bible School, Altona, regarding the propaganda in German literature received during the late 1930s.³⁶

As an accommodation, the German-English Academy in 1940 changed its name to Rosthern Academy. Principal K.G. Toews developed close personal ties with the local school inspector, a WW I veteran, and attended public teacher conventions. David Toews explained to the critics that the Mennonite desire to keep the German language was no different from that of French Catholics to keep French,³⁷ and that such cultural affinity did not undermine their loyalty as Canadian citizens, nor was it of a political nature.³⁸ It was also helpful that the Rosthern community knew that an alumnus of the school, Peter Dyck, by 1941 was involved in Mennonite-sponsored war relief in England.³⁹ No doubt the purchase of war bonds by Rosthern residents and the fact that a number of Mennonite men had joined the armed forces provided for a more favorable disposition towards the school.⁴⁰

In response to war engendered sentiments, a Bible school conducted in the basement of a church in Leamington by Heinrich J. Janzen was discontinued in 1940,⁴¹ and in 1944 J. H. Janzen in Waterloo discontinued evening Bible instruction introduced in 1936.⁴² In Alberta, Mennonites closed German-language Bible and Saturday schools and also German libraries. Some rural churches discontinued the use of German. German ethnic clubs were also closed for the duration.⁴³ Attendance at the Menno Bible Institute, Didsbury, dropped during the war years due to young men being called to the CO camps. Instruction in English was introduced in some of the classes by 1944.⁴⁴ As early as 1936 B. B. Janz had consulted with Premier Aberhart regarding the establishment of a private school in Coaldale. With the outbreak of the war these plans were laid aside until January 1945, and a school was opened in 1946. Due to a lack of sufficient support the school was closed in 1964.⁴⁵

In anticipation of an impending war, Mennonite leaders from across Canada met in Winkler, Manitoba, on May 15, 1939. At this meeting reference was made to an earlier discussion held in Chicago on March 10-11, 1939, which had been attended by some of the delegates meeting in Winkler. The Winkler meeting framed a message to "His Most Gracious Majesty George VI, King of Canada," which concluded with the salutation, "Your reign may always be remembered rather because of its accomplishments in the ways of peace than in the achievements in war."⁴⁶ The Winkler meeting did not arrive at a consensus about an approach to Ottawa, and was divided in opinion more or less between the earlier and more conservative Mennonites and the later immigrants holding more liberal views. The earlier (Kanadier) had

left Russia in order to be free of any entanglements with government demands in education and any service required by the government. The latter (Russlaender) had accommodated themselves to the russification of their schools and had also provided service in the medical units (Sanitaetsdienst) during WW I, and supported approaching Ottawa to make such provisions in the event of another conflict. Separate presentations were made to federal authorities. The conservative group, under the determined and able leadership of Bishop David Schulz of Manitoba, preferred to achieve complete exemption for Mennonite men from any kind of service away from home, but failing such, that no service be related to the military, including that of the medical corps.⁴⁷

The Manitoba group, usually under the leadership of Bishop David Schulz, held about forty meetings either as bishops or ministers, the last of which was recorded for August 1946.⁴⁸ Its major agenda concerned the men in the forest camps. At a meeting in April 1943, first mention was made of teachers being released from their schools due to their CO status, and subsequently a submission on their behalf was made to the Minister of Education.⁴⁹ Though Mennonite men were again able to retain their teaching positions as of September, 1943, first reference to such was made in the minutes of the meeting of January 7, 1944, which also reported that cadet training would not be required of Mennonite schools, but that males of service age would not be permitted to take teacher training nor to teach on a permit.⁵⁰ The minutes indicate that the Manitoba committee was concerned mainly with those who were in the forest camps and with those who had been committed to jails. It gave little attention to the plight of the CO teachers. It reflected the rural orientation of the leaders, most of whom were farmers.⁵¹

Developments Subsequent to 1945

In 1946 the Rosthern Academy was renamed Rosthern Junior College, partly for the purpose of seeking affiliation with the University of Saskatchewan. However, "the climate was not conducive for the affiliation of a pacifist-oriented school with the university."⁵² The cancelled certificates of most Mennonite teachers were restored about 1946 and thereafter. However, resentment towards Mennonite teachers continued in some centres for some years following the cessation of the war.⁵³ For example, a Saskatchewan teacher who applied for a city position in 1950 was informed by the superintendent that Mennonites were not being hired. This person later served as principal for many years in the Edmonton public school district. A Manitoba teacher, whose certificate had been cancelled in spite of having received awards from the Department of Education for meritorious teaching, following the war invited a member of the Discipline Committee which had recommended the cancellation of his certificate, as a guest in his Winnipeg class-

room. The teacher recounted that, "for half the period (the guest) tried to explain and apologize how wrong officials had been in those days in dealing with teachers who had tried to uphold a peace witness through their conscientious status."

Upon being released from active service as a conscientious objector in the Dental Corps, an army officer expressed the concern that I not teach history, lest I subject students to my views. However, my certificate had been reinstated by 1946 without my having made an application. Years later, on July 2, 1975, I wrote to the Deputy Minister of Education in Manitoba requesting that my case be reopened and that I be given the opportunity to appear in person before the Discipline Committee once more. My request included the statement: "Nothing changed with respect to the position I held on the basis of conviction and conscience between the time my certificate was cancelled and the time my certificate was reinstated. Since that was the case, I hold that the first decision was based in the context of the then political climate, understandable in a time of war, and not based rationally or in justice." I received a reply within three weeks stating that the Minister had approved that my file "be cleared and that my certificate be considered to have been in full force from the date of first issuance."⁵⁴

Mennonite educational efforts continued throughout WW II and gained increased momentum when war-related concerns subsided. Both Bible and private high schools experienced increased enrollments after the war as the men from the CO camps returned home. Some schools required enlarging as a consequence, yet some schools experienced increased enrollments even prior to the cessation of the war.⁵⁵ Some schools made special efforts to assist the non-English speaking immigrant children.⁵⁶ Those Saturday schools and German libraries which had been closed were reopened and the German language again was emphasized.⁵⁷

One respondent, a retired Manitoba teacher, was of the opinion that WW II contributed to a reduction of interest in the German language among Mennonites. Such does not seem to have been the case immediately following the war. Many of those whose discourse with each other was in English, but who came from German-speaking homes, also gave their active support to additional instruction in German in the schools and churches.

Mennonite educational organizational activities resumed with new vigor. On behalf of the Education Council of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Paul Schaefer reported on a meeting of about 300 Mennonite teachers from across Canada.⁵⁸ Then, on August 17 and 18, 1949, Mennonite teachers from several provinces met at a conference held at the Mennonite Mission Camp in Springstein, Manitoba. The theme of the conference concerned the instruction of German and religion in schools, including Mennonite public schools.⁵⁹

In Manitoba, a movement in which G. H. Peters, former principal of the

Gretna Mennonite Collegiate, was prominent, brought into being the Mennonite Society for the Nurture and Preservation of the German Language (*mennonitischer Verein zur Erhaltung der deutschen Muttersprache*) in 1952.⁶⁰ Chapters were also established in Mennonite communities in some of the other provinces. The immigration of Mennonites following WW II established a need for the continued use of the German language. University of Manitoba professors Steinhauer and Stirk were supportive of this development, particularly because they hoped more Mennonite students would pursue studies in German.⁶¹

The Mennonite Teachers Conference (*Mennonitische Lehrerkonferenz*), founded in 1929, was discontinued during the war but reorganized in 1953 with a focus on the teaching of German and religion. Also, in 1957 the Mennonite Education Committee (*das mennonitische Bildungskomitee*) was formed to promote the teaching of German and religion in the "Mennonite" schools in Manitoba.⁶² Trustees of "Mennonite" public school boards, with the unofficial concurrence of the Minister of Education, contributed to the salary of a Mennonite inspector who helped to develop curriculum materials for instruction in German and religion, and who observed instruction in the schools. Former public school teacher David K. Duerksen and then Peter Rempel acted in this capacity in the 1960s.⁶³

The improved post-war economy, due to the industrial activity prompted by the war itself, and in provinces like Alberta enhanced by the discovery of oil and gas, made possible improvements in transportation and school programs. Larger school district units were created, and children were bussed to larger school centres. Such consolidation created problems for the Amish in the USA,⁶⁴ and in Alberta for the Holdeman congregations. As long as Holdeman children comprised the majority within a public school district, they felt that they had some control over the education of their children. When that changed, they opted for private schools for their children.⁶⁵ The same concerns held for the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites in Ontario, which established a network of private elementary schools in the 1950s. The most conservative groups elected the historical pattern of distancing themselves from modern influences by moving to Mexico, Paraguay and Bolivia,⁶⁶ and others settled at Fort Vermilion beyond the reach of public school authorities.⁶⁷

In the late 1950s the Manitoba Government launched a program of local unit reorganization and the underwriting of new high schools throughout the province. Its Royal Commission, which in 1959 provided a rationale for such development, also recommended grants for private schools, though the first such grants were not introduced for another two decades.⁶⁸ An inter-Mennonite meeting was held in Winnipeg about 1960 when papers were presented on the question of whether or not to accept government grants for private schools. Perhaps forgotten was the fact that some Mennonite private

schools had been recipients of Government support prior to 1900.⁶⁹ In 1963 the Corporation of Rosthern Junior College was uncertain whether to press for provincial grants in support of its school. Under the Thatcher government, grants for private high schools in Saskatchewan became available in 1965.⁷⁰

Today such grants are generally accepted without question, and most Mennonites are no longer under the apprehension that receiving such support calls forth unwanted interference by provincial authorities. Mennonite colleges have also explored the possibility of receiving Government assistance — after all, several are affiliated with public universities. Also, Mennonites today are found in increasing numbers as civil servants in provincial departments of education, and also as MLAs and MPs. Mennonites have become part of the decision-making and administrative structures in the public as well as their own private domain.

Even during the war, building plans for private schools or their extension were made in several provinces. Frank H. Epp contended that, “The world war psychology made private schools more desirable than ever while the war economy made them more possible than ever before,”⁷¹ and the “need to confirm basic Mennonite principles through education became an urgent issue with many parents and students.”⁷²

Mennonite private schools were established for group maintenance and the survival of a way of life and faith, but also to provide schooling where public schools had not been established. Post-War II developments in private schools were not so much directed against assimilative forces, as to assist in the process of religious, intellectual and philosophical acculturation, and to make relevant Christian choices in today’s world.

When General McArthur made the pronouncement that Japan needed missionaries, mission boards considered sending more missionaries, and some Bible schools responded by introducing special preparatory courses. Though the General Conference Mission Board had decided to send five, a total of ten were sent.⁷³

Though the peace research movement suffered a set-back during WW II, it blossomed following the war, and by 1971 at least 150 institutions in 40 countries were engaged in peace-related research, including peace-related programs introduced in more than a dozen Mennonite educational institutions, colleges and schools in the USA and Canada.⁷⁴

Concluding Comment

The events during and following WW I in part affected the events during and following WW II with respect to Mennonite education. The emphasis on the use of German was dampened and the expansion of private schools was restrained during both wars. An influx of immigrants during the 1920s

added to the need for and the promotion of private schools and the use of German as the language of instruction. The new influx of Mennonite immigrants following WW II contributed to an extended life for the use of German in private schools, and probably provided the essential incentive for a revival of Saturday German schools and the establishment of organizations for the promotion of German and for the continued religious instruction in German in many communities.

Had the world wars not happened, the massive immigration movements before and after WW II would probably not have occurred. Both sets of immigrants were of liberal and progressive orientation. Parents influenced their children to continue their education beyond high school. Also, they were concerned that their children should retain their Mennonite heritage, and hence private schools were favored by many.

Industrialization and the subsequent urbanization of Canada's population was accelerated by WW II. Mennonite youth flocked to the cities, and most of the new immigrants settled in the cities soon after their arrival. Thus a large proportion of Mennonites have become subject to a major acculturation process, and considerable numbers also captive to assimilation forces. No longer could private schools serve the former function of preserving "separatedness" from the rest of society. Schools and colleges faced the challenge of preparing students to be Christian Mennonites in the world and in any trade or profession, and to prepare men and women for service in a variety of needs in any part of the world.

Notes

¹Peter G. Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada, 1786-1960," Ph.D. thesis (University of Toronto, 1970), pp. 115ff.

²E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia — The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955), p. 180.

³Adolf Ens, "The Public School Crisis Among Mennonites in Saskatchewan 1916-1925." In Harry Loewen, ed., *Mennonite Images* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1980), pp. 73-81.

⁴Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), pp. 338ff.

⁵Frank H. Epp, *Education with a Plus — The Story of Rosthern Junior College* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1975), pp. 58ff.

⁶For example, in *Gnadenthal 1880-1980* (Winkler: Gnadenthal History Book Committee, 1982), p. 19ff, Elisabeth Peters relates that when the local school district, which included the village, was organized, the provincial authority named it *Wells*. Other examples of the expression of public sentiment included the renaming of the city of Berlin to Kitchener, and the 1917 decision of the Dominion government to disfranchise Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors, although the latter decision was in accord with the submission of some Mennonite bishops to government officials that Mennonites ought not to vote. On the other hand, in order to appease unsympathetic neighbors, some Mennonite families even encouraged their sons to enlist, according to Aron Sawatzky, "The Mennonites of Alberta and Their Assimilation" (M.A. thesis, Univer-

sity of Alberta, 1964), pp. 69ff. Similar public sentiments were experienced in the United States where Bethel College's German department was closed for 1918-19 in response to the demand of the Loyalty League to drop all German classes, as related by Peter J. Wedel in *The Story of Bethel College* (Newton: Bethel College, 1954), p. 237.

⁷J.T.M. Anderson, *The Education of the New-Canadian* (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1918).

⁸Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), p. 310.

⁹E.K. Francis, "Mennonite School Problems," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 27 (1953), p. 223.

¹⁰Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*, p. 358.

¹¹Frank H. Epp, "An Analysis of Germanism and National Socialism in the Immigrant Newspapers of a Canadian Minority Group, the Mennonites in the 1930s," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1965).

¹²Watson Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe, and Hitler* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 133, quoting from *Der Bote* (March 3, 1939).

¹³Kirkconnell, p. 139, quoting from *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* (January 11, 1939), and *Der Bote* (February 22, 1939).

¹⁴Kirkconnell, p. 129.

¹⁵Kirkconnell, p. 139.

¹⁶As reported in a 1936 issue of *Der Nordwesten* (date not located).

¹⁷Robert H. Keyserlingk, "The Canadian Government's Attitude Towards Germans and German Canadians in World War Two," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 16:1 (1984), p. 19.

¹⁸Keyserlingk, p. 25.

¹⁹Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, pp. 550ff.

²⁰Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe and Hitler*, p. 133.

²¹Johann S. Postma, "Fernheim, fernes Heim" (Unpublished manuscript. Newton: Mennonite Library Archives, 1946).

²²Kirkconnell, p. vi.

²³Kirkconnell, p. 8.

²⁴Howard Palmer, "Ethnic Relations in Wartime: Nationalism and European Minorities in Alberta During the Second World War," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 14:3 (1982), pp. 1-23.

²⁵Ted T. Aoki, "A Teacher in Alberta," *RIKKA*, 4:2 (1977), pp. 22-27. Aoki, a Japanese-Canadian student, born in Canada and a citizen of Canada who with his family had been displaced from British Columbia, was prohibited from residing in the city of Calgary and had to commute to the Normal School on a milk truck in the fall of 1945, and in 1947 required special authority to reside in the city of Edmonton in order to attend the university. Later Aoki became one of Canada's foremost authorities in curriculum studies, and at the time of his retirement was chairman of the department of secondary education at the University of Alberta.

²⁶Sawatzky, "The Mennonites of Alberta and their Assimilation," p. 176.

²⁷Robert Janzen, "A History of the Menno Bible Institute," Course paper 1979 (CMBC Archives).

²⁸Sawatzky, "The Mennonites of Alberta and their Assimilation," p. 177.

²⁹C. Alfred Friesen, ed., *Memoirs of the Virgil-Niagara Mennonites: History of the Mennonite Settlement in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario 1934-84* (Fonthill, Ontario: Niagara Year-book Services Ltd., 1984), p. 146.

³⁰David P. Reimer, ed., *Erfahrungen der Mennoniten in Canada waehrend des zweiten Weltkrieges, 1939-1945* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers Ltd, c. 1947), p. 53.

³¹Guy Franklin Hershberger, *The Mennonite Church in the Second World War* (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1951), pp. 132ff.

³²An undated directive, "To The Teacher," from Ivan Schultz, Minister of Education for Manitoba, sent to all teachers, Fall 1942.

³³Complete documentation of my case is on file in the archives at CMBC Heritage Centre.

³⁴As recalled by Gerhard Lohrenz, at that time a public school principal in Springstein, Manitoba, who attended the annual meeting of the Manitoba Teachers' Society.

³⁵David Janzen (correspondence, April, 1987), who attended the Winkler Bible School during the war years, recalled that pacifism was not stressed in the school's teaching and that the library contained books mainly by nonpacifist evangelical authors.

³⁶Frank K. Isaac, *Elim 50th Anniversary, 1929-1979* (Altona: Elim, c. 1979).

³⁷Sawatzky, "The Mennonites of Alberta and their Assimilation," p. 177.

³⁸Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, p. 575.

³⁹Epp, *Education with a Plus*, p. 139.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴¹Rudy A. Regehr, "A Century of Private Schools." In Henry Poettcker and Rudy A. Regehr, editors, *Call to Faithfulness* (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Bible College), p. 107.

⁴²Dennis Flaming, "A Cause-Effect Approach to the Changes at the U.M.E.I.," Course Paper (CMBC Archives), p. 3.

⁴³Palmer, "Ethnic Relations in Wartime," p. 12.

⁴⁴Janzen, "A History of the Menno Bible Institute," p. 4.

⁴⁵Linda Janzen, "A History of the Alberta Mennonite High School, Coaldale, Alberta, 1946-1964." Course paper 1982 (CMBC Archives).

⁴⁶Reimer, *Erfahrungen*, p. 63.

⁴⁷During the war years more than 10,000 Mennonite men were registered for alternative service, most of whom were sent to forest camps. Small numbers served in hospitals, farms and mines. (Reimer, *Erfahrungen*, p. 35). An Order-in-Council P.C. 7251 of September 16, 1943 stated that a member "of the denomination of Christians called Mennonites or a member of the community of Doukhobors . . . may for the purpose of performing any noncombatant service or duty with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps or the Canadian Dental Corps, be enlisted . . . [and] shall not be required under any circumstances to bear arms." (L.E. Westman, "Offer of Non-Combatant Military Service-Postponed Conscientious Objectors." Circular of the Chief Alternative Service Officer, Department of Labour, 1943). Believing that such service had the approval of the Mennonite leadership, scores of Mennonites (along with Seventh Day Adventists and lesser numbers of others including some from the United Church) who had declared themselves as COs chose to volunteer and serve under these conditions. Less than a year following the loss of my teaching certificate, I elected to join the army noncombatant service and was placed in the Dental Corps. Much later did I discover that the Manitoba Bergthaler Church did not support such an alternative. Also, my choice was influenced by the knowledge of the Mennonite *Sanitaetsdienst* in Russia during WW I. Lawrence Klippenstein included a chapter of such service in *That There Be Peace — Mennonites in Canada and World War II* (Winnipeg: The Manitoba CO Reunion Committee, 1979) along with experiences in the forest camps, in hospitals, and in jails; any reference to CO teachers is missing.

⁴⁸Reimer, *Erfahrungen*, p. 176.

⁴⁹Reimer, *Erfahrungen*, p. 140.

⁵⁰Reimer, *Erfahrungen*, p. 157.

⁵¹It is of interest to note that at the meeting of March 20, 1945, the issue of whether or not blood ought to be donated to the Red Cross was debated, as the blood could be sent to the war theater. It was agreed that the decision be governed by the personal conviction of any donor. Family allowances were being introduced, and at the same meeting the question was raised whether by accepting such the freedoms of the recipient children might not be endangered in the future. Yet the opinion was expressed that it would be "more right" to accept the family allowance than to give blood! (Reimer, *Erfahrungen*, p. 168).

⁵²Epp, *Education with a Plus*, p. 156.

⁵³Correspondence, April, 1987.

⁵⁴It would indeed have been out of character for me to sue the Department for lost salary during that time since my certificate was now considered "to have been in full force from the date of first issuance!"

⁵⁵Presumably many parents were concerned that their children should have an understanding of a Mennonite view regarding participation in war service. See Peter G. Klassen, "A Short History of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Gretna, Manitoba," University of Manitoba course paper 1965 (CMBC Library), p. 35; and Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1970), p. 276.

⁵⁶Peters, *Gnadenthal 1880-1980*, p. 87.

⁵⁷Sawatzky, "The Mennonites of Alberta and their Assimilation," p. 228.

⁵⁸Paul J. Schaefer, "Erster Bericht der Erziehungsbehoerde der Konferenz der Mennoniten in Canada," *Mennonitische Lehrerzeitung* (Zweites Heft, October, 13, 1948).

⁵⁹Editor, "Lehrerversammlung am 17.u.18. August im Mennonitischen Missionspark zu Springstein, Manitoba," *Mennonitische Lehrerzeitung* (September, 1949).

⁶⁰Epp, "An Analysis of Germanism . . .," (1965), p. 325.

⁶¹H. Steinhauer, "Deutsch in der Hochschule," *Mennonitische Lehrerzeitung* (Erstes Heft, July, 1948), p. 6.

⁶²Peter D. Zacharias, *Footprints of a Pilgrim People: Story of the Blumenort Church* (Altona: Friesen Printers, 1985).

⁶³When I was principal of Winkler School, 1958-1963, it was not unusual for Mr. Duerksen and the public school inspector, Mr. Heaney, to be in my school on the same days. There was a *modus operandi* that if one or the other was already visiting a one-room country school, and the second appeared, the latter would simply proceed to another school!

⁶⁴Orland Gingerich, *The Amish of Canada* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1972), p. 134.

⁶⁵John J. Bergen, "Freedom of Education in a Religious Context: The Alberta Holdeman Private School Case," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* Vol. 55 (January, 1981), pp. 75-85.

⁶⁶Frank H. Epp, *Small College Set on a Hill: Reflections on Church College Education in the University Context* (Waterloo: Conrad Grebel College, 1979), pp. 113ff.

⁶⁷Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," p. 182.

⁶⁸R.O. MacFarlane, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education* (Government of Manitoba, 1959), pp. 175184.

⁶⁹Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada, 1786-1960," p. 120. I attended the Winnipeg meeting where papers were presented, some favoring and some opposing the acceptance of government grants for private schools.

⁷⁰Epp, *Education with a Plus*, p. 313.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 148.

⁷²Ibid., p. 122.

⁷³Isaac, *Elim 50th Anniversary, 1929-1979*, p. 24.

⁷⁴Duane K. Friesen, "Peace Studies: Mennonite Colleges in the North American Context," *Mennonite Life*, 35:1 (March, 1980), pp. 14-15. While I was principal in Winkler, about 1960, a young army officer came to my office and enquired whether he might meet with high school students in order to present opportunities in the army. The school board had approved his visit, so some students met with him voluntarily. In discussion with the officer, who was a member of the United Church and whose father had taught school in a predominantly Mennonite community in Saskatchewan, I raised the irony that Mennonites espousing the principle of nonresistance kept a relatively low profile, whereas his church was at the time gaining visibility for its position favoring disarmaments.