

# **Ancestors, the Land, and Ethno-religious Identity on the Canadian Prairies: Comparing the Mennonite and Ukrainian Legacies**

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Canadian prairie identity has been fundamentally informed by the region's settler peoples. Using a cultural filter coloured by both personal experience and group memory, a founder generation reconfigured an alien mental and physical landscape around familiar points of reference that bound the old world and old-world ancestors with the new land and the immigrants' future in it. Successive generations of their descendants internalized further this interplay among the land, the dead, and the past and the present to create a regionally-based identity in which the first arrivals were crucial. The latter also formed a bridge between their descendants as part of a local prairie community and both the rest of Canada and the homeland or people overseas. This process has been less pronounced among British and French "charter" groups and widely accepted and easily integrated immigrants from "preferred" countries in northern and

western Europe. Its most articulate participants and sophisticated forms of expression come from ethno-religious communities that have moved from initial marginalization, whether voluntary or involuntary, to a clear sense of place and belonging. Although seemingly starting from quite different points, Mennonites and Ukrainians illustrate not only the variety and vigour of the ethno-religious responses (and their tensions), reflecting each group's specific pre-emigration history and world view, but also the common prairie features that transcended those boundaries and made them like other westerners.

Ukrainians were by far the larger group - some 170 000 immigrants by 1914 compared to 7 000 Mennonites (the largest Mennonite wave, 20 000, would come in the 1920s, when Ukrainians added another 60 000 to their numbers). While Swiss Mennonites had begun moving to Ontario from the newly independent United States in 1786, the Mennonites who arrived in western Canada in 1874 came from the Russian empire, having left Prussia to settle on the Ukrainian steppe at the invitation of Catherine the Great at the end of the eighteenth century. Now they wanted to escape the encroaching tsarist state, especially the attack on the precious *Privilegium* which set out the rules for their communities (Chortitza and its daughter colonies). Despite living on ethnic Ukrainian territory for nearly a century, they did not identify with the surrounding peasantry and in Canada called themselves "Russian Mennonites." As the immigrants re-created their communal villages in the East and West Reserves set aside for them in southern Manitoba, many found themselves living beside old friends and relatives as whole communities uprooted and relocated. Within a generation, however, some had departed to establish new colonies in neighbouring Saskatchewan and Alberta.<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian immigration to Canada began in 1891 with the scouting mission of two peasants, Ivan Pylypiw and Vasyl Eleniak. Their reports of free land, plentiful trees, and good soil inaugurated the flood that came over the next three decades, mostly from the provinces of Galicia and Bukovyna in the Austro-Hungarian empire. Lured by chain migration and a quest for economic security, the newcomers settled across the three prairie provinces on private homesteads, creating a series of informal blocs - of which the one in east-central Alberta was the largest and oldest - that still bear a strong Ukrainian imprint. Reverberations of the national awakening among the peasantry in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, giving rise to the modern Ukrainian nation, were felt in Canada as the immigrants increasingly insisted that they were not Austrians or Poles or Russians, or even Galicians and Bukovynians, but "Ukrainians."<sup>2</sup>

Although Mennonites initially insisted on remaining separate from the prairie society crystallizing around them and Ukrainians anxiously

sought integration into it, both groups met with prejudice and ambivalence at the hands of the dominant Anglo majority: Mennonites for their isolationism, pacifism, and communalism; Ukrainians for their peasant lifestyle and values. Histories of religious persecution and exile (Mennonites) or statelessness and national oppression (Ukrainians) also magnified commitment to group survival, seen in continued identification with their people abroad and “non-Canadian” goals that had to be reconciled with their new prairie home. Other factors also profoundly affected each group’s evolving regional ethno-religious identity, most obviously a shared agricultural lifestyle and bloc settlement pattern, communal living versus individual homesteading, Anabaptism versus Byzantine-rite Catholicism and Orthodoxy (and surviving pre-Christian practices), and focus on faith versus a more secular ethnicity. Less obvious were fundamental differences in the Mennonite and Ukrainian immigration and settlement stories. The late nineteenth-century Mennonite movement to western Canada was a largely controlled affair, from a well-defined and limited source, that occurred within a narrow time frame and frequently replicated communities left behind. The Ukrainian movement, in contrast, was decidedly untidy as settlers arrived over a long period from different villages, districts, and provinces (sometimes even different empires), without any guiding hand, and often had to build new communities with strangers. The Ukrainians’ shared experience was thus broad and generic and coalesced into collective memory only with time; the Mennonites’ was personal and specific with common points of reference that entered the group consciousness from the beginning. Yet as a Mennonite Canadian-origins narrative, the Russian group’s prairie experience is purely regional, losing out to its Swiss co-religionists in Ontario by almost a hundred years. Ukrainians’ Canadian beginnings, however, date from the mass movement to the prairies at the turn of the twentieth century, so that the regional experience has not only dominated the national one but in fact subsumed it. To Ukrainian Canadians, the prairie settlement saga, and especially the immigrants’ role in pioneering the land, represent their Canadian birthright. This conviction, plus Mennonites’ lengthy self-imposed separation, historically made them more aggressive in asserting their contribution to prairie society as part of its mainstream. But at the opening of the twenty-first century, the similarities in how the two groups accessed their settlement history, the land, and their immigrant ancestors were more striking than the differences.

The following discussion explores three stages or themes in the evolution of this regionally-based ethno-religious identity among prairie Mennonites and Ukrainians. First, an immigrant generation named the land, imposing order on an environment that spelled awe-

inspiring natural beauty and grandeur to some, bewildering and intimidating emptiness to others. Mennonite and Ukrainian place names simultaneously held homesickness and disorientation at bay, reaffirmed emotional ties with an old-world people and past, and formally claimed possession of the land on which the settlers built their homes and communities. Second, the immigrant generation designated a place for its dead. The knowledge that they would rest for eternity on the Canadian prairies far from their ancestors, their bones becoming literally part of the new land, drove home the finality of the decision to uproot and relocate. Over the decades, however, pioneer Mennonite and Ukrainian burial grounds evolved from places of exile, which nevertheless bound their people to the soil, to places of commemoration and collective memory, binding the living and the dead, on the part of their descendants. Lastly, those same descendants have created a series of symbols that recall and celebrate their prairie experience through a much respected immigrant pioneer generation, their personal ancestors, whose legacy they wish to honour more publicly than the private space of their cemeteries (or heritage museums) allows. Land here functions as symbolic space negotiated with the mainstream of prairie society, to which Mennonites and Ukrainians see themselves as belonging.<sup>3</sup>

Both as members of ethno-religious groups engaged in community building, and as individuals coping with having moved half way around the world, Mennonite and Ukrainian immigrants tried to domesticate an alien, unmapped wilderness with images that were meaningful and familiar. As such, they paid no attention either to Native landmarks or to Anglo-Canadian agenda for the prairies (political, cultural, and linguistic hegemony, and immigrant assimilation), if indeed they were initially aware of such things. But because place naming during the settlement era was a rural phenomenon associated with settlement on the land, it favoured agricultural peoples and especially those who formed compact blocs and/or were distributed over large areas where their kind predominated. Thus, of all settler groups in the West, Mennonites and Ukrainians have together left the most widespread and permanent record of their pioneer presence. The most popular place names were nostalgic reminders of the villages, friends, and relatives the immigrants had left behind, underscoring the importance of local identities and a sense of continuity that perpetuated the old world at least in the imagination. Both Mennonites and Ukrainians, but particularly the latter, also looked forward when they christened their new communities. Some of these names were simply descriptive responses to the physical environment. Others typically reinforced pre-emigration imagery of a land of plenty and freedom, whether or not the fantasy was sustained upon actual contact, or expressed people's

hopes for new beginnings, unconsciously echoing the Ontarian expansionist vision of the regenerative and purifying powers of the frontier. Still others referred to the immigration and settlement experience itself.<sup>4</sup> Their official land reserves meant that the places Mennonites named were specifically Mennonite villages, with their distinctive spatial arrangements. In contrast, while Ukrainians named the rural clusters - with their unique onion-domed churches and national halls, schools, and general stores - that dominated Ukrainian communal life, they had no control over place naming by other settler peoples or especially railway developers in the same area.

In the original East and West Reserves dozens of Mennonite villages took their names from places in the settlers' mother colonies on the southern Ukrainian steppe. They included Altona, Blumengart, Gnadenfeld, Kronsthal, Rosenort, and, of course, Steinbach, which emerged out of the settlement period as the largest Mennonite centre in Manitoba. The Canadian prairies were the third stop for a number of these place names, transplanted from villages in Prussia when their residents moved to the Russian empire after 1786. And some of them, like Steinbach, would appear again on the Canadian prairies, as residents of the Manitoba reserves repeated the Mennonite pattern of uprooting and relocation and built anew further west. Among Ukrainians the names of around forty villages and districts in Galicia and Bukovyna materialized across the prairie provinces, attesting to a settlement pattern that saw friends and family seek one other out and people from one area congregate in clusters. Also evident was the politicization underway in the homeland. Places named after famous figures in Ukrainian history - like Bohdan, Manitoba (for the Cossack hetman whose revolt against Polish rule in 1648 led to the founding of the Ukrainian Cossack state) - proclaimed the relevance to the present of nation-building efforts in the past. Myroslaw, Alberta, named for the university student who assassinated the Polish governor of Galicia in 1908, memorialized contemporary events. But while such politicized place names confirmed a coalescing pan-Ukrainian identity on the Canadian prairies, they imported ethnic tensions that had historically poisoned eastern Europe. Not only was Myroslav Sichynsky far from a hero to Polish settlers, but the excesses associated with Bohdan Khmelnytsky's uprising made his a hated name among Jews (in the late twentieth century, they would label 1648 the "first holocaust").

Among the place names commenting on the immigration and settlement experience, a handful flatly repudiated the notion of Canada as the promised land. For example, while named after a homeland village, Komarno, Manitoba (a *komar* is a mosquito in Ukrainian) also commemorated the legions of the insects that Ukrainians across the prairies insisted sucked more of their blood than their landlords in

Galicia had ever done.<sup>5</sup> More common were names like Zhoda, Manitoba (harmony), Myrnam, Alberta (peace be with us), and Vilna, Alberta (freedom). Other names referred to the actual settlement process and its human actors. Shandro, Alberta, was named for Andrew Shandro, at the time (1905) merely the local postmaster but in 1911 the first Ukrainian to be elected to any legislature in Canada. Disapproval of the vanity such personalized claims to place implied kept Mennonites from acknowledging their pioneers in this way. Winkler, Manitoba, in the West Reserve, for instance, was ultimately named after local politician Valentine Winkler, elected to first the Manitoba Legislature and then the House of Commons. He exchanged one of his quarter sections for land the CPR initially bought for its townsit from Isaac Wiens after Wiens's church objected not only to the sale of land to an outsider but also to the unseemly worldliness of the railway's proposal to call the station stop after him. But the village of Schanzenfeld a few kilometres south of Winkler was named after an individual, albeit not a local settler but a prominent Ontario Mennonite, Jacob Shantz, who recommended Manitoba for his brethren from the Russian empire and became one of their "founding fathers."<sup>6</sup> The fact that Mennonites honoured men like Shantz, and Ukrainians in both Manitoba and Alberta perpetuated the name of the Lviv professor of agriculture, Josef Oleskiw, whose 1895 tour of Canada set in motion their mass movement, is important. It testified to a sense of collective identity and shared formative experience, as immigrants in the new land, contemporary with the period of settlement. But Ukrainians named no place after the peasants Eleniak or Pylypiw, evidence that neither man loomed large in the consciousness of his fellow immigrants.

Many of the villages or rural clusters that Mennonite and Ukrainian settlers established existed for only a few years before the centre of activity shifted. Others survived into the post World War II period and beyond, their names, to outsiders once foreign and exotic, perhaps even threatening, now "English" words, the places themselves part of the region's fabric. Subsequent generations, wrapped up in their Canadian present rather than their parents' and grandparents' old-world past, increasingly failed to realize the meaning or point behind the words they inherited. Of all prairie settler peoples, only Ukrainians have systematically set out to recover where their old-world place names came from and why. Perhaps such an exercise was unnecessary for Mennonites, whose penchant for transplanting village names from their mother colonies made the question of origins seldom a mystery. Also, Mennonites' religious conscience and shared e(im)migrant experience gave them a cohesiveness and awareness of their history that Ukrainians, with their diverse backgrounds, lacked. At the same time, it is significant that the collecting and recording of Ukrainian

prairie place names was done not by a descendant of the pioneers but by a linguist who came to Canada as a displaced person after the Second World War.<sup>7</sup> The importance of place and the psychological grounding it provides, always acute among emigrants, is exaggerated in the case of those whose uprooting has been involuntary and violent. For both Ukrainian and Mennonite refugees arriving in western Canada after 1945, the profusion of familiar place names would have been disorienting because it was so out of context, yet it would also have been welcoming and a comfort.<sup>8</sup>

The pioneer generation's sense of rootlessness and detachment from place was highlighted by death, for although the soul went heavenward the body remained in this earth. What Mennonite and Ukrainian immigrants put on their tombstones, whether they marked their graves at all, and how they incorporated their dead and the sites of their dead into their daily lives reflected both individual preferences and a collective sense of community. Countless settler graves — some on private land, some on land officially designated as a burial ground — were unmarked, or marked with wooden crosses or posts vulnerable to prairie fires and which in any case rotted and disappeared with time. Today such graves represent memory lost. Even area residents can drive down their local road without realizing that the fenced off rectangle, overgrown with brush, in the adjacent pasture holds a long-forgotten grave.<sup>9</sup> Conservative Mennonites traditionally did not mark their graves, so that their immigrant dead made no visible stamp on the prairie landscape. Ukrainian markers ranged from wood and simple cement moulds to wrought iron and carved stone; if someone had a camera, the "highlight" would be an inset picture of the deceased, sometimes already in the open coffin. Initially, tombstone inscriptions were invariably written in German or Ukrainian, which reinforced Mennonite and Ukrainian cemeteries as places apart from the dominant Anglo prairie culture. It also made their personal stories inaccessible to outsiders, especially when even the names appeared in an unfamiliar script or alphabet. The words themselves could be scratched with a nail and soon barely legible, handpainted (awkward letters and ungrammatical texts a sign of limited literacy among Ukrainian peasants), or, as individuals and communities became more prosperous, exquisitely engraved. Some epitaphs provided no more than name and year of death, the barest of information divorcing the deceased from the social and physical environments in which she or he lived. Other epitaphs looked backward and outside the immediate prairie setting, linking the dead for eternity with "home." Putting a birthplace on a tombstone could express alienation from the present and attachment to a faraway past; it could also be a way for individuals in unfamiliar surroundings or a crystallizing new community to

identify themselves for themselves and for each other. Immigration and settlement patterns, however, made this exercise much less urgent among the more homogeneous Mennonites than among the more mixed Ukrainians. Because the survivors usually chose the wording, pioneer tombstones also reflect how the second generation mentally situated itself with respect to its old-world origins as much as they comment on the attitudes of its immigrant parents. In actual fact, only a minority of Mennonite and Ukrainian immigrants had their place of birth recorded on their tombstones. Their children, born or raised on the prairies, buried where they had always lived, felt even less need to reaffirm their connection to place in this way.

In Ukrainian tradition, the relationship between the living and the dead matters greatly. Like generations of peasants before them, on Christmas Eve Ukrainian settlers in western Canada brought into the house a sheaf of wheat, saved from the harvest, whose kernels were believed to contain the souls of the departed; on New Year's Eve they burned the sheaf in the fields to return the souls to the soil. From this perspective, if by chance the immigrants had brought the first handful of seed grain with them from Ukraine, their ancestors literally became part of their Canadian farm. Moreover, the newly dead were as important as the distant dead, and the pioneer cemetery and its graves immediately became part of private family and public communal ritual. In both Orthodox and Catholic churches, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection were followed by *provody*, when people gathered in the cemetery around their family graves for special memorial services or prayers for the dead. After the priest blessed the tidied plots and the baskets of food people brought, they broke bread together (and symbolically with their dead, past and present) on the graves. One surviving 1940s photograph from Alberta shows family members enjoying bottles of beer next to the braided bread and decorated Easter eggs set out on the tombstone. A closer look suggests that the men are playing cards.<sup>10</sup> Through this annual ritual, the liturgical calendar bound successive generations of Ukrainian Canadians with an original immigrant generation buried on the Canadian prairies. It also tied them to family and villagers back in Ukraine, increasingly remote in both time and place. In the opening years of the twenty-first century, seldom used country churches and cemeteries continue to draw Ukrainian Canadians back to their roots and their ancestors every spring. Once there, collective worship at graveside reinforces a sense of community around not only shared national origins but also shared prairie beginnings and pioneers.<sup>11</sup>

The theological rationale behind *provody* was, and is, the saving of souls from purgatory. The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation unleashed by Martin Luther rejected the notion of purgatory or

damnation altogether in favour of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Its immigrant heirs in western Canada - among them the Mennonites - dwelt on the salvation of the living. Cemeteries might be places that surviving family members visited privately, but they were not transformed into places of communal ritual and symbolism focussed on the dead. As such, they did not serve as a constant reaffirmation and reminder of the immigrant generation and its legacy or as a claim on the land and its history. For its part, despite an agricultural way of life, the thinking of Old Colony Mennonites - arguing that it was enough that God knew where the dead lay - actively worked against a three-way relationship binding the living and the dead through the cemetery to foster a sense of belonging and place. Today the cemetery at Reinland, Manitoba, in the West Reserve, for example, looks half empty, when in fact the broad expanse of grass covers those Mennonites who wished to be buried anonymously.<sup>12</sup> Mennonite immigrants also brought a strong tradition of alienation, migration and exile, persecution, and martyrdom as part of their collective memory and identity. A history of recurrent uprooting and relocation, albeit with the promise of spiritual renewal at each stop, undermined a sense of attachment to place, although not to ancestors themselves.<sup>13</sup> Yet the simplicity of Mennonite burials, and a partiality for burial mounds that would eventually sink to blend with nature, over formal cemeteries and grave markers, also prepared the immigrants' descendants, no longer insisting on separation from the surrounding society, to appreciate their merging with the land of western Canada.

Given that emigration disproportionately attracted the young, it was often tragic and accidental death that initially compelled settlers to establish a burial site. The age profile of immigrants also meant that not all, or even a majority, of the pioneer generation died in the settlement period itself. Perhaps the greatest number of Mennonite "old-timers" were buried in the 1920s and 1930s, Ukrainians between the 1950s and the 1970s (precisely those decades when the original settlement areas were experiencing accelerated out-migration and the decline of their rural communities). Among both Mennonites and Ukrainians, burials in country cemeteries became increasingly infrequent and confined to the older settler generation and its descendants who stayed on the land, as the upwardly mobile or those unsuited to farming left for the region's urban centres or other parts of Canada. Certain burial sites had not survived the pioneer period itself. For example, a mere thirty years after the Mennonite village of Schoendorf, Manitoba, in the West Reserve was established in 1874, the farmer who took over the abandoned land noted in his memoirs, "I could easily pick out the evidence of fourteen or sixteen house cellars

and a larger building which may have served as a Sunday School. The Cemetery was on the north west corner of the village - one of my implements caught the corner of a casket or rough box."<sup>14</sup>

Across the prairies, regardless of the settler peoples concerned, some cemeteries inevitably closed and vanished under grass or brush, while the dead from others were dug up and physically moved to new locations, closer to where the focus of local activities had shifted. Often, however, as short-lived villages like Schoendorf disappeared, or rural clusters lost their *raison d'être* and their churches, schools, and halls were demolished or sold and hauled away for other purposes, only the cemetery remained as a mute reminder that here had once flourished a viable community with a clear identity. Some graveyards were carefully maintained and visited regularly, still part of the lives of area residents and more intermittently of descendants returning for special events and religious services. Others awaited a generation curious about its Canadian origins and an ethno-religious community anxious to acknowledge its pioneers, to be rescued from decay and neglect. Indeed, the quest for roots sparked massive cemetery recovery and registration projects in the closing decades of the twentieth century, as provincial genealogical societies in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba transcribed the information on their tombstones, checked it against written records, published the data in hard copy, and posted it on the internet.<sup>15</sup> Surviving pioneer cemeteries continue to illustrate the interlocking duality of individual and community identity and sense of place that they exhibited at the time of their establishment a century or more earlier. That identity and sense of place now, however, mean something quite different from what they once did and are expressed in different ways. The cemetery is the place where the settlers' descendants acknowledge and celebrate their regional roots, commemorate those of their people who came before them, and proclaim their right to the land and its history. At the individual level, such statements are personal and idiosyncratic, the prerogative of those who remained on the land and lie beside their parents and grandparents, expressed in the images chosen for their tombstones. At the community level, such statements are made within the context of the ethno-religious group, in the form of commemorative cairns and monuments that cater to its priorities and agenda.

In terms of individual gestures of identification with place, integrating the life histories of "old-timers" with local and prairie history, Ukrainians have been visibly more enthusiastic than other settler peoples. Mennonite disinterest is no doubt explained by de-emphasis on the self, initial separation from the surrounding secular society, and religious-cultural biases that favour simplicity. The austere Mennonite graves in the East and West Reserves in southern Manitoba,

for example, are virtually devoid of visual symbols identifying the dead with the land or their regional roots. If Mennonites put anything on their tombstones besides the facts of the deceased, it is apt to be a Bible verse, expressing a religious rather than a regional or secular ethnic identity; sometimes there will be a modest flower or a few stalks of wheat. Ukrainians, in contrast, have adapted not only traditional engraving but also laser and computer technology to personalize their tombstones.<sup>16</sup> One option is to cover the back or front of the tombstone with romanticized and nostalgic images, crying natural abundance and prosperity, that appeal to the emotions through instantly recognizable icons: a log cabin in the bush beside a stream, a buck deer flashing its antlers at the forest's edge, a fish leaping from the lake, fat cattle grazing in the pasture, horse-drawn rack piled with hay, sheaves of wheat or combine in the field and grain elevator in the background. Ironically, such generic scenes are ultimately depersonalizing. Far more unique and assertive are tombstones that feature the deceased's actual farmstead - either engraved onto the stone or laser copied from a real photograph. Some of these pictures are clearly rooted in the past and depict the homestead that was. Others are present oriented and capture the operation when the person died, including details like the television antenna on the house, the van in the driveway, and the dogs barking at the gate. Aerial views most gratifyingly include not only the farm buildings but also the sweep of land owned around them. The type of place and belonging that these images claim is not just rooted in the region and its experience, but makes a very personal claim on a specific piece of land that the deceased and his or her ancestors have now cultivated for a hundred years. Ukrainian personalized tombstones must also be viewed within the context of contemporary events encouraging a sense of self-worth and entitlement as pioneers: Manitoba's centennial in 1970, the seventy-fifth anniversaries of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1980, the Canadian centennial in 1967, the "identity crisis" that gripped the rural prairies at the century's end.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, while ethnicity recedes in agricultural images, Ukrainian markers also sport the symbols of the ethno-religious group. Besides the cross, embroidery motifs - from simple designs to the red-and-white border framing a coloured engraving of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Meleb, Manitoba) - are most popular.

Ethno-religious specificity returns with communal commemorative cairns and monuments. And once again, Ukrainians more than Mennonites have singled out their pioneer cemeteries to pay respect to their Canadian ancestors and confirm themselves as heirs of the community they built.<sup>18</sup> The two groups have also understood community differently. While Mennonites regard it primarily as a

"kingdom of God" or communion of co-religionists, albeit with ethnic (cultural) overtones, Ukrainians are more appreciative of a secular identity. Ukrainians more than Mennonites have also mobilized the symbolic potential of the place of the dead as a reminder that they are a diaspora with ties and obligations elsewhere. The proliferation of cairns and monuments in Ukrainian prairie cemeteries to commemorate the pioneers and express a dual Ukrainian and Canadian (prairie) identity has several explanations. First, the size and number of Ukrainian bloc settlements magnified a sense of belonging around land that was "theirs." Second, intense Catholic-Orthodox rivalry, beginning in the pioneer period and lasting for several decades, multiplied the number of churches and thus cemeteries.<sup>19</sup> Ukrainians also tended to stay on the land through several generations, so that many of those churches and cemeteries were abandoned late or still function. Lastly, Ukrainians have always attached significance to the dead, the soil that shelters them, and their relationship to the living. The bond is not only reiterated on ritual and religious occasions like *provody* but has also been fundamental to transforming Ukrainians, in their own minds, into a "founding people" of western Canada.

Included in this founder image are the sacrifices made by the pioneers so that Ukrainians, individually and as a group, could prosper in the new land. One of the memorials marking the golden jubilee of Ukrainian settlement in Canada in 1941 was a plain monument, its only decoration a maple leaf, erected at Patterson Lake, Manitoba; it said, in Ukrainian, "Here rest 42 pioneers. Everlasting be their memory." The forty children and two adults had died of disease and exposure in 1899 after the Anglo-Canadian residents of Strathclair had refused the party - en route to homesteads near Shoal Lake and struck by scarlet fever - shelter in their community. The survivors marked the burial ground with wooden crosses and proceeded on their way; what had been crown land was taken over by a non-Ukrainian who pastured his cows among the graves; and by 1915, when a Ukrainian schoolteacher acquired and ploughed the property, all evidence had disappeared. Learning what he had done, the teacher fenced off the site, and in the 1920s the families of the victims built a single large burial mound topped with a wooden cross.<sup>20</sup> It was the cross on this common earthen memorial that the fiftieth-anniversary monument replaced, establishing a clear link between personal history and tragedy and the collective fortunes and experience of the ethnic group. In 1991, the centennial of their settlement in Canada, Ukrainians returned to this spot and erected yet another monument, this time sponsored by the local Ukrainian pioneers' association and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (Manitoba).<sup>21</sup>

Eventually, Ukrainians also acknowledged Vasyl Eleniak and Ivan

Pylypiw, who settled in the huge bloc east of Edmonton, as the group's founding fathers. The granite monument outside St Mary's Ukrainian Catholic church in Chipman, in whose adjacent cemetery Eleniak lies buried, was erected in 1954. On the side facing the road, the side with the Ukrainian text, the date 1891 appears above an engraving of a muscular farmer in a cowboy hat, sleeves rolled to the elbow, shirt open at the neck, wielding a scythe and blessed by rays emanating from the cross in the upper left corner. The text reads, in uncompromisingly male terms: "To the Ukrainian pioneers from their grateful sons." The English text on the reverse is more conscious of claiming place: "In commemoration of the Ukrainian pioneers in Canada by their grateful sons." The date is now 1954 and the engraving shows a farmer driving his self-propelled combine. In both Ukrainian and English the monument specifically credits Eleniak (in 1954 he celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday) as the first Ukrainian in Canada. Pylypiw, in contrast, had to wait more than half a century after his death for the recognition his travelling companion enjoyed in his lifetime. Two monuments erected in 1991 near the Ukrainian Orthodox church at Star related the story of his journey abroad and of the four couples (husband-and-wife photographs on one monument identify them as Iwan and Maria Pylypow, Myhailo and Maria Pullishy, Fedor and Anna Melnyk, and Wasyl and Anastasia Feniak) who settled nearby on 22-56-19-W4. "They," reads one text, "were the first of thousands from all parts of Ukraine who came and played a large part in the development of western Canada. They were also part of the founding members of this parish and, along with many others who settled in this area, are resting in this cemetery."<sup>22</sup>

Although the otherworldliness of their religious tradition has kept their cemeteries from acting in a parallel fashion as sites of secular pioneer or ethnic commemoration, prairie Mennonites have also developed a sense of place and roots around their prairie settlement, villages, and reserves. They have likewise deemed the recovery and recording of the names of pioneer dead important,<sup>23</sup> and, in the case of Rosenfeld village in the West Reserve, they agreed that the cemetery was the proper place for the Historic Sites Advisory Board of Manitoba to put up a plaque commemorating Mennonite occupation of the area. There are also specifically Mennonite evocations of the pioneers, found both in the inscriptions on private tombstones and in public communal statements. Rosenfeld village itself, for example, erected a cemetery cairn to its pioneers on the occasion of the centennial of Manitoba in 1970. Also in the West Reserve, the following epitaph, in English, acknowledged six members of the Hiebert family (the first died in 1896, the last in 1955): "In remembrance of the pioneers. The dead in Christ shall rise first. We shall bear the image of the heavenly."<sup>24</sup> In

1982, when the West Reserve community of Schoenwiese erected a plaque at the local cemetery "in honor of our grand and great grand parents and their families who pioneered in the village of Schoenwiese, 1875-1940," it included Psalm 103:2 in German: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." The dominant message here is one of attachment to God rather than to the surrounding land or to the ethno-religious group as a contributor to the regional or national society. Yet in the context of the plaque - the history of Mennonite settlement on the Canadian prairies - "benefits" could also mean the freedom of conscience and even economic prosperity that the 1874 contingent and its successors found in southern Manitoba. Reinforcing this sense of identification with Manitoba history is the imagery on the monument in Steinbach Pioneer Cemetery, erected in memory of the men and women (named individually) who arrived "in the Providence of God" in fall 1874 to found the village. Opposite a Mennonite windmill is a Red River cart, universally equated with Metis in the fur trade but also important in prairie Mennonite mythology, having transported the first immigrants from where they disembarked at the junction of the Rat and the Red rivers to the East Reserve. The Red River cart also features alongside a hand plough and a spinning wheel on the cairn in the Steinbach Mennonite Heritage Village dedicated to the Russian Mennonite immigration of the 1920s.

If pioneer memorials in Mennonite cemeteries acknowledge the hand of God or Providence more than those of their Ukrainian counterparts, they have similarly singled out the graves of their founding fathers for special recognition. Often, as with the Reverend Heinrich Wiebe, these figures were the same person as their religious leaders. A member of the scouting party sent from the Russian empire to inspect Canada in 1873, Wiebe settled in the East Reserve before relocating to the West Reserve, where he died in 1897 and was buried; his tombstone was eventually moved to a cairn near Gretna.<sup>25</sup> The leadership of the Reverend Johann Wiebe is recalled in a small cairn beside the road in the Rosengart (West Reserve) cemetery; unveiled in 2000, it also commemorates the members of "the pioneer congregation he served," many of whom lie buried there, often anonymously.<sup>26</sup> In neither Mennonite nor Ukrainian tradition, however, have the grave sites of the group's founding fathers acquired symbolic value as focal points of regularized community ritual, especially as pilgrimage sites where the group gathers to pay homage or to celebrate the landmark events in its collective life.<sup>27</sup>

In a symbolic but very concrete way, prairie Mennonites have also accepted a collective responsibility towards their old-world ancestors and leaders, in particular Johann Bartsch and Jakob Höppner, two men who spearheaded the exodus from Prussia to the Russian empire.

In 1968 the marker from Bartsch's grave was moved from southern Ukraine to Manitoba and re-erected at the Mennonite Heritage Village at Steinbach. In 1973, when the land around Höppner's grave on the island of Chortitza was to be levelled to build a park, Manitoba Mennonites negotiated with the Soviet government to bring over his marker too. While Bartsch's monument was a plain obelisk, the Höppner marker, erected at the disgraced leader's grave only in 1890 after he had been rehabilitated, came complete with the wrought-iron fence that originally surrounded the plot.<sup>28</sup> The grounds of the Steinbach village museum have linked prairie Mennonites with their overseas dead more assertively as well. Dominating the forecourt, a monument in memory of Mennonite victims of violence, first in the Russian empire and then in the Soviet Union, over the course of the twentieth century specifically remembers, with bilingual English-German texts: "The victims of war and anarchy, 1914-1921," "The victims of terror, 1929-1941," "The victims of World War II, 1939-1945," "The unknown victims, 1914-1953," and, finally, "The Mennonite women, 1929-1953." A diaspora mentality via identification with the old-world dead is also found among prairie Ukrainians. It exists most similarly in the huge monument dedicated to Ukraine's freedom fighters that dominates St Michael's Ukrainian cemetery in Edmonton, more ambiguously in "The Tomb," a centennial cenotaph to the "unknown Ukrainian soldier," erected in the heritage village, Selo Ukraina, in Dauphin, Manitoba, to honour participation in Canada's wars.<sup>29</sup>

Ethno-religious cemeteries and museum properties represent private group space. Over the past several decades, more recently in the case of Mennonites, both they and Ukrainians have also sought to have their experience acknowledged in "mainstream" space because of the larger legitimization it confers. To be successful, such public expressions of Mennonite and Ukrainian identity and collective memory cannot challenge prevailing notions about the nature of prairie society and its component parts. Moreover, the fact that requests for this type of recognition have sometimes met with resistance serves as a reminder that even on the prairies, where ethno-religious groups have contributed fundamentally to a distinct regional society, integration and acceptance are imperfect. In Mennonite and Ukrainian public commemoration of their pioneers, two points stand out. First, both groups have singled out landmark anniversaries of their arrival and settlement on the Canadian prairies as the moments to mark. Second, the visible symbols and themes they have chosen to say who they are and what they have done draws less on their western/Canadian present or future than on their prairie pioneer and even old-world pasts. What most distinguishes initiatives by the two groups, affecting

how prairie Mennonites and Ukrainians relate to their people in Canada as a whole, is that the Mennonite statement of place and belonging remains regional, while its Ukrainian counterpart speaks to and for all Ukrainian Canadians.

Ukrainians' iconographic manipulation of the turn-of-the-century peasant pioneer woman, as both a politicized ideological symbol and a much loved grassroots figure, is arguably the most pervasive group image emerging from the prairie settlement experience.<sup>30</sup> Most strikingly, she is not only female and ordinary, but at the time of settlement was also blamed by both Anglo-Canadian nation builders and a status-conscious Ukrainian immigrant intelligentsia for her family's material and cultural poverty. Rehabilitated by a post-World War II generation, the peasant pioneer woman embodies two competing views of Ukrainian-Canadian identity. In official community mythology she acts as a model of Ukrainian consciousness, especially for women's organizations. The statue "Madonna of the Wheat" in front of City Hall in Edmonton best captures her essence: young, slender, beautiful, her hair coiled in neat braids, wearing an embroidered blouse and carrying a sheaf of wheat, the symbol of life and unity with her ancestors. Commissioned by the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada and sculpted by John Weaver, "Madonna of the Wheat" was dedicated to all pioneer women of Alberta on the province's seventy-fifth anniversary - to honour their labour, sacrifice, and achievements.<sup>31</sup> The grassroots figure is not the eternally young mother and activist inspiring successive generations to preserve their language and culture, but *baba* (old woman or grandmother) - the once youthful homesteader now frozen in time, who speaks to her direct descendants and legitimizes their role in nation building as a founding people of western Canada. She also embodies the essence of their Ukrainian peasant heritage, and in endearing traits once branded as foreign and inferior, testifies to a generation secure in itself and its Canadianness. *Baba* is not beautiful or feminine or given to causes, but neither is she submissive and downtrodden. Contemporary folk art, like the "Baba bell" Christmas tree ornament sold in a Canadiana souvenir shop in Banff, Alberta, depicts a plump woman enveloped in voluminous skirts and trademark headscarf. By halves eccentric and dignified, *baba* keeps her dead husband's gallstones in a pickle jar in the kitchen; she drinks beer and raises chickens in downtown Winnipeg; and she is indifferent to her social-climbing daughter, ashamed of the green-roses kerchief and black felt boots worn to tea in the River Heights mansion. A much more intimate and humble figure than her community counterpart, *baba* is not, however, seen to deserve statues in public places.

When prairie Mennonites celebrated their centennial in 1974, and debated what kind of permanent memorial to leave on the landscape,

the question of what best encapsulated who they were came to the fore. Would this symbol draw on their old-world heritage (that is, the Mennonite faith), or would it draw on their specific experience as a settler people in western Canada? One thing was clear. The Conestoga wagon, whose wheels would feature so prominently in the memorial erected in Vineland, Ontario, in 1986 to commemorate the bicentennial of the arrival of the American Mennonites from the former Thirteen Colonies, had no resonance with Russian Mennonites who identified their arrival in Manitoba with a riverboat and the Red River cart. Nor did the quilt (two were given as anniversary gifts to Governor General Jeanne Sauvé and the lieutenant governor of Ontario, as part of the Ontario-driven bicentennial celebrations) figure in prairie Mennonites' consciousness.<sup>32</sup> Their debate illustrated not only the importance of symbols but also the debilitating effect of having no clear and undisputed images with which large, or influential, segments of the group identified. One issue concerned the site for the proposed monument and the relative symbolism of the junction of the Rat and the Red rivers, where the Russian Mennonites stepped onto prairie soil, versus a high-profile public space on the Manitoba Legislature Grounds. Although the architects and artists approached in 1972 to execute the project favoured the former, the latter prevailed, to the chagrin of one observer:

What more meaningful a place to commemorate our centennial than the very spot where our forefathers first landed 100 years ago?... But no, it seemed our leaders felt a certain economic threat from developing this location, a threat to the museum at Steinbach where such a large investment had already been made. It had already been decided that the site of the monument was to be on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Building, 'at the crossroads of Manitoba life.' Here we would take our rightful place, as part of the Manitoba mosaic, along with the other ethnic groups (Queen Victoria, Robby Burns, Taras Shevchenko, and Louis Riel?)<sup>33</sup>

The second issue concerned the design for the statue. In the end, two concepts were proposed, both drawing explicitly on the Manitoba Mennonite experience. Harold Funk's design featured a peaked roof evoking the Mennonite *darp* or village, "with its elements of community and shelter," which formed part of the group's adaptation to the new environment and visually interrupted "the strong horizontal plane of the prairies." Alvin Pauls's design was a three-dimensional mural made out of ordinary objects ("machinery parts, spades, forks, etc.") to be left to the vicissitudes of the weather and representing four stages in Mennonite life:

The first, *confrontation* symbolizes the loss in religious freedom in Russia. The embryonic form symbolizes the rebirth resulting in emigration, and the church window symbolizes the strength of their faith. In the second stage, *realization*, the spades tied to earth indicate man's need to know. Earth is god. Man touches god through earth. The wheel symbolizes the Mennonites [sic] aggressive thrust forward. The groups of figures looking out, represent those seeking new identity, causing confusion in some which results in differences among the people. The third stage, *vision* is symbolized as being achieved by the tilling of the earth. The partial church window represents the religious part of hope and states that with the correct vision, religion will be the dominant part of the future. The last stage, *hope*, is a result of the vision. The beginning of new embryonic forms indicate [sic] new birth, the future. The open spaces symbolize the hopes to be fulfilled.<sup>34</sup>

The solution was a compromise, with Funk's roof sheltering Pauls's mural, but without community consensus the monument never became a reality. By early 1975 a modified version of his mural had won Pauls first place at the Mennonite Festival of Art and Music in Winnipeg, and the Women's Committee of the Mennonite Educational Society was trying to get it accepted for a public building in the city.<sup>35</sup> Greater consensus emerged around another Mennonite symbol, although its adoption was local: the windmill built at Steinbach in 1877 was chosen a century later as the emblem for both the Mennonite Heritage Village and the city's Chamber of Commerce.

The Mennonite centennial debate raised the question of the relationship between "art" and the artist in ethno-religious commemorative works and preconceived community expectations and/or agenda. Can an abstract piece meet the demand of telling both a group's own members and the public at large what that group has done, what it stands for, where it is going? The fortunes of the Ukrainian-Canadian centennial statue slated for the Alberta Legislature Grounds suggest that the group at least needs something concrete that resonates emotionally with its pre-emigration or settler past. After an independent jury chose none of the designs submitted to it, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (Alberta) commissioned the work that was eventually erected. Much like Pauls's Mennonite mural, "The Commitment" by Danek Mozdzinski is packed with objects that combine Ukrainians' old-world peasant heritage and western Canadian pioneer experience - among them the ubiquitous sheepskin coat, an Easter basket, a sheaf of wheat, the tools for breaking and sowing the land. The guidelines accompanying the announcement of the original competition encouraged thinking along these lines. Suitable subject

matter ranged from "love of the land" and "land, water, trees, wheat - symbols of the environment" to "a sense of the deep religious commitment held by Ukrainians" and "admiration of the risk taken on by the pioneers." These themes, which captured and privileged Ukrainians at the moment they arrived, proved more attractive than those like "achievement of individuals and groups in the economy, the arts and sciences, politics, education" that addressed their subsequent life in Canada.<sup>36</sup> It was also important for the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, like its Mennonite counterparts in Manitoba, that the community's official statue go up in politically potent public space in Alberta's capital rather than in the outlying rural area where settlement occurred. The site and its attendant legitimization, however, did not sit well with everyone. Most surprisingly, John McIntosh, chair of the original jury and previously the architect for the revamped Legislature Grounds, criticized both the precedent and the statue's too prominent position near the fountain.<sup>37</sup>

McIntosh's objections came in the wake of a more spirited fight over what was suitable for the lawn in front of Edmonton's City Hall and adjacent Churchill Square. Although dissident voices had been heard when they were erected, the issue resurfaced in late 1989 when not only "Madonna of the Wheat" but also a monument marking the fiftieth anniversary of Stalin's artificial famine in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-3, when six to seven million died, had to be temporarily removed for the construction of a new hall. It proved an ideal moment for the City to float the idea that they be relocated to a special ethnic heritage theme park, where Edmonton's non-British, non-French could have their symbols without imposing on the larger public. This suggestion, in the words of an *Edmonton Sun* reporter, "got the Ukrainians' pyrogies in a knot,"<sup>38</sup> and the Alberta Ukrainian community launched a successful campaign to have its statues restored to their original spots. "What some council members may be finally sensing," the same reporter commented as the controversy swelled, "is that ...Ukrainians are Edmonton's distinct society."<sup>39</sup> With their statues on the grounds of the Alberta Legislature and City Hall, Ukrainians are the only settler people to be represented in this way. How are casual visitors to the province and its capital, let alone their own citizens, Canadians of Ukrainian descent, and members of other ethno-religious groups to interpret this fact? Does Ukrainians' success, not only fusing the general prairie settlement story with their specific experience but also winning the battle to commemorate their homeland history in public space, mean that they *are* different from the rest?

The 1974 Mennonite controversy over where the centennial statue should be erected - in group-specific space at the junction of the Rat and the Red, or in mainstream space on the Manitoba Legislature Grounds - raises an important difference in how prairie Mennonites

and prairie Ukrainians have treated the land itself as a symbol. Ukrainians have been more aggressive by far in proclaiming a Canadian homeland through regional founding rights and status derived from cultivation and ownership of the soil. They have then used this argument, in the interests of Ukrainian cultural survival, to obtain group benefits financed by the public purse.<sup>40</sup> But the sentiment is genuine. One of the remarkable features of the Ukrainian-Canadian centennial was its sense of attachment and entitlement to the land. While in the old blocs the pioneers' descendants financed monuments, put up plaques, and marked the sites of rural churches, halls, and schools, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress floated two ambitious proposals: to plant thousands of trees in the same soil their ancestors had laboured so hard to clear for sowing; and to drive a stake with the original occupant's name on every quarter section Ukrainians homesteaded, regardless of who currently owned the land.<sup>41</sup> Yet Ukrainians, unlike Mennonites, have never been emotionally attached to a single specific place - including Edna-Star, where both Pylypiw and Eleniak settled and which Oleskiw favoured - that overshadows all others in the group's collective mythology. Nothing in their Canadian origins story - untidy, recovered from obscurity only in the 1930s, and incorporated retroactively into community memory and ritual - can compare to the role that the junction of the Rat and the Red plays in Mennonite consciousness.<sup>42</sup>

With their unambiguous starting point, their group mobilization around religious faith and the preservation of a way of life, and the shared journey and settlement process, Mennonites had a much deeper awareness of their Canadian beginnings. From the moment the first sixty-five families stepped off the riverboat "*International*" onto dry land, the junction of the Rat and the Red entered the group's collective consciousness; however unimpressive the river bank might have seemed, it symbolized a definitive break with the past and a definitive step towards the future. This much was admitted during the prairie Mennonite centennial celebrations in 1974, when a "dramatized meditation" on the 1874 migration was held at the original landing site and the spirits of the first arrivals welcomed their descendants to the "historic ground" that began "the adventure in faith for which you are honoring us today." A journey half way around the world, "undertaken in answer to God's command, in hopes of a brighter future, in the faith that with God's help all present and future obstacles would be overcome, ... both ended and began on this river bank exactly one hundred years ago."<sup>43</sup> When prairie Mennonites celebrated their one hundred twentieth anniversary two decades later, the junction of the Rat and the Red received the official recognition that bypassed it in 1974. At this out-of-the-way spot, unmarked from the secondary highway that provided access to it, a huge stone cairn was unveiled by

Governor General Edward Schreyer (also a former premier of Manitoba) at the end of a tree-lined path, as the centrepiece of a small park. The sole image on the cairn was of the riverboat that brought the first immigrants; the accompanying text explained the meaning of the site and outlined the immigration and settlement history of Mennonites "from German-speaking colonies in south Russia (Ukraine)." It also paid tribute to the pioneers, "among the first Europeans to establish farm communities on open prairie ... [who] ... also became known for successfully transplanting their nonresistant church-centered ways of life. We gratefully acknowledge their bequeathal of courage and faith in God."<sup>44</sup> By fall 2001 the cairn had been vandalized; someone, presumably with Ukrainian territorial or nationalist sympathies, had chiselled out "Russia" and left only "Ukraine" as the Mennonite homeland.

Despite differences in how Mennonites and Ukrainians have identified with and mobilized their pioneers to express a sense of place and belonging, they share one overarching symbol - wheat. Pivotal to their agricultural backgrounds, doubly important to Ukrainians because of its ritual function and the fact that a seed from Galicia (the ancestor of Red Fife) preceded them to Canada,<sup>45</sup> wheat expresses a seamless continuity and connection between the old world and the new. It is also a symbol the two groups share with other westerners, for it has come to represent the pioneer heritage and rural roots of all settler peoples whose forebears put the land into production. Prairie tombstones are rife with wheat stalks, sheaves, stooks, and even swathes awaiting the combine; wheat motifs grace the signage and logos of towns, villages, and municipalities across the region; and wheat forms part of the design of anniversary monuments and popular memorabilia. A commemorative spoon for the prairie Mennonite centennial, for example, featured "several heads of grain across a Bible representing the agricultural background of the people and their reliance on the biblical record as their guide in life."<sup>46</sup> For the Ukrainian-Canadian centennial, Canada Post issued four commemorative stamps, each reproducing a William Kurelek painting from the National Gallery collection: in one a red-shirted farmer in a hat stood knee-deep in a field of wheat as he inspected the kernels in his hand.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, reflecting the national versus regional claims of the Ukrainian and Mennonite prairie settlement stories, Canada Post had to be convinced that it should issue a special stamp for the prairie Mennonite centennial. "The central question," said Jake Epp, a Mennonite Member of Parliament from Manitoba, of his discussions with Postmaster General André Ouellet,

was whether this event was only of limited interest to a small ethnic group in Manitoba, or ... had a wider significance. I

have pointed out that not only will this event be of interest to all Canadian Mennonites, but that the coming of the Mennonites to Canada in 1874 was a tangible expression of the government's decision of that day to open the vast prairies by people from all parts of Europe, not only those who were of English or French background. Evidence of this fact is seen in the multi-cultural mosaic which is evident in Canada today, and especially so in Western Canada. Since Confederation, Canada has been a haven to many who were forced to leave their homeland for religious or economic reasons.<sup>48</sup>

When the Post Office finally relented, the image chosen for the stamp (issued 28 August 1974) was of a group of male and female figures, the women in kerchiefs and peasant clothes, the men in black hats and jackets, that "drew attention to the Mennonite immigrants" but was "intended to honour all the ethnic groups who found their way to the prairies."<sup>49</sup> Seven stalks of wheat formed the centrepiece of the cancellation mark on the Day of Issue envelope.

In the opening years of the twenty-first century the great majority of the descendants of the pioneers among both Mennonites and Ukrainians fit seamlessly into prairie society, indistinguishable from the descendants of other settler peoples. The great majority of Mennonites and Ukrainians also live no longer on the land but in prairie urban centres, if, indeed, they still reside in the region at all. In each case as well, the original settler immigration was supplemented by additional waves of newcomers, increasingly remote from its experience, however appreciative of it they might otherwise be. Ultimately, a unifying symbol of land and ancestors, representing both beginnings and roots and a bridge between old and new worlds, has cut across the generations and the immigrations to define who prairie Mennonites and Ukrainians are: as westerners, as Canadians, and as members of diaspora communities with global ties.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Published on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Mennonites' arrival on the prairies, Frank Epp's *Mennonites in Canada: The History of a Separate People, 1786-1920* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974) situates their early years within the context of the larger Canadian Mennonite experience. His *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, Manitoba: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962) examines both interwar and post-1945 immigrations. Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) compares the adaptation processes

over three generations of the "Kleine Gemeinde" Russian Mennonites who settled across the forty-ninth parallel from each other (Steinbach, Manitoba and Jansen, Nebraska) in the 1870s.

- <sup>2</sup> One of many books marking the Ukrainian-Canadian centennial in 1991, Orest Martynowych's *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period, 1891-1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1991) is now the standard work on the first immigration. Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk, eds, *Canada's Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) contains chapters on each of the pre-1914, interwar, and post-1945 immigrations. In general the prairie settlement experience, and especially its pioneering phase, have generated a huge amount of literature at both popular and scholarly levels, most of it focussing on the large "Vegreville" bloc in east-central Alberta; see, for example, Myrna Kostash's controversial *All of Baba's Children* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1977), which criticized an ambitious second generation for whitewashing its peasant past in the interests of acceptance by middle-class Anglo-Canadian society.
- <sup>3</sup> The sources for this paper rely heavily on fieldwork conducted throughout the prairie provinces over the course of two decades, and more systematically in 1999, 2000, and 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> There are a number of works on prairie place names, beginning with *Place-Names of Alberta* (1928) and *Place-Names of Manitoba* (1933) published by the Department of the Interior for the Geographic Board of Canada; and ZM Hamilton, *Place Names of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Department of Natural Resources and Industrial Development, 1949). The 1970s produced another flurry of publications, reflecting westerners' increasing concern to recover and record their history. From this period, see JB Rudnyc'kyj, *Manitoba Mosaic of Place Names* (Winnipeg: Canadian Institute of Onomastic Sciences, 1970); ET Russell, *What's In a Name: The Story Behind Saskatchewan Place Names*, 3d ed rev (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980) [1st ed 1973]; and Eric Holmgren and Patricia Holmgren, *2000 Place Names of Alberta* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1972). In the 1990s Alberta Community Development (Historic Sites Service), in conjunction with the Friends of the Geographic Names of Alberta Society and the University of Calgary Press, produced four volumes under the general title, *Place Names of Alberta*. The most recent Manitoba compilation, also a provincial government project, is *Geographical Names of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Conservation, 2000). There are also two recent books by Bill Barry: *People Places: Saskatchewan and Its Names* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1997) and *People Places: The Dictionary of Saskatchewan Place Names* (Regina: The author, 1998).
- <sup>5</sup> Today the tiny community's mascot is a huge metal mosquito, mounted on a pole, that rotates gently in the wind; Komarno, Manitoba, visited 23 September 2001.
- <sup>6</sup> Rudnyc'kyj, *Manitoba Mosaic*, 214-5 (Winkler); cairn to Jacob Shantz, erected by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, Schanzenfeld, Manitoba, visited 24 September 2001 (the former village of Schanzenberg near Niverville, Manitoba, in the East Reserve was also named after Shantz).
- <sup>7</sup> Jaroslav B Rudnytskyi, "Kanadiiski heohrafichni nazvy ukrainskoho pokhodzhennia," in *Propamiatna knyha ukrainskoho narodnoho domu u Vynypegu*, comp Semen Kovbel and ed Dmytro Doroshenko (Winnipeg: Ukrainskyi narodnyi dim, 1949), 765-819; see also his *Slavic Geographic Names in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Canadian Institute of Onomastic Sciences and the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, 1973).
- <sup>8</sup> On the Mennonite and Ukrainian postwar immigrations, see Marlene Epp, *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); and Lubomyr Luciuk, *Searching for Place:*

*Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

- <sup>9</sup> Khimik grave, northwest of Two Hills, Alberta; visited 12 August 2001.
- <sup>10</sup> *Provody* at the Russo-Orthodox church outside Smoky Lake, Alberta; Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, G746A.
- <sup>11</sup> A number of works make reference to Ukrainian pioneer cemeteries and their tombstones, although not to graveside traditions, on the prairies. See, for example, Lubomyr Luciuk and Bohdan Kordan, *Creating a Landscape: A Geography of Ukrainians in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 14-15; Bohdan Medwidsky, "Ukrainian Grave Markers in East-Central Alberta," *Material History Bulletin* 29 (1989): 72-5; AM Kostecki, "Crosses of East Slavic Christianity among Ukrainians in Western Canada," *Material History Bulletin* 29 (1989): 55-8; and James Darlington, "The Ukrainian Impress on the Canadian West," in Luciuk and Hryniuk, *Canada's Ukrainians*, 69-70.
- <sup>12</sup> Conversation, Henry Ens, Reinland, Manitoba, 23 September 2001. On pioneer Mennonite cemeteries, burial plots, and funeral customs more generally, see the comments about the area around Hoffungsort, Saskatchewan, in Russell, *What's in a Name*, 141; John Rempel and William Harms, *Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages, Homesteaders, and Some Burial Plots of the Mennonite West Reserve*, Manitoba (Altona, Manitoba: The authors, 1990), esp the cemetery index (145-7, C1-C39), which identifies known interred by name; Linda Buhler, "Mennonite Burial Customs," *Preservings* 7 (December 1995): 51-2, and 8 (June 1996): 48-50 (the latter issue also contains short descriptions of two private family cemeteries); and Jacob G Guenter, "Early Traditional Mennonite Funeral," in *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, 1895-1995* (Hepburn, Saskatchewan, 1995), 634.
- <sup>13</sup> One concrete attempt to tie Mennonites to their ancestors is through the enduring relevance of the stories of the men and women who died for their faith during the Anabaptist persecutions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, recounted in Thieleman J van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, first published in 1660; see, for example, <http://www.mph.org/studygds/martyrsg.htm> (accessed 23 March 2002).
- <sup>14</sup> Bill Jessiman, quoted in Rempel and Harms, *Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages, Homesteaders, and Some Burial Plots*, 101.
- <sup>15</sup> The database of the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society lists over 3 200 cemeteries and burial sites, which can be accessed by religion, providing a rough guide to ethnicity. The website is <http://www.saskgenealogy.com/cemetery/cemetery.htm> (accessed 20 August 2001); actual files are kept in the SGS library. The master index compiled by the Alberta Genealogical Society contains over 500 000 surnames; see <http://www.compumart.ab.ca/abgensoc/sources/> (accessed 20 August 2001) on where and how to use it. The Manitoba Genealogical Society has transcribed the information (available at the MGS Resource Centre) from over 1 400 cemeteries; see [http://www.mts.net/~mgsg/mgs\\_mis.html](http://www.mts.net/~mgsg/mgs_mis.html) (accessed 20 August 2001).
- <sup>16</sup> Ukrainians' partiality for using tombstones to leave a public record of what a person did or valued in life is not restricted to the old agricultural settlement blocs. For example, in Edmonton's Beechmount cemetery adjacent to the Calder railyards there are engravings of train engines, their numbers clear on the side, chugging through the Rocky Mountains or sitting on the siding with the Edmonton skyline in the background.
- <sup>17</sup> One of the best examples of both prairie nostalgia for the homesteading era with its heroic men and women and the sense of place and belonging felt by present-day westerners is to be found in the profusion of local history books, with their huge biography sections, boasting titles like *Golden Memories*, *We*

- Came and We Stayed, and This is Our Land* (from *Alberta's Local Histories in the Historical Resources Library*, 6th ed [Edmonton: Alberta Culture, 1986]).
- 18 East European Jews who settled on the land illustrate how the psychological importance of ownership of the soil, fortified by shared toil and hardship in taming the wilderness and building on the frontier, could overcome a historical consciousness of living outside the surrounding society to foster a sense of place and belonging around claims centred on the dead. Although the Jewish farming colony at Hirsch, Saskatchewan, was abandoned in 1942, a victim of the Depression, when Jews celebrated the centenary of their settlement in western Canada in 1977, they returned to the cemetery to pay communal homage to their pioneers. The decade saw a new sign placed at the gate, efforts were made to recover and identify graves long obliterated by drifting soil, and in 1977 itself the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada erected a plaque commemorating "this historic venture in Saskatchewan agriculture." The role of the cemetery in claiming a Jewish prairie birthright, predicated upon owning and tilling the soil, was confirmed in 1980 when it became a provincial historical site. The accompanying ceremony, attended by some two hundred guests from as far away as Montreal and Los Angeles, included the singing of the Hebrew hymn for the dead and consecration of the plot as the "eternal abode" for those resting there. The Honourable Norman Vickar, minister of industry and commerce for Saskatchewan and a himself Jew, also spoke. "Standing here," he said, reflecting on why the day's events pulled so many back to Hirsch, "we feel the strength of history. We are in touch with our cultural and natural roots." See <http://cap.estevan.sk.ca/cemetery.records/hirsch/index.html> (accessed 13 July 2001).
  - 19 Ukrainians have a long tradition of photographing, painting, and recording the history of their prairie churches. See, for example, *Propamiatna knyha z nahody zolotoho iuvileiu poselennia ukrainskoho narodu v Kanadi* (Yorkton: "Holos Spasytelia" for the Episcopal Ordinariat, 1941), compiled by the Ukrainian Catholic clergy on the fiftieth anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada; *Zbirnyk materialiv z nahody iuvileinykh sviatkuvan u 50-littia Ukrainskoi hreko-pravnoslavnoi tserkvy v Kanadi, 1918-1968* (Winnipeg: Konsistoriia, 1968), marking the golden jubilee of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada; Basil Rotoff, Roman Yereniuk, and Stella Hryniuk, *Monuments to Faith: Ukrainian Churches in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1990); Diana Kordan, *Historical Driving Tour: Ukrainian Churches in East Central Alberta* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, 1988), published for the millennium of Christianity in Ukraine; Paraska Iwanec's paintings of rural Alberta churches, housed in the Ukrainian Canadian Archives and Museum of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, and the wall calendars (Alan Schietzsch photographer) sold as a Ukrainian Catholic (Alberta) fundraiser in the 1990s.
  - 20 See Julian Stechishin, *A History of Ukrainian Settlement in Canada*, trans Isidore Goresky (Saskatoon: Ukrainian Self-Reliance League, 1992), 174-9; Michael Marunchak, *The Ukrainian Canadians: A History* (Winnipeg and Ottawa: Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, 1970), 44, 61; and Vladimir Kaye, *Early Ukrainian Settlements in Canada, 1895-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 255-63.
  - 21 For a picture and description of the monument with its bas-relief of two bowed figures (designed by sculptor Roman Kowal), see Iwan Perederyj, *Centennial of the First Ukrainian Settlement in Canada, 1891-1991: Commemorative Philately, Memorabilia and Architecture* (Cornwall, Ontario, The author, 1995/6), 42.
  - 22 For further information on the two Pylypiw monuments, see *ibid.*, 43, 46.

Ukrainians in east-central Alberta have also built a symbolic *mohyla* (grave) in the manner of the earthen burial mounds of the ancient Scythians that still dot the landscape of the Ukrainian steppe and which, under the Cossacks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, functioned as strategic points. Erected not in private ethno-religious space, like a cemetery, but on public property owned by the town of Lamont, the Mohyla commemorates the centennial of Ukrainian settlement in Canada and "symbolizes the dedication, respect, and love of Ukrainian people for life-giving earth. True to tradition it rises from the flat prairie as a tribute to the past and a beacon for future generations"; see Hania Martyniuk, "The Mohyla, A Living Monument" (publicity sheet for the reenactment in 1999 of the North-West Mounted Police march west in 1874), private collection of Orest Nemchuk, Society of the Centenary of the Ukrainian Settlement in Northeastern Alberta, Lamont, Alberta.

- 23 Indicative of a subsequent generation's search for place and need of roots, in recent years some of the pioneers' descendants have wanted to know where their (great, great great) grandparents are buried and erect stones; Mrs Henry (Sarah) Ens, conversation, Reinland, Manitoba, 24 September 2001.
- 24 SE/SW 34-1-W2, Rempel and Harms, *Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages, Homesteaders, and Some Burial Plots*, C-17.
- 25 See the meticulously detailed cemetery and interment lists in Rempel and Harms, *Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages, Homesteaders, and Some Burial Plots*; Reverend Wiebe's grave is discussed on page 18, other examples of commemorative cairns and monuments come from photographs on pages C-11, C-17, C-22.
- 26 See Peter D Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community*, 2d ed (Reinland: Reinland Centennial Committee, 2001), Supplement (10); visited 24 September 2001.
- 27 The grave of the Doukhobor spiritual leader, Peter Verigin, stands in sharp contrast. In 1908, six years after joining his co-religionists in Saskatchewan following his release from exile in Russia, Verigin led the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood to British Columbia in search of economic security and freedom from state interference. There, amid escalating factional tensions, he died in 1924, the victim of a mysterious explosion aboard the train he was riding. His funeral attracted 7 000 mourners and his grave near Brilliant, British Columbia, was immediately recognized for its symbolic potential: shortly after the funeral 4 000 followers met at its side to select his successor. Verigin's tomb (his eulogy is engraved on the massive overhanging rock face) continued to be a focal point in Doukhobor life and conflict. While his Community supporters gathered for annual memorial services on the anniversary of his death, in 1931 his Freedomite opponents committed the first of many acts of vandalism and blew up its marble cover. Today a fence topped with barbed wire surrounds the site. More recently, Doukhobors have also gathered for prayers at Verigin's grave on Peter Day (28/29 June) to commemorate the burning of arms that set in motion their movement to Canada. On Verigin's death, see George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), 257-60; references to his grave appear on 316 and in the illustrations. For a description of Verigin's grave and a photograph of the inscription on the rock face, see Nancy Millar, *Once Upon a Time: Stories from Canadian Graveyards* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997), 33-4.
- 28 Zacharias, *Reinland*, 18; also <http://www.mennoniteheritagevillage.mb.ca> (accessed 27 January 2002).
- 29 See the photograph in Peredyj, *Centennial of the First Ukrainian Settlement in Canada*, 41; also <http://www.city.dauphin.mb.ca/UK/tomb.htm> (accessed 4 December 2001).
- 30 The following themes are developed in greater detail by Frances Swyripa in

- "Baba and the Community Heroine: Two Images of the Ukrainian Pioneer Woman," *Alberta* 2, 1 (1991): 59-46; and, more comprehensively, in *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).
- 31 The romanticized Ukrainian pioneer woman also appeared - this time with her husband - on the bas-relief on the plaque installed in the Manitoba Legislature Building at the behest of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee to mark the sixtieth anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada in 1951. Designed by displaced person Myron Levytsky, who had been in Canada two short years, it featured an attractive young couple, the man standing astride with a pick axe over his shoulder, the woman kneeling at his feet and cradling a sheaf of wheat.
  - 32 The complex symbolism of the Vineland memorial, commissioned by the Mennonite Bicentennial Commission, designed by Barbara Fauth, and erected on the site of the first Mennonite meeting house in Canada, combines religious and pioneer elements; for a description, see "Vineland Memorial Captures Faith, History and Vision for Future," *Mennonite Reporter*, 31 March 1986 (supplement), 3. The ethnic as opposed to religious content of many of the 1986 events, including the quilt presentation and a festival "to explain Mennonitism to the people of Toronto" through "readings, ethnic cooking and handcrafts [sic]," was critiqued for sending the wrong message in Jim Coggins, "Since You Are Mennonite....," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 16 May 1986, 2-3.
  - 33 RP Friesen, "The Missing Mennonite Monument," *Mennonite Mirror*, March 1975, 15.
  - 34 Ibid. The same issue of *Mennonite Mirror* featured a photograph of Pauls's design on the cover, a small picture of his and Funk's design combined on page 15.
  - 35 Ibid.; see also "Alvin Pauls: Symbolism in a 'New' Ceramic Medium," *ibid.*, 16-17.
  - 36 Author's private files, Commemorative Monument Committee, Alberta Ukrainian Canadian Centennial Committee of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (Alberta), 1991-2. Alberta Ukrainians already had one public pioneer monument, erected in 1963 in Elk Island National Park adjacent to the original bloc of settlement, where they gathered for an annual Ukrainian (Pioneer) Day.
  - 37 *Edmonton Journal*, 17 September 1993. McIntosh preferred a policy for the Alberta Legislature Grounds like the one on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, which limited statues to the prime ministers of Canada and assorted monarchs.
  - 38 Neil Waugh, *Edmonton Sun*, 20 December 1989. In the City of Edmonton Archives, Edmonton, Alberta, see also City of Edmonton Council Minutes, 13, 26 April 1983; letter (signed by 40 Ukrainian organizations) from the Ukrainian Canadian Committee, 12 December 1989; City Hall Steering Committee Report #1 (plus enclosures), 10 January 1990; Submission of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee to the Public Affairs Committee, 10 April 1990; Brief to the Public Affairs Committee from the Alberta Association of the Canadian Institute of Planners, 10 April 1990; Handouts (including Ukrainian letters) to the Public Affairs Committee, 17 April 1990; and Public Affairs Committee Report, 24 April 1990. Mainstream press coverage can be found in *Edmonton Journal*, 14-28 April, 8 May, 20-24 October 1983, 7, 8 December 1989, 10, 11 January, 15, 18, 25 April 1990; and *Edmonton Sun*, 6 October, 20 December 1989.
  - 39 Neil Waugh, *Edmonton Sun*, 20 December 1989.
  - 40 See Ukrainian Community Development Committee (Prairie Region), *Building the Future: Ukrainian Canadians in the 21st Century: A Blueprint for Action* (Edmonton 1986), esp 4-10.
  - 41 See, for example, "Program Overview: Centennial of Ukrainians in Canada," annual conference of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Edmonton, Alberta, 1 September 1990 (author's private collection).

- <sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Edna-Star was mobilized as a symbolic focal point in the official Alberta centennial celebrations. At a special gathering at the site, Governor General Ramon Hnatyshyn, himself of Ukrainian descent, lit a commemorative flame (carried by torch relay from Edmonton, retracing the trek of the first settlers to their homesteads) and those present reaffirmed their oath of Canadian citizenship; see *Edmonton Journal*, 1 September 1991.
- <sup>43</sup> Al Reimer, "A New Life Half Way around the World," *Mennonite Mirror*, December 1974.
- <sup>44</sup> Visited 23 September 2001; on the unveiling, see Elmer Heinrichs, "Rat/Red River Junction Park and Cairn Dedication," *Mennonite Historian*, 1994.
- <sup>45</sup> In conjunction with the Ukrainian-Canadian centennial, see, for example, "Wheat Kernel from Ukraine Responsible for Opening Up Canadian West," *Steppes through Time/Slidamy chasu* (March 1991), 5, 7.
- <sup>46</sup> The artist was Margaret Quiring of Winnipeg; "Centennial News," *The Mennonite*, 12 March 1974, 178.
- <sup>47</sup> They were issued 29 August 1991 in Edmonton. The other stamps featured a family huddled protectively on ship deck, the raging ocean behind; a child running into the snowy winter night, watched by her mother from a lit doorway; and a homesteader family staring into the bush, the man brandishing an axe as he pointed to the trees. On these and other commemorative stamps, envelopes, and special cancellations produced by Ukrainian Canadians as well as newly independent Ukraine (the Ukrainian-Canadian centennial stamp was the first stamp issued by the Ukrainian Post Office), see Perederyj, *Centennial of the First Ukrainian Settlement in Canada*, 4-25.
- <sup>48</sup> "A Stamp to Honor Mennonite Immigration?" *Mennonite Mirror*, January/February 1974 (special centennial issue), 48.
- <sup>49</sup> "Herald/News," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 4 October 1974, 15, quoting MP Joseph Guay; a picture of the Day of Issue envelope and stamp is included.