

Ethnicity Employed: William Hespeler and the Mennonites¹

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St. Luke's Anglican Church was located in Fort Rouge, a south Winnipeg suburb which Arnold Heeneey, son of the pastor and later one of Canada's most distinguished civil servants, remembered as a "community of wide, flat streets bordered by comfortable but undistinguished frame houses and garnished rather surprisingly by respectable trees and grass boulevards." Young Arnold picked up on the ethnic homogeneity of this largely English-Scottish part of town, and on class differences that existed between the relatively well-to-do neighbours of the church and the less affluent denizens further south, closer to the railway tracks.² This was not the part of town where Winnipeg's socio-economic elite lived in the first two decades of the twentieth century; however, it was also far removed from the bustle and squalor of Winnipeg's immigrant quarters in the North End.

On a cool Saturday in April 1921 an unusual procession of dignitaries of the highest rank and order filed through quiet Fort Rouge to fill the pews of St. Luke's: Lt. Governor Aikens was in attendance as were Manitoba Premier T.C. Norris, W.J. Tupper, local financier and stockbroker Sir Augustus Nanton and many other prominent Winnipeggers. Jacob Beck, half-brother of Sir Adam Beck of Ontario Hydro fame and Charles R.H. Warnock, President of the Galt Knitting Company had made the long trip from Ontario. They all had congregated to lay to rest one of Winnipeg's last surviving pioneers - a man who had not once but twice in his lifetime witnessed the emergence of a thriving new community in the young country that was Canada. They had come to bury William Hespeler.

William had not really been one of them. Born Wilhelm Hespeler in the Grand Duchy of Baden, in today's Germany, in late 1830, he was an immigrant who spoke a heavily accented English all his life. Although the Anglican church became his final destination -- Canon Heeney presided over his funeral mass and Wilhelm found his final resting place in St. John's Anglican cemetery, surrounded by the men who collectively had transformed Winnipeg from a muddy village into a bustling metropolis -- Wilhelm had been a Lutheran and was closely associated with the Mennonites of Manitoba. He was a private man and a wealthy man, one who did not belong to the right clubs but was known by all the right people. His family, through marriage, was linked to many well-known Anglo-Saxon Protestant business people in both Ontario and Manitoba and Wilhelm himself twice married women of Scottish origin. Yet he himself was unmistakably German in his speech and manners. Wilhelm Hespeler was an ethnic Canadian in British Canada, and a singularly successful one at that. And while he failed to penetrate the inner circle of the socio-economic elite during his years in Waterloo County and during his five decades in Winnipeg, he left behind an astounding array of accomplishments that, in their own way, changed one country and commanded the respect of another.

And yet the name Hespeler, and the remarkable family that it signifies, is barely known in either Winnipeg or the Kitchener-Waterloo region, let alone in the rest of Canada. The town of Hespeler, named after Wilhelm's older brother Jacob, is now part of Cambridge, Ontario. Similarly the settlement of Hespeler, Manitoba was soon renamed Gretna. The Manitoba municipality of Hespeler, in existence between 1880 and 1890, disappeared in its amalgamation with the R.M. of Hanover. And Winnipeg's short and undistinguished Hespeler Avenue is in a part of town that few people choose to visit. This lack of public memory is hardly surprising: Canada's early history is not written to include the likes of Wilhelm Hespeler and his brother, sisters, children, nephews and nieces. They remain on the fringe, relegated to so-called ethnic histories. Their success is seen as an exception to the rule, mostly because their ethnicity is judged an obstacle that had to be overcome through Anglicization and assimilation, rather than a tool that was consciously used to devise alternative strategies to material wealth and personal fulfillment.

People like William Hespeler, who consciously put their ethnicity to work when it suited them, do not seem to fit the mould of either mainstream or ethnic histories. His obituary remembered him as a man "who was at one time so foremost in the life of the province."³ Yet Gerald Friesen's standard work on the history of the Prairies does not mention him at all.⁴ Alan Artibise's history of Winnipeg, which so convincingly defines Winnipeg's civic leaders as a sociological group with identical traits, fails to identify Hespeler as one of a handful of exceptions to the Anglo-Saxon Protestant rule.⁵ Ethnic histories also fall short: despite Hespeler's involvement in the migration of Russian Jews to Winnipeg in the summer of 1882⁶ and his service on the Keewatin Council during the smallpox epidemic in 1876, neither Icelandic nor Jewish-Canadian histories make mention of him.⁷ In German-Canadian historiography Hespeler appears as a one-dimensional man of "firsts:" the first German consul in Manitoba, the first German to reach a high parliamentary position

in Canada, the first to bring ethnic Germans from Russia to the Prairies, the first to build a grain elevator in the prairies.⁸

Most references to Hespeler are, of course, found in Mennonite historiography. Klaas Peters, for example, pays tribute to him as a friend, "lieber alter Freund" or "höchst achtbarer Freund."⁹ A 1972 article in the *Winnipeg Tribune* by Peter Lorenz Neufeld calls him a "forgotten man" who made "many major contributions" to Western Canada.¹⁰ No Mennonite history fails to mention that it was Hespeler who, as the Special Immigration Agent for the Canadian government, brought the Mennonites to Manitoba. And yet relatively little is known about the man, about the nature of his involvement in the 1870s migration and about his motivations. This article will attempt to shed some light on these issues.

Wilhelm Hespeler¹¹ arrived in Canada West in 1850, not quite twenty years of age. His background and profile seem to be those of a typical Forty-Eighter, a refugee of the failed 1848 revolution: he was young, single, well educated and from a prosperous bourgeois background in Baden, one of the hotbeds of revolution. However, there is no evidence that Hespeler was in fact a Forty-Eighter. Instead, he was a member of a family chain migration that had started with his older brother Jacob in the 1820s and had already brought two or three of his older sisters to Preston, the town that William was to make his home. Preston, in what was to become Waterloo Township in 1853, was a multiethnic settlement with a predominant German element and a strong Scottish presence.¹² For the Hespelers to assimilate into the majority culture might have meant choosing a life in an ethnic German enclave.

However, the behaviour of the family indicates the opposite. Only one sister, Charlotte, married a fellow German immigrant from Baden, Jacob Beck, and it is possible that the marriage had been arranged by Jacob Hespeler. Stephanie and Ferdinanda married Adam Warnock and John Chapman - a Scot and an Irishman - respectively. Jacob's four daughters all married Anglo-Saxons. William himself married a Scottish-Presbyterian woman, Mary Keatchie. Similarly the Hespelers' business and political connections displayed an emphasis on Anglo-Saxon contacts, often also of American background: William went into business with George Randall, a wealthy young American and Grand Trunk contractor and the latter's brother-in-law William Roos to build up a mill and distillery in the town of Waterloo which, by 1861, produced 12,000 barrels of flour, 2,700 barrels of whiskey and employed fifteen men.¹³ Jacob and his Scottish allies in local politics fought to have Galt rather than Berlin become the new county town in 1852.¹⁴ And even Charlotte and her husband Jacob Beck who lived in the solidly German village of Baden chose Scottish immigrant James Livingstone (later the Linseed Oil King of Canada) as their closest friend and business partner.¹⁵

The Hespelers displayed the behaviour of an upwardly mobile family in 1850s Canada. They identified with the Anglo-Saxon political and commercial elites of Waterloo South more readily than with the Mennonite farming community and the German immigrant artisans of Waterloo North. None of them denied their German heritage: Charlotte liked gardening in a typical kerchief and apron and provided lots

of German food to guests. William served on the Berlin school board in 1857, along with Jacob Shantz and A.J. Peterson, at a time when bilingual education had to be defended. They named their children Wilhelmina and Anna and Albert and Alfred ... and always George or Georgina (to honour the late Hespeler patriarch Georg). They also maintained some contacts with Europe, presumably because of the existence of extended family and a family estate; also, two sisters had married French subjects in Alsace-Lorraine. And in the 1870s, when his life took a different turn, Wilhelm would use these German ties to build an alternative career path.

By the time Canada became a country, the Hespeler family was ready to disperse, each taking the opportunities that the developing political and economic structures of Canada had to offer. By 1874 the Waterloo County miller and distiller William Hespeler had reinvented himself as a representative of the Russian Mennonites, immigration expert and frontier capitalist in Winnipeg, the muddy outpost of the new nation. The whereabouts of William Hespeler in the intervening years 1869-71 are unclear. Steiner's biography of Jacob Shantz suggests that he moved to Winnipeg in 1870 to take on the management of the Manitoba Land Company. This account, though first advanced in Lehmann's 1939 study *Das Deutschtum in Westkanada*¹⁶, seems unlikely since Hespeler at the time had not only a thriving business in Waterloo but also an ailing wife and two small children. Also, *Henderson's Directory* only lists him as manager of the Manitoba Land Company in 1886. Another (unfortunately unsubstantiated) account claims that Hespeler left Canada in late 1868 and participated in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 as a volunteer stretcher-bearer.¹⁷

Unfortunately his trail in Waterloo is equally ambiguous: old biographies of Joseph Seagram have him buy Hespeler's shares in the distillery in 1870 but the Seagram papers demonstrate that the partnership between Randall and Hespeler was not dissolved until 1878. Yet Hespeler also does not appear in the 1871 Ontario census, indicating that he was absent at the time of the enumeration. We can assume that there was a major disruption in his life around 1870, but that Hespeler had no immediate plans of permanently moving to Manitoba. However, he almost certainly traveled there and in fact bought 153 1/2 acres of land (2-14-6-W1) in Manitoba (in what would later become the West Reserve) sometime in 1871 (letter patent granted January 1872).

By late 1871 Hespeler seems to have been looking for a new career and possibly a way to finance a lengthy sojourn in Germany which had become necessary for his wife's recuperation. His knowledge not only of the German language but of South-western Germany and the newly annexed German provinces of Alsace-Lorraine were the key. He approached the Canadian government with his idea to organize a system of immigrant recruitment in the German Southwest by going from place to place and calling upon clergy and government officials. The timing was fortunate: By early 1872 the Dominion Government acknowledged the necessity to compete with the undisputed attraction of the United States by combating widespread ignorance of Canada in Europe. A federal recruitment plan was developed which was to replace the efforts of individual provinces and to supply better information about

Canada to private steamship agents.¹⁸ Designated recruitment targets outside the United Kingdom were “parts of the continent, particularly Alsace and Lorraine, to the continuous parts of Germany and France, and the Scandinavian Kingdoms.”¹⁹ Not surprisingly, Hespeler was authorized to implement his idea by Order-in-Council dated 28 February 1872 which appointed him as “Special Agent for Germany” for six months at a salary of \$200 per month plus \$4 per diem.²⁰ Upon the Minister’s request, several Catholic bishops in Canada supplied letters of introduction for Hespeler. At the beginning of April 1872 Ottawa, through London and the British Ambassador in Berlin notified the German government of Hespeler’s appointment. On 25 April 1872 he arrived in Strasbourg and immediately placed his wife in the care of doctors at the spa of Baden-Baden where she stayed for several weeks.²¹

Hespeler’s move into the business of immigrant recruitment was not unusual for a German-Canadian in the early 1870s; nor was it in any way surprising that private interests and motivations played a large role in taking up public service. Since Ottawa had identified Germany as one of the areas of recruitment, other Canadians with German connections explored the field as well. In April and May 1872, the *Berliner Journal* published a series of articles on “Immigration to Manitoba” by 1850s Prussian immigrant and Government Land Surveyor, William Wagner.²² Wagner himself took up land in Manitoba, near Poplar Point, as part of a township settlement scheme in 1872.²³ The initiator of that scheme was the German Society of Montreal, which had formed a special committee to further German immigration to Canada, and also had Wagner’s report published for distribution to prospective immigrants.²⁴ Further information for German immigrants was collected in “German in Canada: a Magazine for the Promotion of German Immigration to Canada” which was issued in London, Ontario starting May 1871. Publisher C. Mack supplied copies to the Canadian government by early 1872 and it is clear that the survival of his magazine depended on large government orders.²⁵

If German-Canadians in Central Canada took an active interest in furthering German immigration, the government was eager to employ their services. A few weeks before approving Hespeler’s appointment, Ottawa also licensed Jacob Klotz of Preston, Ontario as Special Immigration Agent in Germany at \$100 per month. This duplication of appointments seems surprising, and there must have been some rivalry between the two men, not in the least because of the discrepancy in salaries. Canadian-born, 30-year-old Jacob - the son of famous Waterloo County hotel keeper, wine importer and German school promoter Otto Klotz - spoke English as well as High and Low German and had previously worked as importer of cigars through a family business in Hamburg. If anything, he seemed overqualified for the task of distributing printed material, including Mack’s pamphlet, and lecturing on Canada as a field for German immigration.²⁶ However, his ulterior motive emerges in his consistent efforts to promote direct transatlantic shipping traffic between the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen and Quebec City - no doubt a requirement for his and his father’s export-import business.²⁷

Klotz’s somewhat subordinate interest in recruiting immigrants was reflected in his style. He was impassive and conventional, awaiting government instructions,

while Hespeler was impatient, ingenious and quite willing to circumvent the law. For example, he used the name of an agent of the Montreal Ocean Steamship Company (popularly known as the Allan Line) to make illegal contacts and presentations throughout May of 1872. Klotz, who had expected to be in charge in Alsace-Lorraine became frustrated with Hespeler who was obviously well connected in the south-western regions. Eventually, after a meeting on 25 April 1872 in Strasbourg to discuss "our mission hither" the two men seem to have split the recruitment territory, with Klotz returning to northern Germany and Silesia and Hespeler continuing to concentrate on the Southwest.²⁸

It is clear at this point that neither Klotz nor Hespeler had been appointed for the recruitment of Mennonites. In fact, the initial focus was very much on Alsace-Lorraine. Until the summer of 1872 neither man showed any obvious interest in the Russian Mennonites.²⁹ When Hespeler, on or around 24 June, received government instructions dated 1 June to plan a trip to Russia his response displayed a distinct lack of enthusiasm. "Personally I do not care much for going to Russia," he confessed to Canada's main immigration agent in London. As Klotz had repeatedly hinted in his own reports to the government, Hespeler's mind was on his sick wife as much as on emigration matters: "Three days ago I was called away from [Strasbourg] to Baden, where my wife is under medical treatment on account of her illness having taken a sudden change for the worse, so much so, that she was not expected to live....[and] as she is not yet out of danger, it will be impossible for me to leave..." Hespeler had other reasons to resent the sudden change in instructions. He had rather doggedly been pursuing his plan to implement his immigration system in Alsace Lorraine: "I have engaged to visit several places in Elsass during the latter part of [June]." Going to Russia now, he complained, would "leave my work just begun here uncompleted and consequently the cause of this mission must suffer."³⁰

Hespeler, however, also had some good reasons for suppressing his ill humour and setting out on his trip to Russia in early July. First, as a civil servant he had to obey instructions given to him by the government or lose his job. Second, a trip to Berlin in early June had turned out to be not only frustrating but alerted Hespeler to the basic hostility of the German government toward any form of emigration. Third, he began to realize the magnitude of his task of competing with the allure of the United States in Alsace-Lorraine; there would be no immediate success in recruiting immigrants and hence his appointment might not be renewed.³¹ On the other hand, a mission to Russia, a new recruitment field where U.S. competition seemed non-existent, might well save his reputation: "I think these people (unlike the people here) have no prejudice for the United States having in former years not been emigrating and consequently having no friends or relatives living in the United States to ask them to come there having found that challenges from friends have the greatest weight to draw people to the one or the other country." The previous success of Mennonites in Ontario, "superior farmers and people of wealth" in Hespeler's words, was a good omen. Hespeler also shrewdly observed that in a tightly knit religious community assistance for newly immigrated brethren would

surely be forthcoming. With all this in mind and money for his services prepaid by the London office, Hespeler finally started out on his journey to the East in early July 1872.³²

The details of his adventurous trip through Russia have been summarized elsewhere. However, it is important to point out that Hespeler returned to Strasbourg on 17 August still with the intention of continuing his previous work. Various factors made him change his mind and become more heavily involved in the Mennonite emigration. Perhaps most importantly his wife Mary died after her lengthy illness in August and Hespeler found himself a widower with two minor children who needed their extended family in Canada. Second, emigration from Alsace was all but prohibited after 1 October and the prospects for improvement became dim. Finally, Hespeler had been very favourably impressed by the Mennonites and saw a realistic chance for a large-scale settlement project that would bring people as well as capital into the young country.³³

In October, 1872, Klotz returned to Europe after a few months in Canada only to find that once again, as in the case of recruitment in Alsace-Lorraine, he had been outmaneuvered by Hespeler. Klotz expected to pick up the Russian work and for this purpose had his passport registered with the Russian consul in Paris "so that I may have no trouble in the event of my going to Russia." A few days later he realized after talking to Hespeler in Strasbourg that the latter had taken the offer to go to Russia for a second time and "it was needless for me to go there." Klotz then proceeded to concentrate on the northern areas, especially Mecklenburg.³⁴ Hespeler's unconventional and often illegal methods, in the meantime, ran afoul not just of the Russian but of the British authorities and he was recalled to Canada in early December.³⁵

As is well known, his involvement with the Mennonite migration did not end with this hasty recall. Hespeler, along with his old acquaintance Jacob Shantz, organized the visit of a Mennonite delegation in the summer of 1873 and Hespeler accompanied them to Manitoba.³⁶ Hespeler's successful efforts came to the attention of John C. Schultz, famous as the driving force behind the "Canadian party" in the Red River Settlement whose advocacy of annexation of the Northwest to Canada had brought him into direct conflict with Louis Riel in 1869.³⁷ By 1873 Schultz represented the new province of Manitoba in the federal parliament in Ottawa. As an expansionist and sworn enemy of the Catholic Métis population he promoted the active recruitment of reliable, and preferably Protestant, settlers for the region and witnessed, with considerable delight, "the ability and zeal displayed by Mr. William Hespeler while acting temporarily as Immigration Agent." Hespeler was the kind of man needed to fulfill the expansionists' dreams. As a consequence, Schultz recommended him for a permanent position in the Department of Agriculture, arguing that such an appointment "will in a large measure aid in diverting to Manitoba and the North West the stream of Scandinavian and German Immigration which is developing and enriching the North Western American States."³⁸ The minister obliged the very next day and recommended to the federal cabinet Hespeler's appointment as Immigration Agent for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories as of

1 July 1873 at a salary of \$1,400 per annum.³⁹ Hespeler would hold this position until his resignation in 1882 when he would take up the office as honorary consul for Manitoba and the Northwest territories for the German Empire.

Hespeler moved to Winnipeg in late 1873 but maintained close family and business ties with the Waterloo County region, thereby reflecting a pattern typical for the Ontario expansionist movement. In late 1875 he returned for several months to get married in Seaforth, near Guelph Ontario, to a Canadian-born woman of German origin. And because only one of his nephews and his older widowed sister had moved to Winnipeg, Hespeler returned annually, each spring, to visit his family. As time went by, he attended more and more funerals of family members in Ontario. He also forged some business links, strengthening the connection between Waterloo County and Manitoba which was built around Jacob Shantz's involvement in the Mennonite migration. Hespeler himself directed some family members to invest in land in Manitoba and the Northwest and he himself took up Military Bounty Grants probably given to his nephew, George Hespeler, for his 1860s involvement in repelling the Fenian Raids. Hespeler also represented Seagram's as an agent. Quite possibly he was responsible for the flax mill built by James Livingstone in Niverville in 1879, the year Hespeler and his son Albert erected the first grain elevator there.⁴⁰

It could be argued that Hespeler used his ties to his former Waterloo County home as he used his ties to Germany and German culture: strategically and selectively without letting them dominate his basic integration into the Anglo-Saxon mainstream of Winnipeg society. Once settled, Hespeler deftly explored the entrepreneurial opportunities of a frontier area. In late 1872, while still in Waterloo County, he bought an entire section of land between Portage and Poplar Point, near the planned reserve for a German settlement sponsored by the German Society of Montreal. He also acquired town lots in Winnipeg and Niverville,⁴¹ sold water in the city of Winnipeg, provided mortgages and loans, organized grain shipments and acted as a middleman between the Winnipeg business community and the Mennonite settlements.⁴² Like his fellow Ontarian Jacob Shantz he did not see anything wrong with profiting from his connection with the Russian Mennonites, although some of the migrants obviously had expected more altruism and grumbled that "he sought not only our benefit but also that of the [Winnipeg] merchants and his own."⁴³

Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s Hespeler also acted as an intermediary between the Mennonites and both levels of government, provincial and federal.⁴⁴ In fact, so extensive was his involvement with Mennonite issues that he was accused of neglecting his duties as immigration agent. Hespeler justified his involvement, in a typical manner, as serving national Canadian goals: "I beg to say that I have and am assisting [the Mennonites] in various ways...; my services rendered to them are of course gratis, and from my point of view only reasonable, when considered that this valuable class was brought to a country foreign in habits, laws and language." His work on the Provincial Board of Education, for example, led to the integration of the Mennonite schools into the Protestant Board of Education "promoting thereby the introduction of the language of their adopted country." He also

had, he added, assisted Mennonites in becoming British subjects in order to obtain their homestead patents.⁴⁵

There can be little doubt that to Hespeler the Mennonite settlement was a business *and* a cause, just like his civic and government positions served both the common good and his own or that of his friends. Numerous examples demonstrating the mixing of public and private interest exist. As immigration agent in charge of building new immigration sheds in early 1882, Hespeler purchased over \$600 worth of material from his fellow German-Canadian, local businessman Fritz Ossenbrugge. Two years later, Ossenbrugge and Hespeler were both instrumental in setting up a German Society to support German immigrants.⁴⁶ A similar pattern can be found in Hespeler's early career. In 1874, for example, he erected the "Hespeler Block" on Winnipeg's South Main Street (which later housed the Government emigration office) and next door built "Lorne House" as a hotel. The *Nor'wester* reported that the hotel had been constructed "for the special accommodation of Mennonites. It is to be kept by a Mennonite on the Russian plan and will no doubt prove a giant convenience to the class of our population."⁴⁷ He later used his position as alderman on City Council to plead for improvements to the sidewalks in front of his buildings.⁴⁸

Apart from his service as an alderman, Hespeler found other pathways into mainstream Winnipeg. Almost immediately after his move to Manitoba he became a director on the Board of the Winnipeg General Hospital (and served as its president for more than a decade from 1889 onward),⁴⁹ and was appointed to the Council of Keewatin during the smallpox epidemic of 1876-7.⁵⁰ William and his second (and later his third) wife were regular guests at social functions. When his daughter Georgina turned 21 in 1885, he introduced her like a debutante, taking her to a ball at the Legislative Chambers and paying respects at Government House.⁵¹ Georgie quickly captured the heart of young Augustus Nanton, a rising star at the Winnipeg branch of Toronto financial agents Osler and Hammond. Although Georgina tragically died the next year after giving birth to Hespeler's first grandchild, the tie between Nanton and his erstwhile father-in-law remained a close one. Through Nanton, Hespeler reached into the upper echelons of Manitoban and Canadian society and linked them to the ethnic enclaves he had helped create.

In the early 1890s Hespeler purchased land in township 42, Range 3 in Northern Saskatchewan. This was a township mostly owned by Nanton, his business partner Edmund Boyd Osler and the Qu'Apelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railroad and Steamboat Company which Osler had financed. Osler, Hammond and Nanton were also agents of the North of Scotland Canadian Mortgage Company which provided first mortgages to settlers and Hespeler had a seat on the board of directors. However, this was not the extent of his involvement in the area which was located along the edges of what was to become the new Osler-Hague Mennonite Reserve a few years later. In fact, Hespeler made one final effort to attract new settlers to the Northwest in 1891-2. When approached by Cornelius Jansen with the news that young people in the Mennonite colonies in Nebraska were looking for new settlement areas, Hespeler traveled to Ottawa and Toronto and garnered support from

both the Minister and Edmund Boyd Osler for a two-month- recruitment trip to the United States. After this trip he spent most of the rest of the year in Europe, but the following year he repeated his efforts, this time among the Mennonites in Kansas.⁵² Whether these efforts (which anticipated a government recruitment drive in the United States under Clifford Sifton)⁵³ directly resulted in new immigrants and profits for Hespeler and his Anglo-Saxon business partners is not known. Historian Adolf Ens does report that by 1894 about 400 Mennonites had moved from Kansas and Nebraska to the Rosthern area and it is possible that Hespeler profitted from the migration.⁵⁴

That this well integrated German-Canadian never severed his connection with Germany and German culture suggests that there is no contradiction between ethnic persistence and assimilation. It is not clear how Hespeler was chosen to represent Imperial Germany as honorary consul in 1882, yet with this appointment his displays of Germanness increased. As already mentioned he participated in a short-lived German society in the 1880s.⁵⁵ In 1888 he supported the establishment of a German-Lutheran congregation in Winnipeg.⁵⁶ The following year he was instrumental in setting up a German-language newspaper (*Der Nordwesten*) to provide an ecumenical bridge between Mennonites and other German-speakers. Hespeler continued to take extended trips to Germany. Indeed, on one such visit in 1884 his second wife, like his first wife died. In both 1891 and 1896 Hespeler again visited his home country.⁵⁷

Yet Hespeler was not considered an ethnic outsider by his contemporaries. They accepted him and his cosmopolitan tastes, the latter displayed in a luxurious Fort Rouge apartment bloc which noted Chicago-style architect John D. Atchison designed for him in 1906.⁵⁸ Upper middle class Winnipeggers soon copied Hespeler's example. A 1911 portrait of him in the "Pioneers of Winnipeg" series of the *Winnipeg Tribune* identified him as "that shrewd little business man who hails from the land made famous by Frederick the Great and later by Bismarck." "William" the writer wagered "always partakes of the best the markets afford."⁵⁹ A personal cultural gap remained nonetheless; Hespeler appeared to the Canadian writer as "a citizen that has never allowed any man to come near enough to him to really learn the manner of man he is. He has gone smoothly along, well groomed and living carefully . . ." The sense that Hespeler was an enigma even to those who had lived in his vicinity for decades was shared in his obituary: "He was of a reserved nature which forbade familiarity and did not seem to encourage intimacies."⁶⁰

The experience of Hespeler and his family shows that early non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants in Canada were not victims of Anglo-conformity and British exclusivity, but agents and participants in a fluid society that offered a wide range of choices. William Hespeler was a man who was both typical and atypical for his generation: typical because he followed many patterns that made for commercial and financial success in nineteenth century Canada, yet atypical because his repertoire and interests were, in many ways, wider than those of his Anglo-Saxon contemporaries who moved along more established paths. He thus pioneered efforts in the field of immigrant recruitment. His German connections proved an asset rather than a liabil-

ity but his inherent conservatism prevented him from becoming the spectacular success (or failure) that characterized Winnipeg's growing elite. Well-connected, if not well-liked, he lived a comfortable life and died a peaceful death, albeit in a slightly 'wrong' part of town.

Notes

¹ Special thanks to my research assistants in Waterloo and Winnipeg, Emily Stokes-Rees and Micki Kolbe.

² Arnold Heene, *The Things that are Cesar's: The Memoirs of a Canadian Public Servant* (Toronto 1972), 7-8.

³ Manitoba Legislative Library, Manitoba Biography B7, p.111.

⁴ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto 1987).

⁵ Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth 1874-1914* (Montreal 1975), 36. Artibise identifies five "ethnic" civic leaders: two Jews, two Icelanders and one Ukrainian.

⁶ Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, *The Beginning of the Jewish Community in Manitoba* (Winnipeg, n.d.).

⁷ See for example Wilhelm Kristjanson, *The Icelandic People in Manitoba* (Winnipeg 1965) and Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto 1992).

⁸ Werner Entz, "William Hespeler: Manitoba's first German Consul," *German-Canadian Yearbook* 1(1973), 149-52 and "Wilhelm Hespeler: Britischer Parlamentarier aus Baden," *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für Auslandsbeziehungen* 7 no.3 (1957): 171-2. Heinz Lehmann, *The German Canadians 1750-1937*, trans. and ed. Gerhard Bassler (St. John's 1986),135-7.

⁹ Klaas Peters, *Die Berghthaler Mennoniten und deren Auswanderung aus Rußland und Einwanderung in Manitoba* (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1924).

¹⁰ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 11 November 1972.

¹¹ Some information can be found in W.H.E.Schmalz, "The Hespeler Family," *Waterloo Historical Society Report* 57 (1969): 21-9.

¹² Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through two Centuries* (Waterloo, 1995).

¹³ 1861 Census and Seagram papers, University of Waterloo Rare Book Room.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Hayes, *Waterloo County: An Illustrated History* (Kitchener 1997), 26-9.

¹⁵ William R.Plewman, *Adam Beck and the Ontario Hydro* (Toronto 1947),17-8.

¹⁶ Lehmann, *The German Canadians*, 283.

¹⁷ Entz, "William Hespeler: Manitoba's first German Consul," 149.

¹⁸ Patrick A. Dunae, "Promoting the Dominion: Records of the Canadian Immigration Campaign, 1872-1915," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-5): 73-93.

¹⁹ *Sessional Papers* A1872, Report of Winnipeg Immigration Agent G McMicken, No. 2A, p.13.

²⁰ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Records of the Department of Agriculture, RG 17 vol.58 docket 5533, Order-in-Council, 28 February 1872.

²¹ RG 17 vol. 65 docket 20 May 1872, Hespeler to Pope, 20 May 1872. A different version of this letter is printed in *Sessional Paper* A1873, No.26, p.153; this version omits his wife's illness and Hespeler's concern about staying in the proximity of Baden-Baden.

²² Samuel J. Steiner, *Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz* (Winnipeg, 1988), 67 n.14.

²³ Norman J. Threiner, *A Sower Went out: A History of the Manitoban and Saskatchewan District of the Lutheran Church - Canada* (Regina 1982), 5-6.

²⁴ Karin R. Gürtler, *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft zu Montreal, 1835-1985* (Montreal, 1985), 27. See also RG 17 vol.67 docket 6404, Bucher to Lowe 9 July 1872.

²⁵ RG 17, vol.56 docket 5398, Mack to Minister of Agriculture, 29 Jan 1872. Also vol. 66, dockets 6365 and 6381, Mack to John Lowe, 27 June and 5 July 1872. Mack claimed that, as a result of the distribution of his magazine in Germany, German immigration to Perth and Waterloo Counties had increased: "It seems that at last we shall get our due share of the stream of immigration that flows to this continent."

²⁶ RG 17 vol. 56, docket 5343, Order-in-Council, 16 January 1872. Information on Klotz from the 1861 *Census* (Preston Village) and Gottlieb Leibbrandt, *Little Paradise: The Saga of the German Canadians of Waterloo County, Ontario, 1800-1975* (Kitchener 1980), 101-2.

²⁷ RG 17 vol. 58 docket 5591, Klotz to Dixon, 14 Feb 1872. *Sessional Papers A.1873*, no.26, pp.158-9, Klotz to Dixon, 2 Dec 1872.

²⁸ *Sessional Papers A 1873*, no.26, 160-2, Klotz to Lowe, 17 August 1872.

²⁹ I have not yet found any evidence for Klaas Peters' suggestion that Hespeler was told about the Mennonites by Count Menchikov in Baden and then proceeded to tell Prime Minister John A. Macdonald about them.

³⁰ RG 17 vol. 67 docket 6405, Hespeler to Dixon, 24 June 1872.

³¹ RG 17 vol. 66 docket 6369. Hespeler to Lowe, 17 June 1872.

³² RG 17 vol. 67 docket 6405, Hespeler to Dixon, 24 June 1872; docket 6495, Hespeler to Lowe, 1 July 1872.

³³ RG 17 vol.70 docket 6800, Hespeler to Pope, 28 August 1872. *Sessional Papers A 1873*, No.26, 156-7, Hespeler to Pope, 21 October 1872.

³⁴ *Sessional Papers A 1873*, No.26 pp. 158-9, Klotz to Dixon, 2 Dec 1872.

³⁵ Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa 1994), 14-6. See also Hespeler's own report in RG 17 vol. 83 docket 8005.

³⁶ The trip is described in Peters, *Bergthaler Mennoniten*, 12-5. Shantz's involvement is described in Steiner, *Vicarious Pioneer*, esp. chapter 6.

³⁷ Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto 1980). Hespeler's link with the expansionist movement can be explained by parallel goals: the development of the Northwest through Central Canadian efforts and in direct competition with the United States.

³⁸ RG 17 vol. 91 docket 8858, J.C. Schultz to Pope, 12 August 1873. Schultz's concern about American competition was based on dismal retention statistics for German immigrants. For example, 1871 numbers from the Hamilton agent showed that only about 4% of 9,500 German arrivals intended to stay in Canada.

³⁹ RG 17 vol. 91 docket 8898, Order-in-Council, 13 August 1873.

⁴⁰ *Niverville: A History 1878-1986* (Niverville 1986), 16, 23, 57.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 62; Alexander Begg and Walter R. Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg 1879), 105. "Pioneers of Winnipeg No.43," *Tribune* 15 April 1911.

⁴² Peters, *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten*, 33-4.

⁴³ quoted in Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto 1993), 288 n.52. See also Peters, *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten*, 38.

⁴⁴ Ens, *Subjects or Citizens*, passim.

⁴⁵ RG 17 vol. 275 docket 28439, Hespeler to Lowe, 20 March 1880.

⁴⁶ The Society existed from November 1884 until 1887. Ossenbrugge, who had come to Winnipeg in 1875, served as its President; Hespeler sat on the Society's Executive and Finance Committees.

⁴⁷ Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 105, 130. *Nor'wester*, 21 Sept 1874 and 12 April 1875.

⁴⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 July 1874.

⁴⁹ Mrs. G. Bryce, "Charitable Institutions of Winnipeg," *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions* I No. 54 (1899).

⁵⁰ Begg and Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, 141-2. Public Archives of Manitoba, Alexander Morris Papers MG12, Ketcheson Collection, K-335.

⁵¹ *Evening News* 17, 25 September 1885.

⁵² RG 17, vol. 674 docket 76992, Hespeler to Minister, 17 January 1891; see also RG17 vol. 742 docket 85660, Minister of the Interior, 14 Dec 1892. Various newspaper reports confirm that Hespeler returned from a trip to the United States on 20 March 1891 and spent the months from July to Sept 1891 in Europe.

⁵³ Karel Denis Bicha, *The American Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914* (Lawrence KS, 1968) chapter 3.

⁵⁴ Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, 86.

⁵⁵ The City of Winnipeg *Hendersons Directory* 1887.

⁵⁶ On Hespeler's church activities see clippings in National Archives of Canada, Schmieder papers, MG29C94, and the General Council publication *Siloah*.

⁵⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 March 1884.

⁵⁸ Parks Canada, *Early Buildings in Winnipeg*, ed. Ivan Saunders, R.R. Rostecki and Selwyn Carrington, volume 7: Reports on Selected Buildings (Winnipeg 1974), 143-47.

⁵⁹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 April 1911.

⁶⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, 20 April 1921. Interestingly, this sense of aloofness was not perceived by lower class immigrants. One such new arrival described him as "a very nice man indeed." Quoted in Cecilia Danysk, *Hired Hands: Labour and the Development of Prairie Agriculture, 1880-1930* (Toronto 1995), 30.