An Immigrant Experience on Indigenous Land: The Mennonites of Namaka Farm

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Abstract

Beginning in 1925, thirty-six families, part of a mass migration of German-speaking Russian Mennonites (Russlaender), were settled on Namaka Farm, a large ranch in southern Alberta. With their arrival, the area became home to three disparate cultures and languages: Siksika Blackfoot, British colonial settlers, and Mennonite settlers.

This thesis proposes that the experiences of these Mennonites prior to arriving in Canada influenced their adaptation. It shows how they were both marginalized and privileged within the existing colonial structure. Values they held tightly created unforeseen and inadvertent repercussions, including the perpetuation of systemic injustices and racism.

Extensive oral interviews and primary document research illustrate how these immigrants formed relationships among themselves, with those in authority, and with their Siksika and "English" neighbours. The integration of Russlaender, Indigenous, and English voices has produced a coherent narrative conveying wisdom that can create thriving and sustainable intracultural, intercultural, and ecological relationships today.

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Prologue

As an adolescent, I had become disillusioned with the fundamentalist beliefs of the Mennonite Brethren church, the Mennonite denomination in which I was raised. I distanced myself from the church but never from my family and always respected their values, like peace, compassion, integrity, and courage, and I tried to embody them. I couldn't, however, reconcile with their staunch exclusionary belief system that theirs was the only "right" way and the only path to heaven. Nor could I accept the steadfast belief that human beings held superiority and mastery over all other life. For both reasons, I studied Indigenous spirituality from a variety of perspectives because of their underlying understanding of the interrelationship of all life and our role within that, not separate. In midlife I realized that no matter how much I distanced myself from those beliefs, the experiences of my ancestors had shaped me into who I was. If I wanted to understand myself and what I was capable of, I needed to understand them. None of my grandparents were living so I could not ask them. Putting myself in their position and trying to envision life through their eyes in the 1920s and 30s, might help me find answers. The best way to do that, I reasoned, was to get on my motorcycle and follow their migrations across Saskatchewan and Alberta, stopping to walk the lands where they had lived when they first arrived in Canada. My quest at the time seemed straightforward and simple. How had their lineage engrained over more than a century in imperial Russia shaped their way of life, and consequently mine? Little did I know that this exploration of history was so rich that it would lead to this thesis a decade later.

As much as I told myself I was trying to understand my ancestors, I thought I knew as much as I needed to know and was more interested in understanding Indigenous spirituality. I

divested myself of apartment, car, and lots of stuff in preparation for at least eighteen months on the road, continuing to South America to explore different approaches to Indigenous spirituality. My plans included stopping in Namaka, but they didn't include traveling to northern Saskatchewan where my maternal grandparents started life in Canada. I'd been there before I reasoned and didn't need to go back. Nor did they include traveling to Beaverlodge where Johann and Liese, my paternal grandparents, had lived and where Johann was buried. Three weeks into that trip, while on my way to Blackfoot Crossing, I crashed my motorcycle at a deviation in the road, right at the border of the Siksika reserve. My motorcycle was written off but fortunately I was not, although I had severe injuries. Before the prairie dust had settled, I knew that this was a temporary setback, and I would return. Apparently, I needed to understand my own culture to understand myself, before looking at others.

A year later, I purchased a new motorcycle and set off again, this time focusing on my family. The entire trip took six weeks and followed the full migration of both sets of grandparents after they landed in Canada. That quest was one of reconciliation and awakening to the life and stories of my ancestors. When I returned, I spent the next year writing my memoir, *Crash Landing*, published in 2018.

In 2016, four months after returning, with the help of Gordon Berdahl of the Alberta Genealogical Society, I received Johann's probate file which specified the parcels of land where he and Liese had lived and farmed. In 2017, Dad was ninety-one and his health had stabilized following surgery for a fractured hip, I sensed he would enjoy returning to the places where he had spent his youth. He was frail but I knew he could make the trip, so I asked him. After

confirming we would be flying, not traveling by motorcycle, he agreed. Mom was already in Long Term Care and would be well-cared for in his absence.

In Beaverlodge, we visited Johann's grave, and met a woman and her father from the family that had owned the land where Johann had built a rudimentary log cabin. We stopped at the farm in Beiseker where Liese and Dad lived for two years after Johann's death. Two years earlier I had met the granddaughter of that family, and she was eager to meet Dad and take him to what had once been his home. Then it was off to Namaka and the land where he had lived between 1930 and 1937. We met the Blackfoot man who had been a tremendous resource for me after my crash. Serendipitously, he was accompanied by a Siksika Elder, who spoke with Dad, mesmerizing Dad with his stories. "I could have listened to him all day," Dad said. All the while, the land we walked evoked memories and Dad was relaying stories of family and culture. It was an unforgettable trip, poignant, a wrap-up for him. He died two months after we returned. I had thought my reconciliation with ancestors and my culture was complete but there was more to come.

In 2019, returning from a three-month book tour across Western Canada and the US to promote *Crash Landing*, I camped at Writing-on-Stone Park, a sacred area in Traditional Blackfoot Territory on the Milk River in Alberta close to the Montana border. While walking amongst the hoodoos, I had a distinct message that my work was not done, telling me, "The land here has stories you need to hear and share."

This thesis is the outcome of that message.

Introduction

Russlaender arrival on Namaka Farm

In early 1925, the Canadian Colonization Association (CCA) accepted an offer from the Mennonite Land Settlement Board (MLSB) to settle twenty-five families[1] of German-speaking Russian Mennonites (Russlaender) on Namaka Farm, a large ranch in southern Alberta.[2] The adaptation experiences of this specific settlement was the focus for this research. These Russlaender were part of a mass migration underway, but their placement in a structured settlement under a group rental agreement carried unusual terms that influenced their adaptation. Their responses to unfamiliar living conditions and the expectations placed upon them had an unsettling effect on the colonial status quo in and around Namaka Farm, including their own community. In addition to the existing Siksika inhabitants and the Anglo newcomers, the Russlaender inserted a third culture with distinct, entrenched belief systems that disrupted existing power relationships. With their arrival, the area became home to three disparate cultures: Siksika Blackfoot Nation, one of four Indigenous Nations that make up the *Siksikai'tsitapi* [Blackfoot confederacy], British colonial settlers, and Mennonite settlers. The Canadian colonial government proffered rights and economic benefits differently to each group with policies and actions that affected their survival and settlement experiences accordingly. As immigrants began arriving from countries once on Canada's non-preferred list, the complexion of settler-colonialism changed as cultural diversity increased. They held at least one thing in common: they were settlers on stolen land.

This thesis proposes that the experiences of these Mennonites prior to arriving in Canada influenced how they adapted and formed relationships with their neighbours and the

land. The wisdom derived from those times can inform intercultural and ecological relationships today. It shows how the Namaka Farm Russlaender were both privileged and marginalized within the hegemonic structure that shaped the political, social, and cultural milieu.

Namaka Farm, formerly known as Namaka Ranch, one of the first large farms in Alberta, evolved from a grand colonization scheme in the southern prairies. Successive owners ran into financial trouble and the property changed hands several times. In 1913, George Lane purchased it. Lane, an American who had fought in the Indian Wars in the western states, arrived in Alberta in 1884, reputedly, "on horseback and everything he owned was in the saddle when he got there."[3] Lane would go on to become a cattle baron, set up a world-famous Percheron horse-breeding operation, help found the Calgary Stampede, and become a Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly. His mixed farming success depended on high prices and sufficient rainfall, thus a prolonged dry cycle beginning in 1916 led to financial difficulties. In 1922 the Dominion Bank took control of Namaka Farm and continued to operate it as George Lane Ltd., even after Lane's death in 1925.[4] Here, on an eight-mile tract of land between the hamlet of Namaka and the Bow River, bounded on the east by the Siksika Reserve, sat a 12,265-acre ready-made farm needing to turn a profit.

At the same time, thousands of Mennonites were awaiting emigration and speedy removal from what had become Ukraine in the U.S.S.R.[5] The Russlaender carried a pedigree that was different from British and Western European settlers and even other Mennonites who had preceded them to Canada. Like all Mennonites, they had undergone mass relocations since their origins during the Anabaptist movement in the 16th century.[6] Persecution during that upheaval resulted in two main branches. One branch migrated to Switzerland-South Germany,

then to Pennsylvania and on to Canada at the end of the 18th century. The other migrated to Prussia and eventually to imperial Russia at the end of the 18th century. Over the years, splinters appeared in both groups as members disagreed about how to interpret and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. This in turn resulted in the formation of a broad spectrum of Mennonites strains, and churches.[7] There are approximately thirty groups in Ontario.[8] All originated from the same roots but evolved to different expressions of beliefs and forms of worship, from conservative to progressive. Settlers on Namaka Farm belonged either to the General Conference of Mennonite Congregations (GCs), founded in imperial Russia in 1883, or the more evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church (MBs) established in 1860, also in imperial Russia.[9] It was the latter belief system into which I was born.

The organization, wealth, priority of education, and expertise that most brought with them when they arrived in imperial Russia in the late 18th and early 19th century gave them an advantaged start.[10] They enjoyed exemptions and special privileges like the other colonists welcomed by Tsarina Catherine II. They thrived in colonies, controlling their education, religion, and community life. That had changed during the period of Great Reforms beginning in the early 1860s, which altered the relationship between the state and its subjects, with the result that Mennonites feared the loss of the privileges, specifically their exemption from military service. In 1871, Mennonites (and other foreign colonists) lost their special status as administration for "education, health, prisons, roads, and agricultural development,"[11] was incorporated into the provincial governments.[12] During the next decade, more than 15,000, a third of the population, emigrated.[13] Those that stayed found accommodation with these new circumstances, and their attributes served them well as the Russian empire underwent a rapid

transformation from an agrarian economy within an autocratic regime to a more capitalistic industrial economy, and they with it. Those additional fifty years profoundly influenced the perspectives of those who migrated in the 1920s.

After the 1917 revolution, the subsequent civil war, and the victory of Vladimir Lenin's Bolsheviks, Mennonite communities were devastated and facing an uncertain future. Although Ukraine had been their home for more than a century, Mennonites had a history of migrating to preserve their way of being and many would do so again. Within less than a decade, the Russlaender had withstood a revolution, civil war, epidemics, famine, hyperinflation, personal tragedies, separation from family, and upheaval from traditional ways. They had cleared emigration scrutiny and endured often arduous intercontinental and trans-Atlantic transport. They were survivors.

Their numbers worked for them; more than 20,000 would arrive in Canada in the 1920s. Combined with their faith, their engrained attributes would serve them well in Canada. One of the most important assets aiding their migration was the existence of a solid network of experienced and savvy negotiators who mobilized to assist with their settlement. Over and above their repute as a loyal, hardworking, industrious, and thrifty people, they were esteemed as prized agriculturalists, exactly what the colonial government sought to expand a fledging economy. They knew how to achieve social and economic success despite their impoverished situation on arrival. They could rebuild their communities. Those same attributes that made them appealing to the colonial government would lead to friction at Namaka Farm.

Russlaender settlement arrangements, including negotiations with the Canadian Colonization Association (CCA), originally a private organization before being taken over by the

Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR),[14] were handled by the Mennonite Land Settlement Board (MLSB), the settlement arm of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBoC). The MLSB's mandate was to, "secure lists of available lands suitable for settlement by the immigrants, to inspect these lands, to consider carefully conditions of sale, title, price, terms, and in general to protect the interests of the immigrants."[15] The MLSB was also financed through the CCA, housed in CPR-owned offices, and staffed by Mennonite agents who received a commission for successful placements.[16] In addition to accepting what would comply with regulations applicable to all immigrants, the CMBoC made three promises to the Canadian government on behalf of Mennonite immigrants. The first was that they be sheltered and supported by Mennonites in Canada. Secondly, they promised that Mennonites would settle on land during their first five years. The third was a commitment that during that time, they would not become a public charge.[17] The second was a requirement of all immigrants at the time.

Two German-language publications kept Russlaender connected with family and friends left behind in the Soviet Union and those who had immigrated and were now scattered across North America. The Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana began publishing the semi-monthly, then weekly paper, *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, in 1880. It was created to serve Mennonites who had immigrated from Russia to Manitoba and the western states in the 1870s and was distributed in North America, Europe, and Asia.[18] In 1924, *Der Bote* began weekly publication in Rosthern, Saskatchewan to serve Mennonites arriving in Canada from the Soviet Union in the 1920s. This regular means of communication in their first language updated them about their new country and connected them with their community.[19] Although their

reach varied, each of these vital lines of contact carried news meaningful to friends and relatives from whom they were separated.

Siksika (Blackfoot)

Before the British colonists or Mennonites arrived, this "vacant wilderness" of the Great Plains was the traditional home of the *Siksikai'tsitapi* [Blackfoot-speaking people] and other Indigenous groups for more than ten millennium.[20] The traditional territory of the *Siksikai'tsitap*i stretched, "from the North Saskatchewan River in present day Alberta and Saskatchewan to the Yellowstone River in the state of Montana, from the Continental Divide in the west to Regina in the province now known as Saskatchewan."[21] After Treaty 7 was signed, "the Siksika homeland shrunk to reserve number 146, and in 1910, this was reduced by nearly half, in a surrender scheme aggressively pursued by the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA)."[22]

For years prior to signing the treaty, Blackfoot leaders had expressed uneasiness about the intent of the Canadian government. Despite their reluctance, the Blackfoot saw treaties as a means of economic security in the face of an uncertain future. Seeing the bison disappear, they showed a willingness to learn commercial farming in the 1870s.[23] Treaty 7 was signed in 1877 at Blackfoot Crossing, not far from Namaka. Once Indigenous groups were on reserves, the government showed little interest or willingness to honour promises of support. Sarah Carter writes, "It was vital to the enterprise of establishing colonial rule in western Canada to cast First Nations as the antithesis of agriculturalists—as hunters, incapable and ignorant of farming, and thus having no concept of true land ownership."[24] Non-Indigenous people believed that Indigenous people were uninterested in farming, despite their history of prairie farming. The corollary was that they did not need much land.[25] Furthermore, non-Indigenous people

believed that Indigenous people lacked any desire for private property or maintaining a surplus, and that they were indolent and unable to control the natural world. Colonial-directed agriculture was deemed to be a panacea that would cure Indigenous nomadic habits, help them learn to appreciate private property, and show them how to master nature. Farming would promote independence and "erode the tribal unit."[26] Rather than attempting to understand and learn how Indigenous peoples had existed on the prairies for eons, colonial governments dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their land and sponsored initiatives to erase them, both culturally and physically. White settlers could produce more and attract more immigrants to fuel economic growth. Fertile lands on reserves lay dormant because of policies that undermined the Indigenous culture, while settlers unfamiliar with agriculture failed to consider consulting them before enacting practices that led to environmental degradation.

While the home farm experiment on prairie reserves got off to an auspicious start, Indigenous leaders insisted they were not given enough implements or advice, and that the implements they received were inadequate.[27] A pass (permit) system controlled their movements, constraining their travels off the reserve, a control not imposed on other farmers.[28] Bands suffered from lack of adequate clothing and footwear, making it difficult to work.[29] Hayter Reed, a lawyer with the Department of the Interior, enacted policies under the guise of humanitarianism and sincerity, but in fact were intended to abolish reserves.[30] By the turn of the century, Indian Affairs was promoting land surrenders.[31] By the time Mennonites were farming next door on Namaka Farm, independent, resourceful, and resilient Indigenous people known for their exceptional ability to adapt to change, had no choice but to become largely dependent on government rations. They would much rather have secured their own

food as they had done for millennia, had their means of survival not been taken away from them. Eventually, thirty-six Mennonite families, including my ancestors, would be settled on Namaka Farm.

Colonization History and Priorities

The newly created Dominion of Canada needed immigrants to expand the economy. Capitalistic forces demanded cultivating a growing amount of land and extracting the highest yields possible. In the west, the government sought agriculturalists to "break" sod and develop farming. With the completion of the transcontinental CPR line in 1885, it made economic sense to develop the land along their routes through the southern sections of the western provinces. But the colonial government didn't want just anybody. The 1910 Immigration Act was amended in 1919 to allow the government to limit entry to immigrants from countries loyal to Britain and refuse admission to the rest.

The result was the ability to separate people from preferred places of origin, like Great Britain, the United States, and Western Europe, i.e., those providing white settlers, from non-preferred countries.[32] Mennonites from the USSR were not preferred but eventually admitted. Adventuresome souls from preferred regions came to Canada for assorted reasons and from varying economic circumstances. Many had little, if any, agricultural experience, but all held dreams of a new life with hope and opportunity. Even the most experienced settlers heading for the southern prairies would not have been prepared for the steep learning curve and the challenges they would face. As early as 1857, Irish adventurer John Palliser described this land as "a near desert… unfit for agriculture."[33] These grasslands had supported bison and mobile plains peoples for eons, but developing agriculture required massive interventions that altered

the water, the land, and its peoples, and inextricably changed their relationships. It was marketed as a land of endless opportunity and appeared as such. But it is not difficult to understand why it challenged early settlers.

By the 1920s, immigration from preferred sources had slowed to a trickle. At the same time, competition for British immigrants increased elsewhere. While Russlaender were not on the preferred list and were in fact temporarily banned by a 1919 Order in Council,[34] they also had an established reputation as esteemed agriculturalists, hard workers, and diligent, honest people. They had been credited with helping establish Ukraine as "the breadbasket for much of Russia." Mennonites had bred stronger strains of livestock, developed more productive farming practices, and introduced and manufactured specialized, more effective tools and farm implements. As their economy grew, industrialists emerged to support the agricultural industry and millionaires emerged in both sectors.[35] Although this required specialization beyond agriculture to support the infrastructure and institutions, it was their legacy as agriculturalists that haloed their reputation and made them desirable to Canada. Colonel J. S. Dennis, head of the CPR's Department of Colonization and Development, said that they were "recognized as the best farmers in Russia."[36] To the colonial government, 20,000 people known for their agricultural expertise were a perfect solution for the wide-open expanses they wanted to develop in the west. This thesis looks at the experiences of those who settled on Namaka Farm as they adapted to their new surroundings under three primary categories: how they acted to sustain themselves in the short and long term, beginning with basic needs of shelter, food, and clothing, to establishing themselves economically as agriculturalists; how they formed

intracultural and intercultural relationships; and how their spirituality reflected and shaped their adaptation.

Timeless lessons gained from this project could only have come to light by listening to those with whom settlers formed relationships. Practices like respect and reciprocity come about through listening. The wisdom that evolves from that needs to be shared to build healthy, reciprocal relationships with other people. At the same time, recognizing that all life is interconnected and applying the same respectful perspective to non-human beings, the land, and the water, promotes healthy environmental and ecological practices.

Literature Review

This research project relied mainly on primary sources from interviews and archives for ethnographic detail, followed by secondary sources to add history and context. Interviews with descendants of Mennonite and non-Mennonite settlers and Siksika Elders provided the most extensive source of data. Since this research sought to understand adaptation of Mennonites arriving in Canada and settling on Namaka Farm beginning in the mid 1920s, it also focused on correspondence between organizations involved in their settlement. These included the CCA, the CMBoC and its settlement arm, the MLSB, George Lane Ltd, and the Dominion Bank, owners of Namaka Farm. It also included correspondence from individual settlers to these boards seeking to resolve issues. Most documents were housed at the Glenbow Library and Archives, Special Collections at the University of Calgary, and others at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, and the United Farmers Historical Society. Secondary sources added valuable context to understand how the Namaka Farm settlement evolved. A variety of sources were necessary to compile a holistic story. The ethnographic

project relied primarily on first-person accounts to understand history. The literature chosen supplemented those interviews to understand the context in which they occurred.

Primary Written Sources

Extensive archival documents depicted everyday life in rich detail. Documents revealed information on topics ranging from bureaucratic processes to details of the struggles, challenges, and triumphs of daily life. Three predominant sources are governmental agencies, Mennonite settlement boards, and Mennonite settlers. Many connect two of the three parties, but few connect all three. More than 450 archival documents consulted in this project provided an accurate chronology of events. They recorded the tumultuous transition from tenancy to individual farm agreements, reasons and resolutions for contentious issues that arose between settlers and between settlers with George Lane Ltd. officials, attitudes of officials towards Namaka Farm settlers, recommended corrective action, soil conditions, and the progress made on "settling" the farm. Meeting minutes from various boards were available, as were progress reports. Administrative records detailed individual indentures, land assignments, sale agreements, farm productivity, inventories, sales, crops grown, and financial transactions, including settler debt. They portrayed the settlement process from the perspective of those in authority at settlement boards, depicting communal and then individual agreements.

These archival documents provided Mennonite history from a colonizer as well as new immigrant perspective, facets not necessarily captured in cultural history but ones that provide new insights when combined. Although it was not essential, I was unable to locate registered Title Transfer documents for any of the settlers on Namaka Farm, despite working with a specialist at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Legibility was a challenge at times because some

of the correspondence was handwritten. That challenge was even greater when handwritten in German, but an expert transcriber was able to decipher relevant letters. Personal journals of immigrants, offered by descendant interview participants, provided personal details from living and farming conditions upon arrival, distain for communal living arrangements, hardships, hopes, joys, and family life. German language newspapers *Der Bote* and *Die Rundschau* were points of contact for Mennonite immigrants wanting to stay in touch with friends and families across North America, Europe, and those left behind in the Soviet Union. They described matters such as experiences of daily life, significant life events, celebrations, movement of families, obituaries, and, of course, the weather.

Trails to Little Corner: Namaka and Districts was compiled and edited in 1983 by Marguerite Watson, also an interview participant. Its 696 pages of mostly first-person texts, with accompanying images of life in the area during the period of interest for this project, are contributed by Siksika/Blackfoot, non-Mennonite, and Mennonite authors. It also includes Siksika history written by Indigenous authors, and history of the surrounding areas. This was the one tome that brought together a representative and inclusive history of the area. It depicts daily life and still evokes a feeling of community at that time. Unfortunately, historical accounts, while consistent with documented events, were not cited so could not be used directly.

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources were chosen for their documentation of relevant history. Books like *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* and *Mennonites in Canada: A People's Struggle for Survival, 1920-1940*, both by Frank H. Epp, and *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* by John A. Töews

provided important background, essential because this research examined how the experiences and values the immigrants brought with them influenced their adaptation. They spoke of their beliefs, cultural history, and migration experiences.

Another rich source of Mennonite context was the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). Entries here provided information on Mennonite history in general, history and context of Mennonite publications, significant figures, like Col. John Stoughton Dennis, instrumental in advocating for Mennonite immigration, and the various colonization boards. These sources provided vital information from a narrow perspective. Nonetheless, they were helpful in adding context to traditional values, beliefs, and experiences that influenced adaptation.

Participant interviews included Elders of the Siksika Nation, as they lived adjacent to Namaka Farm and were some of the first people to interact with the Namaka Farm settlers. Gaining knowledge about settler-colonialism and Siksika and Blackfoot history was essential to help understand their perspective. Indigenous history, both general and specific was augmented by secondary sources, like Ryan Hall's, *Beneath the Backbone of the World: Blackfoot People and the North American Borderlands, 1720-1877*, and Robert Joseph's *21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act*. This project also relied on the writing and wisdom of Dr. Sarah Carter, scholar of Western Canadian History in general and Alberta history in particular. Carter's *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* was one of the reasons I was compelled to undertake this project for its enlightenment of colonialism as applied to Indigenous agricultural policies. Dr. Carter was an expert witness for "The Siksika 1910 Land Surrender" and offered her paper for use in this project. She also co-

authored *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, invaluable in gaining an appreciation for the term "stolen land."

Methodology

This research project sought to understand how the experiences that German-speaking Mennonite immigrants from Soviet Ukraine brought with them influenced how they adapted interculturally and ecologically. It then explored how the wisdom from those times can be applied today. The project addressed a gap in the scholarship of Russlaender Mennonite adaptation by focusing on a settlement of thirty-six families on Namaka Farm, between 1925 and 1937. It bore special meaning for me because it was where my father lived between 1930 and 1937, between ages four and eleven, and it was the place he spoke of his entire life. Its location next to the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation and surrounded by British colonial settlers created a microcosm of colonialism.

I chose to convey this story as an auto/ethnography for its focus on "cultural analysis and interpretation,"[37] not only of my culture, but others that influenced and were influenced by my culture. It allowed me to put my family and myself into the story. I had already spent more than a decade exploring this topic non-academically, and I had made several trips to the area. I even wrote a memoir about this quest, published in 2019. Now I was deepening my understanding through an academic lens with expert scholarly guidance.

These interactions and interrelationships were not preserved in the historical record, but they were held in stories passed on to descendants. Even those that were recorded, either publicly, in private journals, or memories, needed to be examined considering new findings.

The best way to find the material I sought was by using the qualitative methods of interviews and archival research, supplemented by secondary sources.

Autoethnograhic methods enabled me to understand my own culture, but also to bring my understanding of cultures into my analysis and interpretation. Obtaining a holistic picture of the times, required that I interview descendants from each of three groups: Mennonites settlers who lived on Namaka Farm, non-Mennonite settlers who lived in the area and interacted with them, and Siksika people who were their closest neighbours. Honouring "relationality, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, and respect,"[38] pervaded this process and informed my approach, particularly with the Siksika, whose culture is so different than mine and whose wisdomkeepers held knowledge essential to understanding history. I prepared by studying Siksika history, culture, and colonization experiences in courses prior to beginning this project. I also familiarized myself with Indigenous "re-search" methodologies.[39] Preparing for participation required that I become knowledgeable and sensitive to using Eurocentric methods and terminology before even approaching Indigenous participants, including avoiding use of the term "research." The northwestern border of the Siksika reserve adjoined the eastern border of Namaka Farm. Settlers who lived along the border, including my family, had the most interactions with Siksika and I hoped to interview descendants from other families along that border. Given the nature of my research, I required Ethics Approval, a process that took four months.

My goal was to interview three to twelve participants from each of the groups. I ended up with eighteen Mennonites, seven Siksika, and eleven non-Mennonites, interviewed mostly in August and September 2023 with the last one occurring in December 2023. Mennonites were

interviewed in their homes, farms, and one by Zoom. Non-Mennonite interviews took place in homes, farms, a long-term care residence, the CPR Demonstration farm in Strathmore, a local Roadhouse, and Tim Hortons. Most Siksika content came from participation in an Elders' Circle at Old Sun Community College on the Siksika Reserve. One participant who could not be present was subsequently interviewed via Zoom. Three Elders wished to remain anonymous and are referred to as Elder A, Elder B, and Elder C.

It was important that interviews be done as close as possible to the place they originated and when that was not feasible, in family homes. It made participants more comfortable and helped with story recall. For me, being in place helped me visualize the community that existed in the 1930s and imagine what was required for adaptation. It is one thing to be told about the vast expanse of prairie but to stand on it in the setting of these stories brought a much deeper meaning. What was once the bustling hamlet of Namaka is now a few streets of modern bungalows, built around the derelict General Store and settler homes. The four grain elevators and rail siding are long gone. Namaka School, which some of the interview participants attended, evolved into a community centre. The Namaka Mennonite Brethren Church is now a residential dwelling. The Mennonite cemetery is well-maintained by descendants of those early Mennonites. Two publications, *Trails to Little Corner* and *Namaka, 1925-2000*, proved to be useful in prompting memories for their photographs, images, and in the latter, a map of Namaka Farm with settler names on individual plots of land.

It was surreal to attend the Elders' Circle in the library of Old Sun Community College, once Old Sun Residential School. In 1971, Siksika leaders took control and transformed a residential school into a community college for Blackfoot students. The large winter count on a

tanned buffalo hide on display at one end of the library left no doubt that I was in another place and nation.

All interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed. Transcriptions were then shared with individual participants to ensure their content conveyed their intent. A similar undertaking was done with the final thesis draft.

Participants were selected using snowball sampling, a sampling method whereby one participant refers others. My connection to the community through my father, my familiarity with the geography and history, and the sense of community that remained amongst those who had maintained a continuous connection to the area, was an asset in gaining participation and trust. I focused on engaging with those who had either personal experiences on or around Namaka Farm during the 1930s and 40s or were the keeper of family history of that time. Most were aged between seventy-five and ninety-nine. I spent almost two months in the area.

Recruitment of settler participants began by connecting to a prominent figure, a descendant of Mennonite settlers, whom I'd met on a previous visit. He did not participate but he put me in touch with Mennonite and non-Mennonite participants who put me in touch with more. This tightly knit community had survived and bonded over challenging times and it did not take long for word and interest to spread. A significant number of Namaka Farm settlers, including my family, moved to Ontario in the late 1930s. This cohesive cohort had shared similar experiences from a specific place and time. The bond created between settlers lasted a lifetime and my father remained in touch with his Namaka friends. I attended church and school with several of his friends' children and invited them to participate.

Engaging with Siksika Elders was understandably a longer process. I first met with Chief Ouray Crowfoot and Councillor Owen Cranebear to familiarize them with my project, seek their support, and ask how this project could be beneficial to Siksika Nation. Chief Crowfoot then directed me to Maria Big Snake, President of Old Sun Community College, who ultimately provided a contact person who in turn arranged a gathering of Siksika Elders to participate and share knowledge in an Elders' Circle.

The largest collection relevant to this project was held at the Glenbow Library and Archives, Archives Special Collection (ASC) at the University of Calgary. Glenbow ASC houses materials from the history of southern Alberta, including CPR records and correspondence between Colonization Boards, (CCA, CMBoC, MLSB), George Lane Ltd., Dominion Bank, and individual settlers. Another sizeable source came from the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) in Winnipeg. Their large repository of Mennonite Immigration records, German-language Mennonite newspapers *Der Bote* and *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, provided invaluable help in recreating those times. Both Archives produced a large amount of relevant data which supplemented the settler history obtained through interviews. Archivists were very helpful in sourcing and interpreting records as necessary. Although I spent several weeks there, time constraints meant I could only source and scan data to review and analyze later.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta in Calgary houses Namaka Mennonite Church records and Namaka Farm School records. The administrative assistant there turned out to have lived on Namaka Farm and I recruited her for the project. I was able to check my father's attendance and performance. United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.) Historical Society held relevant records related to U.F.A. meetings. National archives in Ottawa and Legislative and

Immigration records accessible online. Glenbow Museum holding the Blackfoot archives was closed for massive renovations and those records were not available. I relied on the oral history I received and select secondary sources to frame the historical context.

Research activities resulted in a large amount of qualitative data to analyze and synthesise. Upon my return, I went through each non-Indigenous interview and catalogued relevant information such as the settler's history in Namaka and area, age, the participant's relationship to other settlers, year of arrival in Canada, occupation before emigrating, family composition. Cataloguing the more than 450 archival records was an extensive undertaking. I identified the key figures and their roles, dates of correspondence, key points, other people involved, and relevance to research questions. Some correspondence was barely legible because of age, wear, and handwriting, especially when that handwriting was in German. Even correspondence that was typewritten could be challenging to decipher when the author wrote in German or had poor command of English. The old German Script used in documents and newspapers was also beyond my comprehension. Because my German is not proficient, I engaged an expert fluent in German with archival experience as a bonus.[40] Even then, some of the expressions required deliberation to ensure the translated content reflected the intentions of the author.

During my analysis with both stories and archival records, I asked myself where and how the record had originated. I questioned what content had made it into the archives and speculated on what was missing and lost to history. I also wondered how the agreements in the records reflected what transpired. I contemplated the form and context of records, especially

given cultural and language differences among settlers and colonizers. Archival records corroborated data provided in the interviews and provided missing contextual information.

Data was organized into three chapters as it related to Mennonite adaptation: sustainability, connections, and spirituality. Sustainability explored how the Mennonite settlers established themselves, their families, and their community in this new economic, cultural, and political environment. The chapter on connections explored how they formed intercultural, intracultural, and ecological relationships to sustain themselves and flourish. This offered interesting insights on friction and conflict within the settlement during the initial transition. It also revealed surprising interactions between Mennonites and Siksika people. The Spirituality chapter reflects my understanding of the term as it is used throughout this thesis, which aligns with established convention. Spirituality is defined, "as a more general feeling of closeness and connectedness to the sacred."[41] On the other hand, religion is defined as, "adherence to a belief system and practices associated with a tradition in which there is agreement about what is believed and practiced (Hill et al., 2000)."[42] The chapter focused on how these Mennonites represented their religious beliefs and how that enhanced or damaged relationships between Mennonites, between Mennonite and other settlers, and between Mennonite and Siksika, even if that was inadvertent.

The most significant insights came from listening to the same story from the respective perspectives of Mennonites and Siksika. The difference in terminology used to describe the same event revealed cultural perceptions of power relationships. A charitable activity like Mennonite women coming into Siksika homes to teach quilting, canning, and gardening, which was well-received by the Siksika, was applauded. At the same time, it was tempered by the

message it sent when Mennonite women would not reciprocate when Siksika women offered to teach them quilling, beadwork, and tanning. Only through extensive reflexivity supplemented by close reading of the story did these themes evolve.

Given the nature of this project, reflexivity was an ideal methodology. It refers to, "the ways we reflect on how our 'lived experiences' influence our research and how our research affects us."[43] It acknowledges the influence of my experiences and perspectives on the work and interpretation of the data. It further recognizess that participants are "subjects, not objects,"[44] It reminded me that the perspectives of those who participated were also influenced by their experiences, bringing added richness and depth to the story when the data is analyzed and synthesized. I utilized it throughout the project—in assessing published resources, during the interview process, and in my analysis and synthesis. The stories and experiences passed down from my ancestors have shaped me, so utilizing reflexivity was particularly relevant when assessing how I perceive myself, and how I interpret stories and representations originating across cultures.

The same attributes that made reflexivity strongly suited made it difficult because it was so personal. It required me to come to terms with their, and my, role in settler-colonialism, accept that they were settlers, not Mennonite refugees or immigrants, and that some of their well-intentioned acts perpetuated systemic injustices, white supremacy, and racism. Although they could be considered marginalized, they were also privileged as they had resources available to them through the colonial hegemonic structure into which they assimilated that was not available to others, especially when compared to the Siksika. They used that privilege

for economic, social, and cultural benefit at the expense of their Siksika neighbours, privilege of which I, too, am a beneficiary.

The methodological choices utilized were ideal for learning how Mennonites adapted to their new surroundings, and how they formed and nurtured intercultural and ecological relationships. Prior to this research, little was known about this settlement, other than the stories passed down in cultural silos. As it turns out, the message from those times is so much greater than the Namaka Farm settlement. The archival research was necessary and beneficial in confirming details and augmenting challenges faced by the settlers, and by confirming historical context. It was, however, the interviews that produced the greatest understandings, surprises, and wisdom. This would not have been the case had I interviewed only Mennonites or broadened that to include non-Mennonite settlers. The greatest epiphanies were produced by analyzing the stories from all three perspectives. The key learnings came about through the contribution of the Siksika participants, a culture with a different history and different way of relating to the world from any of the white settlers. Siksika participants were relaying stories and oral histories, but it was the words they used and the everyday situations they described that we have been blind to that led to the greatest awakening. It required looking at all stories in relationship to each other and reflecting on what was said, how it was said, the language used, and the historical context in which they occurred to produce the wisdom we can apply today. That was the goal of the research.

The methodological choices were also ideally suited to writing this thesis as an auto/ethnography, thereby bringing my family and my journey into the story. Many times, while listening to interview participants, I felt as though I was part of that community. A story

that is personal, historically accurate, and presents a new, thought-provoking, and defensible perspective will engage readers and hopefully spurn them into action to apply the wisdom contributed by interview participants.

Chapter 1: Sustainability

introduction

Mennonite settlers began arriving on Namaka Farm in the spring of 1925, many with young children and most with little more material goods than what they could carry. They now had a place to live in Canada to begin rebuilding their lives, but conditions were primitive, and they were not physically or emotionally comfortable with the living arrangements. The expectations, communication systems, and power relationships were far different than what they had known in Soviet Ukraine. They would have to learn how to navigate the forms of commerce, obtain health care and education, and speak English. Immigration terms required they farm for five years, but not all were experienced agriculturalists. Even those that were, would learn that although the prairie terrain looked familiar, the soil and climate differed from that on the Ukrainian steppes, and would require different methods of cultivation and implements to become productive.

Once they had established shelter, they had to feed and clothe their families, as well as shelter and feed their animals. They needed to decide what crops to grow, how to market them, and how to work and live together. It was a steep learning curve, but there was much opportunity. They were a strong, resourceful, and resilient people, and even if they had to start at the beginning, they would learn to thrive. They had a long history of taming “wild” land and bringing it into production and could do it again here. This chapter introduces some of the early arrivals, including my family, their challenges, how they leaned on familiar ways of being while learning to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances, and how settler life on Namaka Farm evolved over the next decade.

Wagon Trails

A sense of timelessness settled over me as Peter and Elsie Thiessen Nikkel led me across the pastureland surrounding their home. Elsie was born on that farm in the late 1930s on what was then Namaka Farm Three. I stood transfixed as August breezes blew across the open prairie. We were standing on wild prairie wool—land deemed unsuitable for cultivation that had never been "broken." "*This is the original*," said Peter, as I stared at the earth beneath my feet. "*You're standing on original prairie*." "*The soil here is very alkaline*," said Elsie. "*On a windy day like we had yesterday, you can get a dust storm that is white. More like a blizzard*."

We headed for a nearby vantage point, while keeping a close eye on a herd of cattle grazing in the distance. "*The Siksika had a wagon trail that ran across these fields to Calgary prior to fences going in*," Peter said, pointing to barely discernable parallel indentations wandering northwest across the land. "*You can hardly distinguish them now, but there are two sets of tracks that weave in the same pattern, one set going in each direction. When we get a skiff of snow, they become more visible*." Nodding his head to another area close by, he said, "*Over there you can see all the dips and doodles where the buffalo must have taken dust baths*." As a black cow headed toward us, Peter advised us to head for the car. "*She chased our daughter over the fence yesterday*."

My mind stayed with the prairie wool. Plains peoples, like those of the Siksika Nation now living on a reserve a few miles east, had thrived for millennia on these lands. They understood the natural cycles of the land and the beings that inhabited it, and migrated with the seasons, knowing how and where to draw sustenance during each season. Settlers, like my ancestors, arrived to occupy this land recently taken from the Siksika. They were there to

"break" the sod, which they and the government saw as a necessary step to produce crops and survive. They struggled.

Namaka Farm Early Years

Dominion Bank's initial asking purchase price for Namaka Farm was too high for the CCA to recommend a deal,[45] but in 1925, they reached an agreement to lease to twenty-five Mennonite families.[46] Relationships amongst these first tenant families got off to a rocky start. Multiple unrelated families living in cramped quarters under the same roof directed by "English" institutional owners was an unusual arrangement for Mennonites who preferred to live and operate their lives and farms independently, but they accepted it out of necessity. Under the terms of the rental agreement, the Lane Company (Dominion Bank) also provided horses, cows, pigs, chickens, and seed grain. Mennonites repaid in kind with labour and a portion of the produce.[47] It was, at least, a start.

As grateful as they were to be in a land of supposed peace and freedom (for white people), the culture, ways of operating, and language were foreign to them. They tended to distrust those in authority. Namaka settlers were asked to appoint two "Attorneys" (Power of Attorney) for each group on Namaka Farm One, Two, and Three. These men would have "wide powers" and could sign cheques for "the bunch." They resisted signing the lease and asked the Company for changes, which were made. The Company tried to convince them that their suspicions were ungrounded.[48] Likewise, the Dominion Bank had initial misgivings. They needed this farm to generate a profit to meet their financial obligations. Having all 12,265 acres settled by Mennonites would have been considered a fiscally prudent undertaking. Mennonites' reputation as esteemed, industrious, and economically successful agriculturalists in imperial

Russia had evolved over more than a century. The portrayal was true for the Mennonites in aggregate, but not individually. As the Russian economy grew, it included industrialists, small business owners, teachers, and religious leaders, as well as agriculturalists.[49] Although farming was a requirement of immigration, not everyone who arrived was an experienced or willing farmer, including those who found themselves on Namaka Farm.

In early May 1925, senior officials from CCA, Dominion Bank, and George Lane Co. were understandably alarmed after learning that only eight families had any farming experience.[50] This prompted immediate visits to Namaka Farm to assess the situation and protect their investment. While they were shocked at the agricultural ineptitude they witnessed, they were hopeful the Mennonites could learn to farm.

B. E. Elmore, Secretary of George Lane Co. reported that, "On my second visit they have shown a considerable improvement in the way they are handling the horses."[51] Elmore also displayed little tolerance towards those unwilling to accept the conditions under which they had been accepted onto the Farm. He wrote, "I am of the opinion that there are two or three agitators among the colony, and I would recommend that this matter be taken up with the Colonization Board with a view of having any agitators removed off the place, thus allowing the work to run smoothly. All the Mennonites were supposed to have experience in farming. However, if they are willing to work it will not be very difficult to teach them."[52] Subsequent correspondence to the CCA notes, "They (Mennonites) would soon have no horses left, that they had already lost fifty hens, that their hogs were dying off, that their time was being spent in quarrelling among themselves instead of farming."[53]

Mennonites claimed the lease terms were unclear and obligations unevenly distributed between families. Distrust, high turnover, unrest, and crowded, primitive, and austere living conditions strained relationships and made Dominion Bank's investment in land and labour unstable. It had become patently obvious that the communal arrangement and lease expectations were not going to work for either party. As early as 1926, Dominion Bank, the CCA, and the CMBoC agreed to divide the settlers onto three previously established divisions, Namaka Farm One, Namaka Farm Two, and Namaka Farm Three, with each tract suitable for twelve purchasers.[54] Although some initial tensions were alleviated by ongoing negotiations, the transition was anything but smooth.

The purchase arrangement became a crucial and persistent stumbling point. The twelve families on each of the three farms had purchased their parcel jointly. No one could move off the Farm without incurring financial and legal liability unless they assigned their farm to another purchaser approved by the group. Loan repayment was to be made by purchasers turning over half the crop to George Lane Ltd. until the entire purchase price was paid. What was not understood by the purchasers was that even if one of them paid off their loan, they would not be granted title until all twelve loans were repaid. Family size, financial obligation, and spending habits differed so each family had distinct needs.[55] Finding an equitable way to distribute risk, rewards, and obligations presented a major and ongoing predicament.

Given language and comprehension differences, expectations, and the existing external power structure, it was understandable that problems kept arising. Multiple documents record meetings between the parties to deal with legitimate concerns, with George Lane representatives emphasizing they wished to see the settlement succeed. A meeting convened

in November 1928, with representatives of George Lane/Dominion Bank, CCA, and delegates of Namaka Farm, was typical of ongoing efforts to address mutual concerns. Points of discussion included how to deal with Mennonites who abandoned their contracts, individual bank accounts, a request for the redivision of land, setting up individual land agreements, equitable division of land, setting aside acreage for feeding livestock, purchasing seed, how to market grain, and a request to try a new version of wheat.[56] Many Mennonites on Namaka Farm Three, the last of the three to be settled, had barns and outbuildings but wanted assistance to build houses so that each member could live on their own parcel of land. The common request for an 18' X 24' house did not seem extravagant.[57] Clearly, much had to be addressed for the settlement to succeed. These Russlaender did not accept that colonial authorities were acting in their best interests, and they did not comply with official requests without due consideration.

Soil quality, which varied significantly across Namaka Farm, farming ability, and motivation to farm, all affected the productivity and potential yield. Availability of water and weather conditions also varied, with some locations more susceptible to damage from hail.

These factors had to be taken into consideration when establishing individual parcel sizes and price. Russlaender wanted to recreate the Russian field pattern with which they were familiar. Under this configuration, communal grazing areas were located on unaerable land. Land was divided according to its suitability for "cultivation, hay land, and meadow, according to the draining, slope, soil texture, vegetation, and relation the site of the village."[58] W.R. Dick from the CCA, A. J. McLean and Mr. Klassen from George Lane, and Mr. (A. A.) Töews of Namaka Farm Two met to discuss common grazing areas and agreed to terms and conditions that would allow settlers specified acreage on which they could grow feed for their stock.[59]

Dave Thompson, Lane's farm manager, had assisted in settlement and seemed to get along with the newcomers most of the time. But his practice of taking unacceptably high cash payments from settlers to cover expenses for the use of his automobile had come to the attention and disfavor of Mr. McLean, lawyer for George Lane Co.[60] By the fall of 1929, resolution of complex issues was on the horizon. McLean had met with Namaka settlers to discuss individual contracts and proposed he would strongly recommend them if they would accept A. W. Klassen taking over as farm manager from Thompson. Klassen spoke German and the Mennonites trusted him. He had proven himself with George Lane. His skills and dedication would serve all well.

After much turmoil, negotiation, and debate, a recommendation was submitted to the officials of Dominion Bank recommending all old contracts be rescinded and new contracts for individual farms for thirty-six purchasers be prepared. In his correspondence with R. C. Duncan at the CCA in Winnipeg, Dick says, "I feel it is a very desirable thing from the purchaser's standpoint and have heartily approved of this step."[61] The Russlaender on Namaka Farm had been in Canada and on Namaka Farm for a maximum of four and a half years, and now had comfortable living and community arrangements on which they could build their lives.

Namaka Family History

Gathering stories to understand how Mennonites settlers on Namaka Farm adapted to their new surroundings put me in touch with my grandmother Elizabeth (Liese) Friesen. While her story is deeply personal, her journey to Namaka and the hardships she maneuvered along the way were not unusual for these arrivals. Introducing my family and their experiences illustrates the context in which many of the families, whose stories follow, began life in Canada.

A photo of the Klassen family from September 1925 that only recently came to my attention captivated me. Likely taken in the village of Elisabethtal (Molotschna colony), now in Ukraine, to commemorate Liese's and Johann's 1925 departure, it was the last time the family was together. Johann's parents are seated in the front row surrounded by their children and five grandchildren. Liese and Johann stand in the back right corner. The farming family came from a lineage of agriculturalists and appear well-dressed and healthy, not impoverished. Johann's father was also the *Burgermeister* [village mayor]. I imagine the photo marks one of the most auspicious, yet poignant, times of Liese's life.

Born into a poor, landless family, Liese Friesen had always had to work hard. Her schooling ended after six years. Seeking a solution to their landlessness, the Molotschna Colony had purchased land from Russian nobles in the Khasaviurt district and established the Terek daughter colony in Caucasus in 1901 on the traditional lands of the Muslim Nogays, Chechens, and Kumyks. Landless families like the Friesens received 108 acres each. Seeking a different future, the Friesens undertook the more than 1,000-kilometer arduous migration. Existence here was fraught with challenges. Oil was discovered in their water and soil. Liese talked about "Tatars," a catch-all phrase used for their Muslim neighbours, raiding their farms and how she would not back down to their demands. I wonder what toll they extracted from the young teenage woman that she never voiced. The settlers lived here through the travails of the Great War and the social and political upheaval of 1917, but fear of attack by the Nogays, Chechyns, and Kumyks became too great. In a dramatic overnight exodus on February 8, 1918, settlers formed a two-mile caravan of wagons, animals, and meagre possessions. As attacks intensified, they discarded livestock, implements, and furniture, taking only what they could carry.[62] Liese

and her family returned to Elisabethal where she and Johann met, fell in love, and married. In the photo, they had been together for five years, were expecting a child, my dad, and were about to leave for a new start in Canada, which they envisioned as a land of hope, opportunity, and peace.

At the same time their hearts were torn apart. Within the past four months they had buried their two-year-old and eight-month-old daughters who had died from a communicable childhood illness. Johann and Liese were the only ones in that photo who chose to emigrate. After years of turmoil, the social, economic, and political horizon looked brighter. Yet, many, including Liese and Johann, were skeptical enough to leave. Liese's mother, age fifty, and brother Peter, had died in 1919 and 1920 respectively, likely from typhus. Like many Friesens, including her father, the other Klassens in the photo chose to stay. The Klassen family had a productive farm which promised to provide well for them and future generations—until under Stalin's rule, when the animals and their barn were confiscated, then their land, and they became impoverished. Extended family members were imprisoned and executed. Survivors were eventually exiled to Kazakhstan. But when the photo was taken, none of this had come to pass and the future appeared optimistic.

Liese and Johann set sail in November 1925, only to be delayed in Southampton, England for three months to treat Johann's trachoma. During that time, her pregnancy was progressing. When they arrived in Swalwell, southern Alberta, after what could not have been a comfortable passage by ship and rail, she was two months shy of her due date. She remained in Swalwell, while Johann went ahead to Beaverlodge in northern Alberta, joining other Mennonite families who had arrived the previous fall. Here he would proceed with plans to

clear land and build a rudimentary log home for his family until Liese and their newborn, Bernhard Johann, whom they called Bennie (Dad), could join him.

Once owners of land in Alberta heard about the mass migration of Mennonites underway, there was a steady stream of correspondence to the CCA and MLSB, advising them that they had land available for Mennonite settlement and the terms under which they would sell. In a standard response from CCA, the prospective vendor was told, "These deals that we are finding for these people are lands under cultivation and fully equipped with stock and machinery, and in many cases, an advance is made for their living expenses for the first year, or until they get a crop. Then land is sold to them without any case payment whatever, and the purchasers turn over one half of all crops raised."[63] Another letter held up the "Carrell Brothers' Deal" as the standard. The Carrells owned large tracts of land in northern Alberta, including that to which Liese, Johann, and Dad were moving. Their deals included, "all the horses, cows, pigs, poultry, and all the farming machinery, seed for the year, and feed for all their stock and an advance of several hundred dollars for living expenses to the purchasers, who went into possession and have broken up some new land and raised a crop, half of which goes to the Vendors, and half is retained for the purchaser's living expenses."[64] Naturally there was room for negotiation, but this was the standard offer for Mennonite settlement, unlike the group arrangements negotiated with the Dominion Bank on Namaka Farm. What was common was the repayment of debt on the half-crop basis.

Gordon Berdahl of the Alberta Genealogical Society helped unravel the terms of sale on Johann's arrangements from his probate file as much as possible, but they remain nebulous. At the time of his death, Johann had a one-quarter interest in six separate quarters of land,

dispersed in the southwest outskirts of Beaverlodge. Four were owned by the Carrell family, the other two by Michael White and Douglas Stone respectively. Berdahl deduced that possibly his share of ownership was an agreement with the three other Mennonite parties named who each held a one-quarter share interest in the six parcels, or that he rented from the owners under a crop-sharing or annual payment arrangement.[65] Because he was late arriving in Beaverlodge, these arrangements were presumably made on his behalf by the earlier arrivals.

Johann was likely weakened from his final years in the U.S.S.R., illness during transit, and physical labour in primitive conditions on what was then a frontier. On February 7, 1928, he succumbed to tuberculosis after fighting it for four months. Not only his death, but the cause of death, added stress to the young widow and her son. Tuberculosis was a communicable disease and Liese believed that it may lead to her and Dad being deported. At the same time, they must have worried about the expenses arising from Johann's medical treatment and hospitalization in Grande Prairie, AB. In the obituary submitted to *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, she wrote, "My dearly beloved husband Johann Bernhard Klassen caught a cold and became ill. At first, he was not very ill, but it got worse, so that he had to be taken to the hospital in Grande Prairie on the 27th of January."[66] Dad always maintained that his father died from "some kind of" respiratory illness. It was not until I obtained Johann's death certificate less than a decade ago that tuberculosis was confirmed as Johann's cause of death. A now-derelict Mennonite Cemetery was created on one of those Beaverlodge parcels and is where Johann was laid to rest.

The CMBoC allocated relief funds to pay for hospitalization and must have intervened for my grandparents, otherwise, immigrants who, "became public charges were threatened

with deportation."[67] Canadian deportation policy was applied to all immigrants, but it may have been felt more strongly by Russlaender. After the 1917 social and cultural revolution and the Great War against the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany, public opinion created suspicion of those arriving who might be communists, thus a threat to national security. This in turn fueled anti-Mennonite sentiment. Any new immigrant seeking public assistance or remaining unemployed could be deported.[68] Immigrants were particularly vulnerable during the drought and economic depression of the 1930s when the need for farm labour dropped and unemployment rose. Documents at the Canadian Museum of Immigration report that in the early 1930s, "For every two or three people admitted to Canada, one was being deported."[69] All of these factors must have compounded the legacy of terror and distrust these fledgling Canadians brought with them. Adding a communicable disease and incurring medical costs must have dramatically increased their fear. Dad carried this fear for years and even in his later years would relay stories stressing that they had to be careful, or "*Back you'd go!*"

To make ends meet after Johann's death, Liese took in laundry from the workers extending the rail line. With no electricity, heat, or running water, life must have been beyond grueling. Widowed with a toddler and unable to speak English, she did what she had to do. Their land agreement ended up in a legal dispute and those she trusted betrayed her. Bereft and destitute in all ways, she left Beaverlodge with Bennie in late summer of 1928 to take up a housekeeping position outside of Beiseker, AB, 800 km south. Here she landed safely with a blended German-speaking family of Seventh Day Adventists with up to twenty children. They lived on an established prairie farm, where the man of the house adored Bennie, and where mother and son would remain for two years until Liese married Peter Jansen. By then, Peter

was living on Namaka Farm Three, seventy kilometers further south. The circumstances under which they met remains a mystery, but one can imagine the Mennonite matchmaking machine going into high gear to pair a young widow with an eligible bachelor.

Peter Jansen

Mystery also shrouded Peter's background. Legend has it that he had appeared in Namaka on horseback, riding like the wind across the prairies, hoping to settle on Namaka Farm where he heard an aunt lived. Research has added missing detail, but the legend stands. Peter grew up in Berdyansk, now Ukraine, with at least nine siblings in a once-prosperous family who operated a mill. For unknown reasons, he became estranged from them and left home in 1915 at age seventeen. Dad remembers Peter telling stories of joining the Cossacks[70] and getting ousted shortly after when a ricocheted bullet hit his shoulder. At some point, likely from involvement with the White Army, he spent three years as a P.O.W. in Bulgaria, changed the spelling of his name from Jantzen to Jansen (Jantzen, Janzen, and Jansen all appear in records) to make it appear less Germanic, and arrived in Canada, alone, on July 3, 1926, via Hamburg, Germany.[71] Like Johann, all his immediate family remained in the U.S.S.R.

How and where Peter spent his first few years in Canada is unknown. He likely drifted throughout Alberta, finding employment on farms as necessary. Eventually he found his way to Namaka Farm where his Aunt Aganeta Willms, her husband H. H. Willms and their family, and extended Willms family had settled. His arrival coincided with a nearby parcel of land on Namaka Farm Three becoming available as the "owner," Gerhard Thielmann, was moving to Saskatchewan. Peter, by now thirty years of age, likely envisioned himself obtaining land, a wife, and settling down. But there was a glitch. The process that transpired illustrates the

agreement in place at the time between George Lane Ltd. and the Mennonites for transfer of property.

On March 2, 1929, Gerhard Thielmann sought advice from his brother Peter Thielmann, a lawyer, about the sale of his land. Gerhard had arranged to sell his farm and chattels to a Jacob Reimer of Bassano, approximately seventy kilometers east of Namaka, on the east side of the Siksika reserve and Thielmann's moving wagons were booked. However, on the advice of Heinrich H. Willms and Aron Wall, the two attorneys for Namaka Farm Three, the rest of the Namaka Farm Three group changed their mind about Reimer, the intended purchaser. Willms and Wall wanted it to go to Peter Jansen and took it upon themselves to visit David Thompson, George Lane's Farm Manager, the next morning to arrange the assignment. Jansen was a tough bargainer and shunned legal paperwork, expecting a handshake agreement would suffice.[72] This appears to have been his mode of operation.

Peter Thielmann responded to Gerhard on March 4 that Jansen or any other buyer can be approved, as long as the group agrees, and the written request is signed by the attorneys.[73] Jansen was forced to relent and on March 6, an Indenture was signed between him and Thielmann, witnessed by Thompson, registered in the court on April 15, 1929. In addition to the legal descriptions of the land, the agreement included five horses (Bill, Daly, Nelly, Buster, and Pony), four unnamed cows, which was one more than Reimer would have received, tack, meagre farm implements, one stove, one cabinet, one table, and one chair.[74] The Indenture identifies Jansen's address as Tofield, near Edmonton. Another document places him in Hussar, fifty kilometers east of Namaka. The elusiveness about how he had spent the three preceding years remains intact.

Dad's Namaka story began in March 1930, when his mother Liese and Peter married. The news was carried in *Der Bote*, although the account missed naming my grandfather, Johann Klassen. The entry read, "On March 9, Sunday, we celebrated a wedding at the home of A. W. Klassen: Peter Janzen, farmer on Namaka Farm No. 3, married widow Liese Klassen, nee Friesen, whose husband died in Grand Prairie about two years ago."[75] A. W. Klassen (no relationship) had worked for the MLSB[76] and continued there part-time while filling the role of Namaka Farm Manager. His house was home to his family and headquarters of Namaka Farm Two.

After the ceremony, bride and groom were placed on chairs, then hoisted in the air by celebrants. All almost-four-year-old Bennie Klassen remembered was that he "*cried his eyes out*," terrified by what they were doing to his mother. He had already been through a lot in his short life. Dad had good reason to cry. Life for him and Liese would continue to be difficult, although he formed and carried close friendships and fond memories of Namaka in his heart his whole life. I can never understand what experiences shaped Peter and cannot judge. He loved to ride horses, loved to engage socially, attended church services, and by all accounts was well liked by others in the Mennonite community. He refused to learn English, saying he already knew five languages and was not about to learn another. He was not an experienced farmer, nor was he a good provider, even in the absence of the dust bowl and depression of the 1930s. Although Dad carried the name "Jansen," he did not learn until his wedding in 1952 that Peter had not legally adopted him. In *Trails to Little Corner*, Dad wrote, "Dad [Peter] always had his sights set toward Ontario. Dad had an aunt in Niagara-on-the-Lake so in March 1937 we moved

from Namaka."[77] Peter was killed in a car accident on May 28, 1945, after he disregarded advice to fix the brakes on his car.

Reiseschuld

Prior to the Great War and 1917 revolution, many Mennonites in imperial Russia were wealthy in comparison to their rural neighbours. After that upheaval they were dependent on outside help to emigrate.[78] Most who arrived in Canada in the 1920s, were, "poor and in debt."[79] Through intense negotiations, the CMBoC negotiated with CPR for transportation credits and guaranteed repayment. That allowed the Russlaender to emigrate. The debt was allocated across all immigrants and each family assumed responsibility to repay their portion, including interest at six percent. The unpaid portion was referred to as the *Reiseschuld,*[80] or travel debt.

Repayment of the *Reiseschuld* compounded Liese's stress during those years. She and Johann incurred a debt of $293.30 CAD beginning on February 14, 1926, the date they arrived in Canada. Liese did not make the first payment of $25 until May 10, 1929, a year and a half after Johann had died and a year after she and Dad had moved to Beiseker. By that time, with accrued interest, the debt had risen to $396.45, an amount that was tough to pay off on a housekeeper's wages. The next payment was not made until 1937, and she finally paid off the total, which had grown to $685.69, on December 31, 1940.[81] Peter Jansen's initial debt as a single traveler was only $145.70, beginning on July 3, 1926. Nonetheless, his first payment of $4.00 was not made until January 30, 1933, seven years after his arrival and three years into his marriage with Liese. That total payment accumulated to $351.30 and was also paid off on December 31, 1940.[82] By that time, they were in Ontario and Dad vividly remembers the

tensions arising when collectors would come around, demanding payment. The year 1940 must have been good as between the two debts, a total of $565.79, including principal and interest, was finally cleared.

Introducing Mennonite Settlers Early Arrivals

The attrition rate of families moving away from Namaka Farm in the late 1920s and 1930s was high. This gave extended family members who may have arrived later or started life in Canada elsewhere an opportunity to avail themselves of land on Namaka Farm and move closer to relatives. Not everyone could adapt to the challenges or expectations of the early years, but for those that did, the common bond cultivated during the early days held. At least five families who had adolescent children like Dad moved to Ontario in the late 1930s and maintained lifelong friendships. Other families remained in the vicinity, but their common experiences sustained the early bond. Children and grandchildren of the first Russlaender to arrive in Canada, then on Namaka Farm beginning in 1925, generously shared histories of their families passed down either orally or through family memoirs. The families whose stories contributed to this research, and the relationships of those I spoke with, are introduced below.

Abram P. Willms and Anna Reimer, Peter Willms (son) and Margaret Boschman

Milt Willms' grandfather, A. P. Willms, arrived in Canada on June 20, 1925, and began working as a farm hand on different farms in southern Alberta while his wife and three sons lived in a granary. The Stirling sugar beet harvest attracted migrants, including the Willms, looking to establish more permanent roots, but after sugar beet season was over, they were increasingly concerned about their future. Some of the families (130 souls) who had come there were interested in homesteading. A. P. and an A. Epp were appointed to go to northern AB,

west of Edmonton, to check out the opportunities but came back less than enthused. In the meantime, A. W. Klassen of the Colonization Board (CMBoC) and W. R. Dyck from the Canadian Colonization Association came to Stirling to recruit families to replace those who had left the Lane Farm.[83] The Willms accepted.

In his memoir *Out of My Mind,* A.P. Willms wrote about their first home on Namaka Farm. A. P. said:

> Approximately twenty-five families arrived on Feb. 9, 1926. The living quarters were insufficient and at first, we lived like herrings in a barrel. Then we dragged together 16X16 rafters, separated by four-foot spans, and everything was covered with shiplap; windows and doors were put in, and before spring came every family had its own private living quarters. The weather was very favorable, otherwise this would not have been possible. There were so many head of cattle on the farm that each family could have five horses, four milk cows and a breeding sow for their temporary needs. There was also some farm equipment, seed grain, and fodder for the cattle. Unfortunately, in dividing the milk cows, quarrels developed, and the brotherly relationship was destroyed for the whole year. At least mutual trust was no longer present.[84] [85]

Willms wrote that the crop was good the first year but just as the binders were about to start cutting, a hailstorm came and destroyed their crop in minutes. H. B. Janz, charged with collecting money for the *Reiseschuld*, came to collect, saw the devastated fields, and left in tears.

According to A. P., relationships did not improve, and some families left to purchase land elsewhere, while others replaced them. Dividing the land, livestock, and implements, while challenging to divide equitably, went more smoothly and they had greater hopes for the year. George Lane Ltd. provided seed grain and advanced them money to be repaid with the first crop. An excellent crop and high grain prices resulted in a good income that year, and they were able to pay down the debt on the purchase price as well as interest. In his memoir he notes, “This crop was brought in as a group and this damaged the brotherly relationships again.

From that time on, each was his own boss." In 1928, hail destroyed another bumper crop causing more movement away and the influx of new families. The year 1929 was very dry, reducing the harvest and brought hail and low prices. In the spring of 1930, A.P. Willms left to farm near Strathmore, leaving his sons (including Milt's father Peter) to farm at Namaka.

Heinrich H. Willms and Aganetha Martens

"*The Willms family stayed together during their move from Russia to Namaka in 1926, and then from Namaka to Niagara in 1938*," says Susan McMillan, great-granddaughter of Heinrich and Aganeta, during our interview in her Ontario home. "*Those brothers (*Heinrich and Aganeta's sons*) were tight; that family was tight. But they had family that stayed in Russia, and there was always this wonder about how they were doing. They questioned whether they had made the right decision to emigrate or would it have been better to stay. Should they go back?*" That they had made the right decision became clear after 1929 with Stalin's iron grip on power and the launch of his reign of terror. These thoughts would have tormented most Russlaender on Namaka Farm, especially as news from the U.S.S.R was so hard to obtain and if it finally arrived, had been censored.

Susan's mother, Amalia (Mollie), was the daughter of Heinrich and Aganeta's son Heinrich M. Willms and Anna Fisch. Susan read from the journal of Katie Willms, Mollie's sister, about their accommodation on arrival on Namaka Farm Three in 1926. Katie wrote:

> We had a house with two rooms downstairs and two upstairs. Father made a table and benches. We had a rusty old stove to cook on. After one week Uncle Peter's family of twelve arrived. Then Mother's neighbour in Landskrone (Ukraine) Henry Dick arrived and I don't know whether he paid us room and board. The boys built two double bunk beds. On one side Abe and John slept on the top and Peter and Jake on the bottom. Dick and Jake Wiebe slept on the top bunk on the other side of the room; Henry and John on the bottom. In the other room slept Jake and Lisa Cleaver, and the girls Tina, Netta, Sara, and Susie. Downstairs Uncle Pete and Aunt

> Anna slept on one side and little George on the other side. Father and I and Agnes slept on the floor. The big table was in the center. H.M., Anna, (her brother and sister-in-law) and the baby slept in the kitchen. Twenty-three adults and a baby under one roof in four rooms.[86]

Tragedy struck in 1928 when the house burned to the ground, taking everyone's possessions, including the cash savings they had tucked away. Fortunately, Mollie's mother and infant brother were they only ones at home and managed to escape. Everyone else was at the church service several miles away.[87] This traumatic emotional and economic set back must have added additional pressure to the already stressful living conditions.

Gerhard Dirks and Katherina (Tina) Willms

Ray Dirks, born in Abbotsford, British Columbia in the mid 1950s, remembers warmhearted visits with his grandparents Gerhard and Katherina (Tina) Dirks, daughter of A.P. Willms. The Dirks farmed land immediately north of Liese and Peter Jansen, which also bordered the Siksika Nation. Ray's father Walter was born the same year as Dad, and they attended Namaka Farm School together. He said,

> *My recollection is that it was one of the first settler farms in that whole area and belonged to a well-known family. My grandfather was this serious man who was very kind and very nice to me, and I respected him, but I didn't know him on a level of, let's have a chat. I have very good memories of going there, even the whole outhouse experience in the winter. Coming from B.C., where we didn't have it that cold, we would go there for Christmas. Sitting in the outhouse at twenty below with coyotes howling all around terrified and thrilled me at the same time. The rectangular, two-story house, which existed long before they arrived, was paper-thin and uninsulated, so it could be very cold in the winter. It had a caboose added on, which was where you took your outside clothes off and where you had a bath in a big old metal tub. As I recall, there was a big kitchen, a small living room and one bedroom on the main floor. Extremely steep stairs led to the second floor, which was almost like a bunkhouse because there were so many kids. My grandmother gave birth to seventeen children of which fourteen survived and grew up in that house. After my grandparents retired to live in Calgary, my Uncle Eric took down that house and built a new one.*

Dave Penner and Louise Boschman

Elvera (Vera) Penner's father Dave Penner arrived in Namaka in 1926 to be near an uncle. Vera recalled,

> *The rest of Father's family never came. They sold everything and were all ready to board when officials discovered some of them had trachoma. Father decided to go anyway and meet up with Uncle Funk in Namaka. Mother arrived in 1924, first to Tofield, AB, then later to Namaka with her family—two married brothers, her widowed mother, two sisters, and two single brothers. Both her mother and her mother's sister worked in Calgary for a time doing housework. Grandma had nothing but lived in a nice house on #2 (Namaka Farm Two). Father worked with other hired men as a farm hand for the McKinnons; he never worked for Mennonites. He said the other workers were always trying to teach him English. Some of the words they taught him were not very nice, but he caught on pretty quickly. I think Dad working for all these non-Mennonite farmers and Mom working in Calgary for English people really helped them learn to adapt to the ways of people here in Canada.*

Vera went on to describe how their neighbours, the Stangnesses, showed kindness and assisted the family with errands and generally getting established. She also talked about playing with non-Mennonite children and enjoying the friendships despite lacking a common language.

1930s arrivals

The following families began arriving on Namaka Farm in the early 1930s, after the tumultuous initial years had settled and individual land agreements had been established. They started life in Canada elsewhere before moving here, often to live closer to family. Their stories were shared by participants who recalled childhood memories from Namaka Farm.

George Thiessen and Mary Willms

"*I was born in August (mid 1930s) right here on this farm*," said daughter Elsie Thiessen Nikkel, as she, her husband Peter Nikkel, and I sat around their kitchen table. *The old house is gone, but a lot of memories are still here."* Elsie grew up on that farm, left to attend a private

high school at age fifteen, and returned briefly before moving to Calgary where she became an R.N. She and Peter married, raised their children there and moved back to the farm twenty-five years ago.

"*Mom and Dad came to Canada in 1925 when Mom was fourteen and Dad was eighteen," said Elsie. "Mom, who couldn't speak a word of English, was separated from her family and taken to work on a farm. They got married eight years later and farmed first with his brothers out of Youngstown. There was absolutely no crop there, so they packed everything on a wagon and moved to Namaka*. They stayed in the 'Namaka Farm house'[88] until Dad built a small house on the land he had purchased." Peter described how George bought a Buick and transported tourists from High River to Calgary. Like Vera's father, he learned about the new culture, and how to speak English. "*My dad knew a lot of the neighbours around here*," said Elsie. "*In fact, he went to SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, founded in 1916) and took mechanics there briefly."*

Peter continued the story. "*George Thiessen bought eighty acres in 1933 on the western side of Namaka Farm and farmed it until he was eighty-five. When he first decided to farm, this was all grass, with thistles so high, he had trouble getting the horses to go through and cut them the first time*." The weather was also a challenge. "*I have a picture of my brother and me sitting on the top of telephone poles with our feet on the snow drift*," said Elsie. Thistles and snow drifts both grew taller in those days.

Nicolai Janzen and Maria Wall

Gerta Janzen West's parents, Nicolai[89] and Maria Janzen, were already established on Namaka Farm when she was born in the early 1940s, the eleventh of fourteen children. Nicolai,

eldest son of Klass and Elizabeth Janzen, grew up in an agricultural family in Ukraine before moving with his parents and three siblings to Crimea. The family stayed on their farm there for eighteen years until emigrating, with the children working while attending school. Nicolai was unable to fulfill his dream of attending Commercial School after graduation but began working as a bookkeeper in the local village office while continuing to help at home. Gerta shared an excerpt from his journal:

> I was the only member in the Council who was not a member of the Communist Party, but I was one that had never owned land. I was classified as a labourer and paid as an assistant secretary. I could borrow money from the bank to pay for a cow and horse. I was in the Council for two years when my parents began to seriously consider the thought of emigration.[90]

Gerta continued,

> *When the Communist Party became the rulers of Russia, Mennonites were already talking about leaving Russia. A Jewish man in the village Council office that my dad worked with and respected urged my dad to leave Russia if he had a chance, as he may not be able to go later. Dad was not classed as a farmer until he was recorded as such on his emigration application. Newly married with a six-month-old daughter, my parents emigrated in April 1926. They never went back to visit because Dad was afraid he would be arrested. And none of Mom's family ever came out. Their first stop in Canada was in Jansen, SK, where other relatives had already settled. They stayed there and my dad would work wherever he could get jobs on other people's farms.*
>
> Such was the uncertain start many Russlaender experienced in Canada.

In addition to his own growing family, Nicolai assumed responsibility for his parents and siblings. They moved to different locations in Saskatchewan and southern Alberta for more than seven years as they sought farm work. His parents and his brothers Jake and John were first to arrive at Namaka Farm in the spring of 1932. Nicolai and Marie followed in 1933. In his journal, he wrote, “Here at Namaka, we started farming on our

own in 1933. Although we were in the middle of the Depression, and I had no money, we were happy to be on our own farm."[91]

Nellie Wojtaszek, Gerta's older sister shared family papers describing the condition of their Namaka Farm early living quarters, saying,

> *The house had one time been a granary and was divided into two rooms, a living room, a dining room, and the attic was the bedroom. We mixed dough and filled the cracks in the joints. The trap door on the porch led to a cellar with a dirt floor where we stored potatoes, carrots, and other vegetables. I hated to go down there as there were no real lights and it was very cold. At least the canning was on shelves right off to the side with more in the pantry.*

Nellie said that although not everyone lived there at the same time, it never seemed like sixteen people could have grown up in that house. Gradually they added a shed for the boys and a summer building with a coal stove for her mother to can in. One can only imagine how much canning was required to preserve enough food to last the winter.

Initial Mennonite-Siksika Impressions

The large ranch that became the settlement of Namaka Farm would have been sparsely populated before Mennonites arrived in the mid 1920s, but the Siksika people were certainly aware of white settlers colonizing and "breaking" land that had been their home since time began. To me, the Russlaender culture was distinctly different than the British colonial settlers that surrounded them, and until I held them in a class of their own. After all, they were a culture known for practicing peace, compassion, and charity. Even the Province of Alberta classed them differently, identifying three nationalities in their reports of families settled: British, whom Mennonites referred to as "the English," Mennonite, and Other.[92] Russlaender came from a different background, spoke a different language, practiced different beliefs, and arrived under different circumstances. Americans or British colonial settlers who responded to

CPR marketing of opportunities on wide open land chose to come to better themselves, but not because their lives were threatened. They had not experienced the terror and upheaval my ancestors, like the rest of the Russlaender and other ethnic groups, had survived. Their existence depended on finding a new homeland. It was the *other* colonists who I saw as settlers who had displaced Indigenous people, not my relatives who *needed* to leave. I viewed my ancestors as immigrants, often as refugees, who had had to leave their homeland unwillingly under desperate circumstances. They would gladly have stayed had the political climate remained as it was at the turn of the 19th century, before the rumblings of social and political change culminated in a revolution. To the Siksika, however, my ancestors were more white settlers on stolen land. I have had to come to terms with, accept, and acknowledge my ancestors as settlers, not solely as "immigrants" in search of a new home after leaving a country where life had become untenable. They made their new home on land that had only recently been stolen from Indigenous peoples. Developing agriculture on that land required massive interventions that ravaged the water, the land, and its peoples, and inextricably altered their relationships. They benefitted from hegemony and structural imbalances, both intentional and inadvertent, that perpetuated systemic injustices, including white supremacy and land degradation. They were settlers.

To most Siksika, it was clear. Anyone on the other side of the fence was a white settler on stolen land. Even at the Elders' Circle, there were those who didn't know what a Mennonite was. Partly, it was semantics. Elder A explained,

> *I think to our people anybody who was not Blackfoot was just white. I don't know if they differentiated between Mennonites, Hutterites, all the different French and English. They were just white people. They referred to a lot of the Mennonites, the Hutterites as Otaksistoyiiks. It means whiskers/moustache, hair around the mouth.*

Our people lumped them into one group, including women. They did not distinguish amongst these 'religious sects.' I didn't realize that some of them were Mennonites. To me, they were all just English people.

Herman Yellow Old Woman told me there was no Blackfoot word that separates non-Native people. He said,

Our language is very descriptive. So, immigrants are white people. That's why a lot of our people here on the Nation didn't know how to distinguish Mennonites from all the newcomers. They didn't read, they didn't understand. They thought, well, they all came on boats, and they all came over to Canada. They all came from the same country. They didn't know that they were all different. *German people in our language are called Otaksistoyiiks, which means bearded men. So, if you're German here, you are labeled the same as Hutterites. Mennonites, anybody that comes from Germany is called that*.

It is easy to understand the perception that Mennonites originated in Germany. Between their migrations from the Netherlands in the 16th century to imperial Russia in the early 19th century they lived in Prussia, then a German state. It was here they began speaking German, a language and ethnic identity they retained.

Learning to Farm/Survive in Southern Alberta

Understanding Indigenous ways of relating to the land happened in unexpected ways. Herman Yellow Old woman, said,

It was a real big lesson to our people and non-Native people because of the drought that happened. *They say that at that time, they found out that Native people that lived off the land were very resilient. The Dirty 30s were tough. But it wasn't as tough on them as it was to the non-Native people. Because the non-Native people only knew agriculture to survive. Whereas the Native people knew how to survive off the land, even through drought. That was not written in historical books and libraries. They don't talk about that. The area around a place called Hanna, north of Drumheller, was one of the worst hit areas in the 30s. People make fun of them now. But it was in the history books where they actually turned to the Indians to bring rain. And our people were very religious, ceremonial. And they did ceremonies to help, then to help the agricultural people of the day to bring rain back. Today they make jokes about it, but it actually happened in the 30s.*

Herman shared more information that I had not heard. He said,

> *Back in the day I think they [*Mennonites*] really appreciated our people because our people knew everything about the land, from water, from the environment, the animals. Everything. And they knew how to doctor themselves, even the animals. And the Mennonites didn't know how to do that. A lot of the skills of doctoring came from Native people to help with their pets. They learned skills off our people because our people learned off the animals of the land*.

This made so much sense that these newcomers could learn from those who knew how to live on the land. I wondered how that interaction transpired as their predominant languages were different. I also felt immense gratitude that the Siksika people, whose land and way of life had been stolen from them, were now helping these settlers learn to live on this land.

A. W. Klassen's (Namaka Farm Manager) leadership paid further dividends by the spring of 1930. The CCA was holding Namaka Farm up as a success story after Klassen arranged well-attended meetings, open to the public, where agricultural experts addressed topics such as soil cultivation and drought avoidance, weed control, and livestock handling. In Dick's report to T.O.F. Herzer, General Manager of the CCA,[93] in which he copied Bishop Töews, he said:

> Having now established a precedent of having such meetings addressed by the Professors of the University (of Lethbridge) and agricultural experts, we consider a distinct step has been taken for the benefit of our purchasers, not only here but also in other centres. … I feel that the work is so good and the results so satisfactory that the information could be passed on to the other provinces in case they would see their way to do work along this line.[94]

Namaka Farm and its constituents were operating together at a new level of cooperation that poised the settlement for success. Russlaender had always valued education and here they were receiving it from the best. The meeting also facilitated their adaptation to new lands by building positive relations with other non-Mennonite settlers.

A 1930 CCA report concurs, saying that, “The settlers are of a very splendid type, and we have no doubt of their eventual success.” It finishes with, “Initially there were complaints from the neighbours that the Mennonites didn’t know how to manage their livestock, but at the present time they are well liked in the community and are being assimilated.”[95] Overlooking the colonial terminology, it appears the Mennonites were adapting.

Echoing the optimism, A. A. Töews wrote:

> We feel more and more that we form one big family. The purchase contract for the future has been made considerably easier in some respects, so that we hope to make better progress. The old manager, Mr. David Thompson, has had to leave his post, and now we have Mr. A. W. Klassen, who worked in the settlement office in Calgary, as deputy here on Namaka. He lives with his family in the large manor house and feels quite at home here among us. He continues his work in Calgary by devoting his spare time to it. So now we always have someone nearby who can give us good advice on farming because he has many years of experience in it.[96]

The Namaka Farm settlers would likely agree. After five years of tumult, misunderstandings, and extensive negotiations, they would likely say it was on their terms.

Mennonites Leasing Reserve Land

Many of the settlers, like Nicolai and Maria Janzen, arrived on Namaka Farm with young children, and more were born after they arrived. In time, those children sought out farm work to help the family economically. Alan West, who married their daughter Gerta, told me, “*As the family got older, first Gerta’s brother Jake, and then brother Herb, rented land from the Siksika on the reserve. They developed good relationships with a few of the families on the reserve*.” When I questioned why this came about, he said,

> *Because there wasn't enough land to start new farms of their own, but it would get them a grubstake. It gave them land to farm, and they would do it on a crop share basis. They would even hire some of the Siksika to work with them. They could still farm in various places, including on reserve, until some of these landowners on the George Lane farm got older and wanted to quit farming. Most of them had kids*

that took over the farm, some didn't. That's when the land started being sold to other members of other families.

Under the Indian Act, it was forbidden to lease uncultivated reserve land to non-Indians.[97] Crop sharing may have been a way to circumvent this legal constraint.

Elder A's recollections add a different perspective. Elder A said,

I remember my dad used to say, 'well, our farmers on the reserve, none of them had large tracts of land. At the most, maybe somebody would be farming a quarter section. It was very difficult to make ends meet with that quarter section.' They would say if only they would allow us, but the government rules and regulations didn't. Our farmers used to say if only we were able to get more land, then we could make a go of farming. I remember my dad saying these farmers that lease land on the Reserve, when they come in, their implements are bound together with wire. And he said within a couple of years of farming on the Reserve, suddenly, they're all driving brand new equipment. They used to envy how these non-Indian farmers that came on the Reserve, got big tracts of land, and so were making a good living off our land.

This provided further evidence of the systemic injustices that the Namaka Farm settlers were perpetuating at the expense of the Siksika people.

Challenging economic times

Economic sustainability presented a major challenge amongst the settlers on Namaka Farm in the 1930s. In *Trails to Little Corner*, Dad wrote, "Like other families, we were very poor, but thought that was normal ."[98] Nicolai Janzen exemplified typical experiences in his journal, where he wrote:

> The first five years at Namaka were hard years. The implements on the farm were old and worn out and did not make a good job. In 1935 the crop looked good. But on July 17, a hailstorm took the whole crop. We got a little bit of oats and barley off the fields that year. Our income in those first years was very small. Mom always had a good garden. And she raised chickens, geese, and turkeys, and that would give her the money to buy clothes for the children. I frequently worked for the municipality dragging the roads to supplement our income or cleaning elevator bins.[99]

Son-in-law Alan West also mentioned that Maria's memoirs recorded that Nicolai set stooks for a non-Mennonite farmer.

Nicolai was pressed into service as a debt collector because of his accounting background, negotiations skills, and some English proficiency. As Gerta Janzen West says, "*Even in Russia, he had worked with other people. He was a good negotiator.*" Alan West concurred, saying, "*He would negotiate and come up with a solution that would eventually see the money paid off*." Not all Mennonites who arrived in the 1920s had farming experience but other valuable skills such as these assisted others in their adaptation.

Feeding and Clothing Families

Research for this project offered insights about the methods settlers used to preserve and stretch food sources and the resourcefulness with which they fed their families before electricity arrived. Dad says they never went hungry because they grew vegetables in their garden and raised livestock which they could butcher. He recalled many times when visitors would show up for dinner and he would be sent out to catch a chicken, garrote it with a length of wire, pluck the feathers, and eviscerate it for Liese to cook.

Elsie Thiessen Nikkel says, "*Dad got the groceries and Mom did whatever was necessary. She milked cows and tended the chickens. She shipped cream and eggs to Calgary and that was her money for buying our clothes.*"

The Janzens' resourcefulness in the early days shone in their ability to provide for their large family as told by three daughters—Mary in her journals and Nellie and Ellie in person. Mary wrote:

> We smoked our meat. We butchered a pig every spring and then ground up and mixed the meat with spices and stuff and we had to clean the intestines with

> wheat. That became the casing for the farmer's sausage. *Griebenschmaltz* was produced when you cut the large and small and then pry it out. The oil separates and what's left is crackles. You eat some of the bigger ones and the mushy ones you use on your bread. We stirred it together with Rogers Golden Syrup. When we could afford to buy peanut butter, we bought it in thirty-pound pails and the syrup in three-gallon pails. Stirred together it was wonderful in our sandwiches and kids at school would beg to trade.

Nellie said, "*Mom was a good cook. We didn't always have quite enough variety of food, but we had grain, and we would thresh it and we filled up with bread. And we had chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys*."

Gail Buker's parents Earle and Margaret Buker ran the Namaka General Store. As a boy, he became well-acquainted with the locals. He recalled that, "*The Mennonites didn't have much when they came over here, but they survived on just a quarter section of land. They did everything—milked cows, raised chickens, and Grandma baked. Grandma would water glass down eggs*[100] *because they did not lay in the winter. There were no refrigerators. They chopped ice out of Eagle Lake and brought it in and put it in big holes with sawdust in it. We never had running water outside. You would have to get it from the well and use outdoor privies. And you hauled the ashes and the clinkers (coal residue) out."*

Alan West remembered his mother water-glassing eggs and his father and uncle starting the Namaka Beef Ring, a cooperative of twenty non-Mennonite and Mennonite families. "*Every week, one of the farmers would supply a steer. My dad and uncle would butcher it and divvy it up. They'd keep records about who got what cut the last time. Whoever supplied the beef that week got the worst cuts. A steer would be delivered on Monday, killed on Tuesday, butchered, and delivered on Thursday. Thursday morning, we would have steak and gravy for breakfast. That was pretty good pay. We brought the offal home for the pigs and sold the hide. As the*

operator, that money was ours." Gerta said her mom really appreciated it because that was the best way to get a variety of beef every week. "*You couldn't just buy it, not even at Buker's store*," she said. "*My parents had a fairly deep well where we could store it. The only reason I remember it was because I hated to put stuff down there*."

Nellie remembered accompanying her mother and siblings to bring food to the men working the fields. "*We had a cloth that we would put down to eat on. We usually brought food for their breakfast, mid-morning 'lunch', noon meal, afternoon 'lunch' and supper at the house. That meant cooking a lot of food, but they were working hard and were hungry*." It seems they would barely make it back to the house in time to repack for the next feeding.

"*Dad took the wheat directly to the mill*," said Nellie. "*I went there with him once. He delivered the wheat and brought home 100-pound bags of flour in Robin Hood sacs in exchange. The insignia was red and so hard to get out, but Mom would put them on the snow in the winter and keep wetting them in the sun. Eventually the red insignia would come out. Then she made undershirts for us and tablecloths, pillowcases, and sheets by sewing four bags together*." Nellie saved these treasures, and they were used for gatherings in the common area of her retirement residence, until someone, not recognizing their value, threw them away.

Namaka Farm Evolving Economic Situation in 1930s

Even as Namaka Farmers were consulting with experts and learning to adapt their farming methods from what had worked so well for them in Soviet Ukraine to the soils and climate of southern Alberta, dark clouds were gathering. Prices for grain had plummeted and dust was beginning to build. A. A. Töews, who contributed regularly to *Der Bote*, wrote, "The spring storms are already blowing over Alberta's prairies and lifting many a cloud of dust into

the air. And the farmer gazes dreamily into the distance, into the near future. What will it bring us? Will things be as difficult next year as they have been for several years now? Or will we finally be able to breathe a sigh of relief, shake off the burden of debt and become free people?"[101] Töews was the fundamentalist preacher of the group and tended to wax poetic in his writings. Nonetheless, he voiced what must have been the sentiment at that time.

The situation had not improved the following year. On June 18, 1931, Töews's *Der Bote* column recounted, "Many farmers were disheartened this spring by the many violent and long-lasting storms that caused a lot of damage to the crops. Many fields are completely blown out, many are badly damaged, while others are at their green best. You have to work the land and especially the fallow land differently than you were used to in your old homeland."[102] CCA and Dominion Bank were both pitching in to keep the settlers afloat. At the end of 1933, representatives from CCA were scouring the district to find feed and seed oats at an acceptable price when transportation costs were factored in.[103] At the same time, George Lane Co./Dominion Bank was petitioned for advances to purchase oats.[104] By the winter of 1934, times were getting desperate, and four families had applied for relief to provide food, clothing, and fuel. Feelings from settlers and Lane officials were running high even though bank officials had been lenient with payments and forgiveness on interest debt. Dick asked Isaac Zacharias of the George Lane Co. to investigate, noting that some purchasers, "are perfectly willing to run into debt without any thought of repaying same and it just looks like they have made up their minds to get everything they can out of the Company and then go to the Municipality and get all they can out of them without any thought of repayment."[105] By August, 1934, Dick says he,

"Noted a great deal less friction than ever before, and the existence of favourable relationships."[106] The Russlaender were finding ways to adapt to prolonged hardships.

CCA was keeping an eye on their transactions. Even the Mennonites, unable to meet their financial obligations to Dominion Bank and provide food and clothing for their families, were getting creative with their finances. CCA advised the United Grain Growers Ltd. (UGG) that returns needed to be properly directed to the George Lane Co. Ltd., and to report to George Lane Company Ltd. about all grain sold by a list of thirty-three parties from Namaka Farm, including Peter Jansen. CCA told UGG that settlement for grain delivered by those parties had to first be approved by CCA.[107] UGG agreed to advise their agents accordingly but also underscored their limitations in enforcing CCA's request.[108]

In 1934 Peter Jansen was farming 360 acres: ninety-five in wheat, sixty-five in oats, twenty in barley, and seventy-five in summerfallow.[109] He too needed help to stay afloat. In November 1934, he was given one mare[110] and 100 pounds of binder twine.[111] He also applied for 150 pounds of seed oats, slightly higher than the seventeen other Namaka Farm applicants listed, and fifty pounds of feed oats, the lowest amount of seventeen farmers listed.[112] In December 1934, Peter received a Bay gelding, worth fifty dollars. Dad was eight years old but by then was already pitching in with the farm work and contributing to the family coffers by collecting crows' eggs (blown out) and gopher tails. Each was worth one cent and the local children would submit their stash to their teacher who would turn them in, get the cash bounty, and reimburse the children. His brother Albert was four; sister Hilda one; and Liese was pregnant with Irma who would arrive the following spring. Although I do not know the timing, Dad recalled only one story of Liese's desolation, which could have happened any time during

the 1930s. She had just cleaned the house to spotlessness in preparation for a special occasion with company. A dust storm blew up, sending prairie soil through all the cracks, and depositing a layer on everything in the house. Liese was inconsolable.

The outlook remained bleak at the end of 1934, but the settlers remained open to trying new methods. They had little choice. On their recommendation, CCA's Zacharias requested a portion of the land be seeded in sweet clover with a nurse crop to restore soil and maintain more feed.[113] CCA and George Lane were working in collaboration with the Mennonites, too, to survive. Dad maintained that the 350 acres allotted to each family, could not produce enough food or income to survive, even in good times, not when considering that it had to provide income to support the family and home and feed for animals. Families who had not moved away were considering it.

Conclusion

As the 1930s began, the Russlaender settlers had been in Canada and on Namaka Farm for a maximum of five years, and now had the living and community arrangement on which they could build their lives. Settlers who were not interested or able to adapt to the requirements had left and been replaced by others, often relatives of those who stayed. They were on individual parcels of land, responsible for their own property, and accountable for their own decisions. Their children attended schools, learned English, and helped families assimilate into the settler culture. The school built by the county on Namaka Farm educated their children, helped them learn English, and housed their church on Sundays. They were still desperately poor, but so was everyone around them.

They had gotten to know their Siksika neighbours when they had come onto Mennonite yards to trade. As they established relationships, Siksika people shared their knowledge about the land, the water, and the environment, even in the absence of a common language. They taught them how to care for their animals. Mennonites had received an introduction to this unfamiliar culture, but their awareness and understanding of life on the reserve was still minimal.

Non-Mennonite settlers had also helped with their transition. Neighbours offered kindness and transportation. Before coming to Namaka, some of the men had worked with "the English" before coming to Namaka where they had learned the English language and customs. This proved helpful in their families and the wider community integrating into the area, as well as learning how to sustain themselves. They had learned they didn't know as much as they thought they did about agriculture and land productivity in southern Alberta and were open to learning when it was offered to them.

The Mennonites on Namaka Farm had struggled and surmounted formidable challenges to adapting to their new surroundings. By the early 1930s, they appeared poised to establish sustainable methods of farming and living. As they stood on the cusp of a decade of depression and drought, they had their family, community, and history to bolster them, unaware of how much they would rely on them.

Chapter 2: Connection

Introduction

The thirty-six settler families on Namaka Farm knew they would have to rely on others outside their Mennonite community to adapt to their new surroundings. In imperial Russia they had lived in villages within large colonies. As their economies prospered, they increasingly mingled for commerce and education. Reaching outside their culture happened slowly over time. As newcomers to Canada, they did not have the luxury of time to become culturally acclimatized. While there were other Mennonites on which to draw, the key to successful adaptation and sustainability was integrating into the dominant system, which was English.

Everyone in the family played a role in adapting to the new, while seeking comfort in whatever was familiar. Children learned new ways, and English, at school and brought them home to their mothers. Men would congregate and mix with other farmers at the Namaka General Store and the grain elevators. *Die Rundschau* and *Der Bote*, German-language Mennonite newspapers, kept them in touch with family, friends, and their larger community on both sides of the ocean. When Liese submitted Johann's obituary to *Die Rundschau*, she concluded it by saying, "Maybe some will still remember us. We were anno 1926 three and a half months in the Atlantic Park in England. Perhaps there are also still Terekers who know me personally. I am born Liese Johann Friesen. Please, visit me with letters. I often feel so abandoned, but it is my consolation that there is a reunion up there."[114] Atlantic Park was the CPR transit camp in Southampton, England where Johann was treated for trachoma. Terek refers to her family's stay in that colony before she was married. That time of writing must have

been the lowest and loneliest point of her life, and she was using the newspaper to seek familiar connections and comfort while moving forward with her life in Alberta.

By all accounts, Mennonite adults interacted with non-Mennonites on an as-needed basis. They did not participate in the U.F.A. (United Farmers of Alberta) meetings where they may have benefited from learning best current agricultural practices. Part of this may have been due to language differences. It could also have been because of the anti-Mennonite sentiment with U.F.A. roots which had seen them banned in 1919 until the Order was rescinded in 1922. Even then, the sentiment prevailed in the press, but it did not appear to filter down to ground level. Most surprising to learn about was the relationships that developed between Mennonite and Siksika women and with Siksika people in general, and what that implied. This chapter explores how and why Namaka Farm settlers formed connections, the nature of those relationships, and how their relationships evolved.

Mennonite sewing circles

Women stood at the forefront of an exchange of knowledge, culture, and friendship between a group of Mennonites and a small community of Siksika in one area on the reserve. Siksika Elder Herman Yellow Old Woman says,

> *They* [Mennonite women] *taught them* [Siksika women] *how to milk cows. They taught them how to make butter. They taught them how to bake, because our people couldn't read, let alone speak English. Our people, their bodies, were used to the old way. There was no salt. There was hardly any sugar. And so, their cooking was all natural. So, the Mennonites communicated with them and taught them right in their homes. In residential school, they learned how to clean. The Mennonites came in and they taught them how to sew. They had nights where they would have Bible study and the women would be taught how to do quilts. My mom remembers that. She's a sewer herself and has many quilts.*

> *I'm honoured because I'm the last generation that had direct contact with these Mennonites and there is no more that I know of; that we have contact the way we did with my mother and my grandparents. I'm the third generation, but there's no more after this. A lot of stuff that that they [Siksika] do came from the Mennonites and that was sewing, cooking, preparing foods, and canning. The Indian agent didn't do that.*

Herman's mother, now ninety-four, whom he consulted prior to our conversation, reminded him of experiences of Siksika women. Herman recapped,

> *The Indian agent would teach our community people how to farm, how to garden, all that stuff. But the Mennonites, they didn't move in with them, but they pretty much came right to their homes, to their yards. Back in the day, ladies learned skills, because back then, ladies didn't really go into the workforce. They were at home, like the Mennonite women that stayed home and sewed and cooked and worked hard for their families. They taught the Blackfoot women that they were close to the same thing. At the same time, the Blackfoot woman in return, taught them the skills they had. The only thing is a lot of Mennonite women didn't take up the skill that the Native women had, which was quill and beadwork. Some of them learned how to tan hides from the animals they'd raised. But as far as dyeing cloth, trade cloth,[115] all that was shared between Blackfoot and Mennonite*.

None of the stories Dad passed down indicated that his mother Liese's role extended outside her home and family. She would have had her hands full with Dad's half-brother Albert arriving nine months after her and Peter's wedding and half-sisters Hilda and Irma arriving two and five years later. Part of that time, Miss Hinz, the schoolteacher, boarded with them, until she married Namaka Farm neighbour John Willms. It is possible, even likely, that out of financial necessity, other boarders followed.

Mennonite Siksika Relationships

When I first became interested in Dad's Namaka stories, I wondered what perceptions of Indigenous people these Mennonite settlers would have brought with them to this new country. How did those who settled on Namaka Farm, separated from Siksika by a porous border, feel about their Indigenous neighbours? Liese had recounted frightening encounters

with “Tatars,” who had been displaced from traditional homelands during imperial Russia’s colonization. She would regale Dad with stories about how she stood up to the “Tatars” when they raided their Terek homes or stole their livestock. Yet none of the white settlers I interviewed spoke of fear, or described adversarial relationships with the Siksika, even on potentially contentious and stereotypical topics.

The farm Dad lived on, part of Namaka Farm Three, lay immediately adjacent to Siksika Nation’s western border. “Were you ever afraid of the Blackfoot people?” I asked. His reaction was swift. “*Absolutely not!*” he said. “*They were a first-class tribe. Highly regarded and very skilled. Professional. Well organized. Very knowledgeable and resourceful*.” He relayed stories about their famous and respected Chief Crowfoot, esteemed by other tribes and “the English,” and signatory to Treaty 7. David Wall, whose grandparents Aron and Maria Wall and their family lived one farm south of the Jansens, bordered by Siksika and the Bow River, had asked his father the same question. “*My dad told me they may have felt a little stand offish, but they were never threatened or felt threatened,”* said David. He remembers hearing about Blackfoot people appearing at the house occasionally and his grandmother giving them food. *“My impression was that they arrived at the house looking hungry. My family certainly never felt threatened by them, but because their appearances weren’t what we were used to seeing, there may have been a bit of apprehension*.” Indeed, the stories I heard conveyed positive relationships.

Heinrich M. and Anna Willms farmed across the road from the Walls, closer to the Bow River. Their daughter Mollie and Dad were the same age and destined to become lifelong

friends. In a journal entry shared at the 75th reunion of Mennonites in Namaka in 2000, Mollie wrote:

> We had frequent interactions with the Blackfoot Indians from a reserve not far from us. They would often drop in for a chat, or sometimes to trade with us. The government gave them farm supplies they often didn't use. They traded their wagons and other tools for grain and wheat sheaves. One noon Mom had made dinner of pasta and fried ham, and my father invited Indian Jim and his wife to join us for the meal. He wore his hair in typical black pigtails, each tied with a red ribbon. We could understand his English, but his wife remained silent as she shyly ate and studied how we handled our cutlery and food. We children were fascinated with the event as our eyes darted from one to the other.[116]

Susan McMillan, Mollie's daughter, told me that when the Willms left for Ontario in the late 1930s, "Indian Jim" and his wife came to see them off. "*Mom always sensed that there was a good, kind camaraderie between them. They shared things. They invited them in, and his wife never spoke. She probably didn't speak English well, nor did Oma* [Susan's grandmother]." His wife had made moccasins for every person in the family.

Memories of day-to-day interactions with the Siksika people usually involved food, visiting, trading, and farm work. The only personal story I recall Dad sharing happened before Stampede time. A Siksika man came to the yard, wanting to trade his horse for cash so he could get to Calgary. In the end, Peter Jansen gained a horse, and the Siksika man had four dollars to pay for his travels.

Milt Willms remembered the extra-large garden his mother planted. He said,

> *Blackfoot people would come in and Mother would share the garden with them. I'd tell her, 'Mom, you don't really have to do this', but she kept doing it. As far as I know, very few of them ever planted their own garden, even though they were encouraged to do so. Even Chief Crowfoot, who signed the Treaty (7) used to do a little gardening. In the late 1940s, my mother had a car, but she liked to take my little half ton pickup to town to shop. We could see the road half a mile north of us where she would come in and we'd see Mother going by with three or four people in the back of that truck. Blackfoot. She had picked them up at home or wherever*

they were and was taking them to where they wanted to go. Or three or four had been walking and she had picked them up. People would say, she's crazy doing that by herself. But she never thought it was crazy. That was just her. One man, George Fox, really liked her. He was very well-spoken and wrote a column in the Strathmore Standard every week for years. I found out later that he was very disappointed that we didn't ask him to speak at Mother's funeral. You know, you're getting ready to have this funeral and you're trying to think of everything, and I missed him all together. When he saw me, he said, 'Aw Milt, I sure wish I could have talked at your mother's funeral'. He was really disappointed. That's the feeling that was pervasive in that area between us and the Blackfoot.

Irene Morrison called her Blackfoot neighbours the Crowfoot, possibly conflating the name with their famous Chief. "*I remember going to the reserve with Dad. Why, I couldn't tell you. I know Blackfoot people came to the house, and I know Mom fed them many, many times because they were working on our farm. They would come with their lunch, which wouldn't feed a sparrow, so Mom would always give them a big, hefty meal as well*."

The main east-west road heading from Siksika to Calgary ran by the northwest tip of the reserve, the Janzen farm, and the hamlet of Namaka. Alan West remembered,

They [Siksika neighbours] would stop with car trouble or be nearly out of gas. And there would be the mom with one or two little kids. Gerta's mom would show her hospitality, give them something to drink and maybe a snack, while her dad or older brothers were busy fixing whatever needed fixing to get the vehicle going again, be it buggy or car or truck.

Gerta recalled the beautifully decorated horse and buggy processions that would pass by their farm every year on their way to the Calgary Stampede.

Vera Penner also holds memories of Siksika processions at Stampede time. She said,

It was always so pretty with them all with their different horses and their wagons. They always stopped at our place for the night. They would ask if they could stay, and Dad would always let them overnight in the yard. Dad would give them water and hay for their horses, so they were well-fed, and the next morning they could go to Calgary.

Vera recalled Siksika people stopping by at other times as well.

> *They would want potatoes, they would want eggs, that kind of stuff or any garden stuff you had. And they would always say, we'll pay next time. The next time they'd come, it would be the same thing, another sack of potatoes or eggs or whatever. And then they started wanting meat. They never paid. Finally, Dad said, 'Give them potatoes, eggs, whatever they want, but don't ever expect that they're going to pay you for it'. Dad said it's just not in their blood to pay. It is to beg.' In those years they were poorer than they are now. Later they used to come for gas. They were always out of gas by the time they came to our house, which is only one and a half miles away from home. Lots of times Dad would give them gas too. Mom liked some of those women that came and went. So did my aunt. They came and asked for vegetables. The men that worked for Dad always had meals in the house at the same time as the rest of us.*
>
> *Once, in the middle of the night a Blackfoot man came in without knocking, walked into Mom and Dad's bedroom and woke them up. We never locked our doors in those days. Dad asked what he wanted, and the man said he wanted some meat. My dad said, 'I don't have any meat to give you'. And the man said, 'Oh, yes, you do. You have a deep freezer downstairs.' Dad finally got up and gave him a roast or something. We had all kinds of interactions with them, but none of them were dangerous*.

When I asked Vera why she thought this man had been driven to obtain meat in this way, she told me that was their way. She, like other Mennonite participants I asked, lacked awareness of how dire living conditions were on the reserve during the years Mennonites were settling on Namaka Farm. I wondered if her parents had thought otherwise, but the response she attributes to them suggested they too thought the nature of these transactions was due to "their way."

During the Elders' circle, Elder C, unaware of Vera's story, described what it was like for the Siksika, no longer able to live on the bison which had sustained them for thousands of years. "*We lived on rations. I think it was on Thursday that beef were slaughtered, and the choice cuts went to the agency, or to the stock man, or to the farm instructor. And we got the*

meager pieces. And the tripe, the intestines of the animal, to eat. And so out of necessity, folks that had produce to sell, we went to them. In the West End, we went to your people."

Herman Yellow Old Woman also spoke of the chronic lack of meat, saying,

> *The agent was in control of everything. There's a story where a young boy had gotten sick. And he recovered just long enough for him to communicate with his mother and father, and he asked for water, and something to eat. These were people who had rebelled against what the government promised. They had survived with their ways and didn't want to have anything to do with anything modern. The government cut them off from all rations and they had to depend on their relatives. They soon found out they couldn't survive that way anymore. And so, the father went to the agent, knocked on the door of the agent and asked him for even a little piece of meat to feed his sick boy. And the agent said 'No' and slammed the door on him. And the boy ended up dying.*
>
> *Unfortunately, they paint a real beautiful picture from 1910 on, of our community as being one of the most successful tribes. The Indian agent didn't leave this community till I was about ten years old (mid 1960s). And they [the Agents] lived in beautiful two-story homes with garages and drove nice vehicles*.

I wondered what, if any, understanding Namaka Farm settlers had of this legacy.

I have some awareness of what conditions were like on Indigenous reserves at that time because I have studied it. Even today, many people are unaware of the atrocities, rationing, broken promises, and attempted assimilation sanctioned by the Canadian government. What did the Mennonites of Namaka Farm, having evolved from a different history and speaking little English, know or understand about life in the Siksika Nation next door to them? It is impossible to speculate with accuracy, but some things are certain. All of them would have recognized the look of starvation and the behaviour it cultivated. They would have understood what it was like to be robbed of basic means of survival. Whether they understood it consciously or not, they would have possessed a knowing that prompted them to act from compassion, kindness, and

gratitude. Never did I hear Dad, or any Mennonite interviewed, express fear or malice towards Siksika people and their ways.

Siksika Memories of Mennonites

Siksika stories about their interactions with Mennonites portrayed some of the same interactions from an entirely different perspective. My first revelation while listening to their stories was when Siksika people referred to my ancestors as no different from other "settlers." The Siksika people initiated contact and got to know these newcomers just as they would have with other white settlers. Mennonites and other colonists described Siksika coming on their yards and most often using the terms "wanting," "asking," or even "begging" for food. Some did refer to "trade." Giving Siksika visitors food happened in the context of a charitable act. Siksika Elders, however, were clear that they were trading or buying, and described reciprocal, balanced transactions. The choice of terminology portrayed very different perceptions about the power dynamics assumed by each group. Siksika people also combined "trading" with visits, interacting with and getting to know their new neighbours, as the Siksika had for millennia. Perhaps it was memories from some of these transactions that prompted Gwendora Bear Chief to comment, "*Their interactions were sometimes negative. It's not all nice and good, from the stories I've heard.*" She chose not to elaborate, but her words carried conviction. Mennonites were capable of disrespectful behaviour just like any other settler. Herman Yellow Old Women told me, "*The people that lived on the border of Siksika, on the west border of the reservation, were all influenced by Mennonites*." If the Mennonites ever acknowledged the same thing, I never heard it.

Elder B recognized the Eitzen name on the map of Namaka Farm. "*I remember we used to stop there, and my mom would buy eggs from them. And we used to visit them. I was just young so I never got a chance to visit but my mom would visit with Mrs. Eitzen*." Elder B then remembered another favorite destination. "*We always stopped at that very first farm where Highway 901 is, just as you go off the reserve. I don't remember her name, but they used to call her the Egg Lady. We'd go there to buy eggs and then of course my parents would visit with them. Further down, there was another farm on the south side, and they used to buy eggs from them too*." Elders B and A, siblings, recalled their grandfather trading rations they wouldn't use. Elder A said, "*My mother's parents lived at the west end, so they used to trade with them as well when they got rations. Our grandfather would go to Strangmuir Farms by wagon to trade some of our rations that we wouldn't use, like the flour, sugar, and dry goods, and they'd give them vegetables and eggs*."

Gwendora Bear Chief's family originally lived at the west end of Siksika reserve. "*My family also used to get eggs from the Egg Lady, but we bought, not traded. Then we'd go to the General Store in Namaka to buy things and about once a year, I'd get a treat, like pop*."

Bryan Little Chief's story reminded us of changes in relationships over time. "*Our parents interacted and made friends through trading, but it was different for the young ones like me. We were taught to be cautious around non-Natives, so we were kind of scared of it*." He described how he was always listening to stories and learning. Bryan said,

> *I've been around old people since I was an inquisitive child. I used to sit under the table when we were supposed to go play. Dad would visit with them. And even now, to this day, I still interview Elders. One of the old people in the 70s would say there's no such thing as a white man. There's no such thing as a black man. Or a yellow man or a red man. We're all tribes. I am not an Indian. I am Ni'tsitapiikowan [one with Creator] he would say. You are Siksikaikow [a Blackfoot man]. That white*

person over there is Dutch and that's his tribe. He's got his own distinct language we're given. So, everybody in the world is his own tribe. It's just that people started applying names. When you think about things, even in the Bible, it says the tribes. English is just a tribe with their own language. So, if these guys don't want to be labeled as English, they're still immigrants to this country.

Unlike most of the others who had grown up on the west side of Siksika, beside Namaka Farm, Bryan grew up on the east side of the reserve near a Hutterite colony. He said,

I never even heard of the name Mennonite. It was always Hutterites. Their interactions with Siksika were because of the vegetables and all those kinds of things. But one Elder, he is no longer with us now, I visited him quite a bit, and we talked about a broad range of things. He'd mentioned that I'm waiting for my friend. He's a Hutterite. Then he started to talk about them. And he says they're almost similar to our way because these are religious people. They're structured like us. They have a hog boss. They have chicken boss, and, you know, they have a priest or whatever. And then they all have bosses just like us. We have a moving Chief, a hunting Chief. It's structured in that way, and it keeps order. And they're Anabaptists.

That Bryan knew about Anabaptists and Mennonites originating from Anabaptists surprised me. Few people know that history.

Elder C also knew about the history of the Namaka Farm Mennonites and about Anabaptists. He offered sobering insights into the nature of the intercultural relationship. Elder C said,

In Ukraine, they were under intense religious persecution. That's why they had to leave, emigrate sometimes to the point of violence or genocide, kind of persecution. So, the history of your people, their roots are in Ukraine. An agricultural breadbasket of the world and it still is today. So, their life vocation, their life skills were based on the land, you know, producing the land. The land to produce crops for our nation's existence was an agriculturally based economy. And then there's also the spirituality or the religious component of your people as Anabaptists. And so, when Canada was being colonized, I understand where you're at in the 30s when your people came into our territories.

But for us in terms of relationships, not only with Mennonites but with all of Canada, and the governments of Canada and prior to the recognized governments of Canada, under the British monarchy, Canada, Turtle Island is our home. It's our

homeland. It's not yours. And in our stories of creation, and where God chose to put folks, we were given North America with its hosts of different tribes.

I think we perhaps romanticize the credibility of those treaties. The underlying factor was land, land that had a price to it, its real estate. Whereas for us, the land was part of that whole system of relationships, whether it was the land, the waters, or the cosmos. There was a very intricate relationship between the cosmos, the sun, the moon, the stars, the galaxies, and the earth. Currently we say Mother Earth, but the understanding in terms of Blackfoot epistemology is that the earth is like the mother who provides for our sustenance, and it is in our spirituality, it is incumbent upon us to be good stewards of the land, the waters, the earth, the sky, and the seas. And we only harvested what we could use without over exploiting the natural resources.

And so, the British Empire, because they didn't have the people to come to these new lands that they had discovered, contracted folks to come as settlers into Canada. They were given that liberty, certainly not a burden, to purchase land.

Much of the history of Mennonite adaptation involves the purchase of farms and challenges in meeting the financial aspects of their land agreements. They were not able to maintain the lifestyle their families had practiced prior to the Russian Revolution. Yet, here was a Siksika Elder, turning the tables and saying Mennonites were under no obligation to purchase land. It was their choice, a choice not given to the Siksika people.

Colonial Sentiments towards Mennonites

Well before interviewing any of the non-Mennonite settlers, my research had revealed hostility towards Mennonites printed in the pages of The U.F.A. newspaper in 1927. One opinion piece, written on behalf of the U.F.W.A. (United Farm Women of Alberta) on April 6, 1927, articulates resentment toward the Canada Colonization Company from a presentation made a few months earlier. It claimed:

> They (CCA) were mainly interested in colonization by groups whom they were obtaining from European countries, over ninety percent of whom were Mennonites. These they preferred because (1) they were good farmers, (2) their indebtedness was carried co-operatively, (3) they lived simple lives and their

> wants were therefore few, with the result that they found it easier to meet their mortgage indebtedness.[117]

The primary concern, however, was that because they "are content with a lower standard of living means more luxuries for those living indirectly off the farmer. …It means that we shall eventually sink to a peasantry."[118] Collective debt was the structure on Namaka Farm in the early years of Mennonite settlement. They were required to participate. It was not their preference. It is also possible that the writer was conflating Mennonites with Hutterites, a common mix-up. Hutterites did live communally.

Another article in the same publication the next month claimed that the settlers being sought for Western Canada, "are those from Eastern Europe who have endured centuries of peasant conditions; men who are willing to toil early and late for a pittance, strong women who are able to work in the fields as well as in the house, and big broods of children that can be used on the farm so no hired labor (sic) will be needed." They were concerned because corporations involved in settlement were "negotiating with 5,000 Mennonites to settle here next spring, as these were the only kind of people who would be able to stay on the land and pay back the money." The article concluded with:

> It is then up to us who have spent many years, the best part of our lives, pioneering, who have transformed the wilderness into agricultural communities, built fences, roads, schools, if we well accept a lower primitive standard of living; or are we going to put up a fight to get more of the things we produce? …We must organize one hundred percent and take steps to stop the wholesale robbery now going on.[119]

They had probably never considered that the land they had settled on was already stolen!

The existing agricultural community harbored hostility toward newcomers, especially as the economic situation tightened in the late 1920s. They were, "too aggressive, industrious, and

progressive. They were taking the best lands, getting the best crops, and in general making the farming operation pay off in a time when others had difficulty."[120]

None of those I interviewed remembered or carried any awareness of this animosity. The U.F.A. was a powerful lobby group and a political party. It was only in 1922 that the 1919 Order in Council "Prohibiting the landing in Canada of Hutterites and Mennonites, etc." was rescinded, allowing the Russlaender to immigrate.[121] There was strong political pressure throughout the 1920s to limit immigration, however, that sentiment did not seem to filter down to the non-Mennonite settlers. It may have been one reason why no names of the Namaka Farm settlers appeared on the local U.F.A. membership rolls or meeting minutes in records obtained between 1927 and 1935.[122] Language was likely another deterrent as English proficiency was marginal among Mennonites, especially during the early years.

Another startling misunderstanding of the time came from Herman Yellow Old Woman. His cousin and her husband Mike lived on a farm south of the river near Namaka Farm. The story passed on to Herman was that they had heard that the Mennonites were moving in, and other Germans were arriving from Germany where the Mennonites originated. This group of people had a church and owned farms in the area and were called Bolsheviks.

I'm not sure of the origin of that story and never heard Dad, or any of his friends talk about people around Namaka being labeled Bolsheviks. As an early teen, however, Dad was once called a "dirty Nazi," but that was after the Jansens had left Alberta and lived in Ontario. He understood it as a slur but did not know why it was directed at him. He had no idea what a Nazi was. It was another example of the practice of using European political terms to identify and insult immigrants in Canada.

Mennonite Non-Mennonite Settler Relationships

Colonization of southern Alberta, well underway before Mennonites arrived on Namaka Farm, targeted immigrants from countries loyal to Britain. Additionally, veterans who had survived armed conflicts on behalf of the Crown received land grants. By the time the Mennonites were arriving, a bustling community had formed around the hamlet of Namaka. Mennonite adaptation to their new home involved interaction with these established settlers, and at times a steep learning curve. Stories shared for this project by their descendants, introduced below, illustrate origins of non-Mennonite white settlers, their route to the Namaka area, and their experiences while adapting to a new land. They also reveal informative and at times surprising details about the lives of the Mennonites of Namaka Farm.

Fawkes, Smittons, and Bukers

Margaret Fawkes Buker Peterson (November 4, 1923 - January 18, 2024), almost 100 years old when we spoke, and her son Gail Buker, portrayed the community in the first half of the twentieth century. (Note: For consistency and clarity, Margaret is referred to as Margaret Buker, the way those interviewed remembered her.) Margaret's parents, William Fawkes and Margaret Smitton, single and seeking opportunity, arrived from England and Scotland in the early 1900s. Gail recalls hearing about his grandmother's shock, arriving from Glasgow after a long journey by boat and rail, only to get off the train on "*a cinder platform on the bald-headed prairie*." She worked on threshing crews, peeled potatoes, baked pies, and became a good horseback rider. Her parents, who arrived separately, eventually owned about 2,300 acres on the north side of Namaka Farm and employed Mennonites as farm laborers, including Nick Boschman, Pete Willms, and Dave Penner. Gail pointed to Section 21 and part of Section 20 of

the map of Namaka Farm and area.[123] "*Grandpa owned right up to the right on this side of Eagle Lake and lived in town*." William and Margaret lived on the Smitton farm. Their daughter Margaret was born in 1923 in Strathmore, the closest settlement of any size.

William and Maria Buker arrived in Namaka from British Columbia in 1909 and built the Namaka House, a hotel built to accommodate men building the Carseland Dam. Their son Earle, Margaret's first husband and Gail's father, was born in the hotel.[124] Gail recalled stories of hard times for the family in 1929. He said,

> *First, the hotel burned to the ground, so my grandfather built the General Store. Then it was robbed. It was common knowledge that every day, operators from the four grain elevators would bring the day's proceeds to him to store in a safe. One day robbers came, made him open the safe, then gagged and bound him to a chair before taking off. They were never caught, and he was never robbed again. I have the safe in my garage*.

Margaret Fawkes and Earle Buker married in 1941. Earle ran the National Grain elevator, one of four that existed at the time (the others were United Grain Growers, The Pool, and Alberta Pacific), and operated the General Store. Margaret cooked meals for the men who worked at the elevator, but there was no restaurant. All the locals, mostly men, regardless of culture, shopped there seven days a week. Gail remembers warm relationships with Mennonites. "*All our interactions with them were positive, and there was no animosity. When we had the store, the Mennonites came in, and the Siksika came in all the time to shop, because we had the gas pumps right out in front of the store*."

Gail acknowledged the three very different cultures around the village of Namaka. I questioned how this sense of community had developed, and he said, "*Because nobody was rich. Everybody was poor so they all had to get along and work together to survive. The winter was brutal.*" It was the answer Dad had given when I asked him the same question.

Petersons

After immigrating from Scotland, Terry Peterson's grandparents settled in Northern Ontario before moving to Namaka in 1910. His grandfather had logged in the winter and farmed in the summer but wanted to farm full time. His grandmother's brother was already in the Namaka area so moving here seemed like a good idea. By the late 1930s, Eagle Lake Ranching had grown to 2,700 acres stretching north and east of the village of Namaka, north of Siksika. When I asked Terry how they interacted with the Mennonites on Namaka Farm, he said, "*We just considered them as neighbours and people. We didn't consider them as outsiders or Mennonites or anything else. In school everyone looked and dressed the same. Where they came from and all that we didn't know, and it didn't matter. Religion didn't matter. I knew they had their own church but that's about all I knew.*" Like other area farmers, the Petersons employed Mennonites as laborers. "*The Janzen boys, Herb and Jake, would come at threshing time and help thresh oats. They used to have teams and wagons to pick up the bundles*." By the time Terry, born in the early 1940s, got to know them, they spoke fluent English.

Watson

The backyard of Chas and Marguerite Watson's farmhouse, slightly north of Namaka Farm, looks west over open land. "*Pat Burns* (wealthy Alberta rancher and meatpacker, and associate of George Lane*) used to run his cattle through here in the early 1900s. That was all open range*," said Marguerite. "*There were people that went to work on George Lane's Main Farm just like now when people go to work on Thiessen's feedlot. It is basically one great big place again*."

Chas's family immigrated to the area from Scotland in 1911. He says, "*Everybody, except for the Blackfoot, of course, were immigrants. The Mennonites came in 1925 or the early 1930s. The rest of us came in 10, 11, 12—and we were on the same level of need*." Like others, Chas referred to the economic poverty in a matter-of-fact manner.

Chas recalls that his grandfather, who owned a pottery foundry in Edinburgh, wanted to go to a drier climate because of his ill health. "*I don't know how they survived here because they had a nice sandstone house in Scotland, probably a maid or two, and they moved into a two by four clapboard shack. Grass that high*." Marguerite said, "*They knew nothing about animals or farming. His grandmother came out here all by herself with four small children because he came out ahead of time to build the house*." This common story described other British colonists who arrived at the beginning of the century.

Marguerite's great grandparents came from England and Scotland as well, arriving in Alberta after homesteading in Ontario and creating "beautiful places" there. Her father was very active in the U.F.A., but like other non-Mennonites I spoke with, Marguerite had never heard her parents or grandparents ever talk about the acrimony towards Mennonites portrayed in the U.F.A. columns. The only story she recalled about early Mennonite farming came from the early 1940s and talked about the Gossens farming with a jeep, not a tractor. "*That way, they could also take it into town*," she said. Chas, born in the early 1940s, remembers the first time he ever heard the term "Mennonites." "*I don't know if I ever heard them called that back then. They were the kids from the Namaka Farm school*." Russlaender were a distinct culture to me, and it surprised me again to hear that others did not differentiate them as such.

Marguerite describes the nature of the farming community into which the Mennonites arrived. "*If people needed something, all you had to do was crank the long distance on the phone one long ring and people came to help. If there was a fire or during the flu in 1919, people went to other people's homes and nursed each other. There was a closeness that you helped your neighbour and that's just what you did*." This close-knit settler-community helped each other survive, no matter what their country of origin.

Marguerite conceptualized, initiated, and edited the publication of *Trails to Little Corner*, 696 pages of first-person accounts from Siksika, non-Mennonite, and Mennonite contributors, published in 1983. "*I saw that there was so much history here and did not want to see it lost. There was Mr. Aikens and Mrs. Gossen and Grandma Thiessen. So many people were telling me these wonderful stories. Even Mark Wolf Leg, Grandpa Wolf Leg, had such wonderful, meaningful stories I wanted them kept forever*." Getting contributors was no problem. "*Heavens, no*," Marguerite said. "*People would want to know how they could help. There are so many wonderful storytellers out there. It didn't seem to matter when or what I needed, I knew somebody who had a gift in that area. If they couldn't do it, they would know somebody that could*."

Those friendships blossomed into the 1960s. "*Milt and Verna Willms were our best friends*," said Marguerite. Chas said,

> *Our real close circle of friends for a long time were Thiessens, Willms, Eitzens, (all Mennonites) and the Petersons (non-Mennonite). And that was similar for people who moved here in the 10s, 20s, and 30s. At one time. It was just a common thing to have picnics down at the (Bow) river by the beaver dam. It was wide open for anyone. We went but after a while they closed it off to the public*.

The area they spoke of was owned by a Thiessen family in the 1930s and is presently occupied by their descendants.

Sadler

In 2020, the town of Strathmore, Alberta commemorated local historian Tom Sadler's civic contributions by naming a pedestrian bridge after him. Tom's grandparents came to Strathmore from South Africa in 1909 when his father was two years old. He said,

> *Rumor was that my grandfather, an Englishman, sympathized with the Boers in the Boer War, so he was not too popular. After the Boer War they got out, settling at the north end of Strathmore before relocating to Orange Valley, west of Namaka. They always considered themselves English even though they were born and lived in South Africa*.

Tom was born in the mid 1940s and has remained in the area. He recalls,

> *I think it was basically the same as any prairie community. It didn't matter what your background, nationality, or religion. When times were tough, your neighbours were your neighbours and they all interacted with one another. But they did kind of exist as separate communities. The Mennonites were individual, independent farmers, so, they tended to mix with their neighbours and with the neighbouring communities much more so than, say the Hutterites did where they were all bound to the colony.*

That distinction stands today.

Christie

Wayne Christie, who farms east of Strathmore, comes from long lines of farmers on both sides of his family. His father's family originated in Scotland and first farmed in northern Alberta. His maternal grandfather immigrated from Belgium, met his American-born (Iowa) grandmother at a country dance and married in Namaka. Wayne remembers his grandfather talking about how he would go into Namaka in the 1930s and find men, some of whom would

have been Mennonites, for his threshing crew. In time, Wayne helped Milt Willms stook bales. Wayne recalled stories of his family's arrival in the area. He said,

> *Because the CPR made it sound wonderful here, land was bought sight unseen. My grandma said they arrived in 1920 in the middle of the night in Rockyford, Alberta. The next morning, after sleeping in the cattle car with the rest of their family and a bunch of other people from Iowa, they woke up, looked out, and there was nothing there. This was going to be their home for the rest of their life. My grandpa said a lot of people went back home after two years. Others died here in the wintertime. Then the Spanish Flu came along. My grandpa didn't know his neighbour had died until a year later because there was no communication.*
>
> *My grandfather's dad was given a plot of land and some lumber, a cow, and a few provisions when the CPR came through. You were on your own after that. It's a lot colder here than it was in Belgium, so they had to learn quickly. The soil is more alkaline. The higher the land, the better it was; the lower the land, the greater the alkalinity. They had a commonality that if you worked the land, it didn't matter who you were. You worked the land.*
>
> *One year my grandpa said all they had to their name was 129 bushels of wheat and their garden, but they sold hardly any of that wheat because they had to use it for themselves. They had cattle, chickens, and eggs, and they survived that way. Things eventually got better. but ten years in the thirties were awful.*

It is difficult to imagine this pervasive degree of need experienced during this decade.

Wayne also shed light on the colonial practice of grouping settlers from the same country in "colonies." He described area settlements of English, Dutch, Belgian, and Danes, many now inhabited by fourth and fifth generations. Immigrants from all lands drew comfort in the familiarity of being with their own.

West

Alan West's grandparents and father arrived in the area from Illinois in 1909 and began farming, attracted by the CPR invitation and promotion. Non irrigated land was selling for fifteen dollars an acre; irrigated land went for twenty-five dollars an acre. They wound up buying a half section of land plus another fifty-acre field, part of which was irrigated, and part

was dry. "*It was good land, but they worked it well. Mom came up from Michigan with her lumberjack father, mother, and other family in 1920. They had heard about good opportunities in the west. Mom worked as a housekeeper for different farmers west of Namaka before my parents married in 1929*." Everyone in the family pitched in to help make ends meet.

Peebles

Sisters Heather Limb and Laura Janzen's great-grandparents emigrated from Scotland in 1922. One great-grandfather was a coachman and their great-grandmother a seamstress on the same estate, so it is unlikely either would have been prepared for farming, but they were ready for adventure and opportunity. After meeting in a boarding house in Calgary, their grandparents married and homesteaded near Namaka on land that remains in the family. Heather remembers photos of them surrounded by "*bald-headed prairie and no trees for as far as the eye could see. The CPR had wonderful advertising describing this as a land of plenty, but I don't think they had any kind of idea how brutal it could be*." When their grandfather returned from the Great War as a wounded veteran, he was granted land nearby and his father was granted another adjoining half section. The family continued to purchase land as it became available, growing grain crops on the best land and pasturing horses and cattle on soil of poorer quality. Family affinity for farming, and expertise, grew with each generation. Heather and Laura's father studied agronomy at Olds College and thus took over with greater awareness than those who came before.

Cultural Aspects of Adaptation

Language

Numerous interactions between Mennonites and Siksika demonstrated that positive, respectful, and even fond relationships can develop in the absence of a common spoken language. Bryan Little Chief told me, "*These people didn't know English, while our old people, too, were very vague on the English language, but they somehow still communicated. Because, our old people, they were like that*."

Mennonites understood English proficiency was required to succeed in their new home. German had been their first language for more than a century—High German in church, business, and education, and the colloquial Low German at home. Vera Penner says her dad, who spoke English, insisted that she and her sister Elfrieda, the oldest children, speak Low German at home. Many would have been conversant in Russian and some in English. German was the connection to their identity, so while they began learning English, retaining German was also important. Maintaining their cultural heritage through language was another liberty not afforded their Siksika neighbours. Once in the residential school system, children were forbidden from speaking their home language under threat of punishment. Teaching, reading, and writing were all conducted in English.[125]

The Mennonite situation was viewed completely differently. To those in power, Mennonites were white Europeans who would easily assimilate into the capitalist system and contribute to the economy. For their part, Mennonites were eager to become established and prosper economically in Canada, mostly unaware of the implications and their complicity in entrenching racism and white supremacy. Aside from their culturally held values of education

and economic prosperity, they saw their assimilation into the colonial system as a sign of their commitment to Canada and a means to minimize discrimination. There was anti-German sentiment against them following the Great War. At least some Siksika people thought they were Bolsheviks but so did non-Indigenous people. The U.F.A. was instrumental in having them banned in 1919. Strong anti-Mennonite sentiments expressed in two U.F.A. articles in 1927 were based more on their Eastern European origins than their German ethnicity. Already in the early 30s, Nazis were gaining steam in Germany and war clouds were forming. Canada joined WWII against Germany in Sept. 1939. Russlaender were keenly aware of how their separateness, German ethnicity (and wealth), and belief in non-resistance made them suspect in imperial Russia and USSR, and ultimately led to their emigration. Pressure to assimilate seems understandable.

Learning English arose from their desire to integrate into the country where they now lived, but it was not at the expense of their mother tongue. Men tended to acquire English skills first as they needed to understand land transactions, agriculture, and commerce. Married women who spent much of their time at home, could get away with little English proficiency and took longer to learn. Gerta Janzen West's older sister Mary recorded that their father Nicolai, who arrived knowing some English, and his brother Jake went to night school as soon as they arrived in Saskatchewan. Low German was spoken at home and the children only learned English when they started school. Since the communities and churches were mainly German speaking, however, their mother never felt the need to learn English.

Dad learned English once he began attending Namaka Farm School at age six. Although he was a smart student and a quick learner, he benefitted from extra tutoring from the teacher

Miss Hinz while she boarded with them. Liese would have benefited as well, but her English was always rudimentary, and she was always self-conscious about it. After all she had been through by the time she got to Namaka, and what was required once she arrived, it is easy to understand how she had little energy to learn another language, especially with little need or support. Peter Jansen refused to learn English. Any time a situation forced him into using a few words, his children hid in embarrassment.

In the early days, the Mennonites trusted, and relied on, those with more English proficiency to conduct financial transactions. Elsie Thiessen Nikkel said that while her father was not fluent in English, he had interacted with "the English" and could get by. As a result, other Mennonites would ask him to go to the bank and make the arrangements to buy their land.

"*We spoke German at home*," said Irene Morrison. She continued,

> *And if Mom and Dad didn't want us to know what they were talking about, to the day they died, they would speak Russian to each other. Otherwise, it was German. The funny thing is, Mom and Dad wanted to learn English and they wanted us to learn German. We had quite the time trying to talk whatever language they wanted us to speak at the time. It worked out well, however, and we all learned.*
>
> *I don't think I would have had any opportunity before school to speak English to anybody because we were surrounded by German-speaking relatives. Mom, being a teacher in Ukraine, picked up on it a lot quicker than Dad did. But she also learned basic English from the Sears' and Eaton's catalogs. She would look up long pants for boys, for example, then learn what they're called. And then she would look at shirts or sweaters. They ordered clothes, fabric, and footwear so she learned more terms. She would hear words and read them, and she was a stickler on pronouncing them properly. Once she could afford to buy a dictionary, that dictionary was on the table all the time because she wanted to learn the right pronunciation of* the words we *were using*.

"*Earle Buker got such a kick out of my mom, because she couldn't write much in English, but she tried*," said Vera Penner. "*She wrote all her grocery list the way she thought it should*

sound and sent it with my dad when he went into Namaka for groceries. Then Dad and Earle had to figure out what she meant."

Milt Willms recalled his parents' attempts to get him to learn German. "*Gerhard Dirks* (grandfather to Ray Dirks) *was a minister for a lot of the time. He decided that because the German language was disappearing, he would hold German classes on Saturday afternoon at the church. Okay, you've been in school all week. You don't want to go on the weekend too. So, I would get on my horse, but I could never get my horse to go to that church*."

Language and literacy issues appeared in other ways. Peter Nikkel reminded us of Elsie's inadvertent name change. "*Your Dad registered your name at the Post Office in Namaka as Elsie Joyce Thiessen, but the post mistress couldn't spell it. So, it became Elsie Josey Thiessen*." Elsie continued the story. "*One evening during a social event while I was in nurse's training, everybody was supposed to reveal their second name. I said, 'Josey,' and everybody just howled. They said that isn't even a name. I tried my best. But to legally change my name, I had to have had legal documents made before I was ten. My parents couldn't see paying the fee to get them*." Mennonites could be counted on for their pragmatism.

Mistakes leading to name changes for Mennonites were understandable given their English written literacy. Still, it was traumatic, even as an understandable error, for Elsie to be given a name she despised. Although there was some protocol in Mennonite names, it was mostly that males carried the first name of their father as their middle name, and names were given for life. Names did not carry the deep spiritual and cultural connection as those bestowed to the Siksika people. Indigenous peoples had traditional naming practices which made no sense to the Indian Agents. They were difficult to pronounce and made record keeping difficult.

As a result, they were renamed by the Indian Agent with Christian names.[126] It was yet another act to assimilate Indigenous peoples.

Namaka General Store and Grain Elevators

The only connection Wayne Christie's grandparents had with the Mennonites was through agricultural activities. In 1929 the Namaka House burned down, but the Namaka General Store and four grain elevators took over as the community hub. "*Most of my grandfather's grain was delivered to Namaka. My uncle delivered a lot of grain to Namaka and there would be stories because they'd all get together. Back then you couldn't haul a lot of grain at once and it took a while to unload. They'd sit around and have a pop with some Mennonites or go to Buker's General Store*."

Buker's General Store was the place for all cultures to meet, and it seems it was more often the men that travelled there. Margaret Buker says, "*Mennonites baked their own bread, tended chickens, gathered eggs, and milked the cows for milk, cream, and butter, but they would have needed other staples from the store. Milled flour came from the grain elevators when men delivered crops*."

Alan West recalled that, "*the Mennonites kept to themselves. But they also didn't hesitate to work with or bargain with or buy from others or play pool*." Bryan Little Chief remembered the Namaka General store. "*I'm from the east end of the reserve but my auntie and uncle lived up there. So, we used to go visit. And me and my cousins, we used to walk over there. It's not too far. You could get a lot with ten, fifteen cents back then. I remember that old lady, that lady Margaret*."

Aakai'kitstaki, born in the 1940s, remembers trips there with her grandfather. She said,

> *He used to gather us kids, and we'd go along to the store in Namaka. On our way, we walked beside the wagon, and we'd throw empty pop bottles and even bones into the back of the wagon. I wasn't interested in learning where the bottles and the bones were going to go. We would just run into the store and get what we wanted, candy, and some other stuff that my grandfather had on a list, and he would pick up those things. I remember Margaret, and they had a daughter*.

Again, the degree of what seemed like smooth integration astounded me. Margaret Buker talked about going to Mennonite picnics down at the flats of the Bow River by the beaver dam. "*We'd get out of school and go down on the weekends to swim, fish, play ball, and have ice cream cones. Of course, there was lots of food. One of the Mennonite families owned the property and welcomed everyone*." As she paged through photos of the Namaka Reunion in 2000, (Namaka Book – Goertz), she continued. "*We went to Mennonite weddings. They had weddings all the time, always in the Mennonite Church. We went to funerals too and to the cemetery*." Vera Penner had told me about Margaret Buker. Vera said, "*We all went to the Buker General Store to do our shopping, and she and Earle were always there. She was one of the people that didn't miss anything that went on in the Mennonite community. She came to a lot of our weddings and other events, even when she was older and in a wheelchair*."

Elder A recalled what it was like as a child, saying,

> *Back in my father's* day, *I used to think that they got along better with those communities like those in the Namaka area, the Strathmore area. My parents knew lots of people. And they were friends with lots of people. I don't know if they were necessarily Mennonites, many of them probably were because where they used to meet a lot was at the grain elevators at Namaka. My dad met lots of other farmers at the grain elevators, so they all knew each other. Or the Stobart grain elevator. My dad took his crops in and there were often other farmers there, too. They all kind of knew each other*. *So, the Siksika farmers were in the mix. They got to know all those people that used the granaries as well.*

The pool tables in the basement of the General Store drew the men. Terry Peterson recalled his father's stories about pool nights at the General Store. "*They had a pool table in the*

basement and the men would congregate on Friday nights. One of the Mennonites would come and cut hair and the rest of them would play pool while they were waiting or whatever they were doing." "*There were always enough people for my brother Herb, Earle (Buker), and others gathered there to have pool games and who knows what else*," said Gerta Janzen West. Alan West suggested the fare included libations.

Siksika men could not participate, however. The Indian Act made Indigenous people and owners and managers of pool halls who allowed them entry subject to fines and potential thirty-day imprisonment.[127] When I asked Herman Yellow Old Woman why this was, he told me it was so they wouldn't drink alcohol.

Heather Limb and Laura Janzen remembered the general store and grain elevators' social function. Heather says, "*Our great-grandfathers and grandfathers hauled grain, first with horse and wagon and later in trucks, to the elevators in Namaka where it would go out on the train. Their Namaka mailing address meant they would have picked up mail sorted by Margaret Buker at the post office prior to rural delivery*." Despite undoubtedly meeting Siksika people and Mennonites, neither Heather nor Laura remembers hearing stories about them. Laura said, "*By the time it got to our generation, Mennonites were like any of the rest of us. Regular people. Neighbours*." It wasn't until Laura began to date Don Janzen, grandson of Nicolai Janzen, that she learned about Mennonites. "*Our great-grandparents came to the Scottish community in Calgary, but when they left there, then the community was just the neighbours. And we were brought up that way. Always*," said Laura.

Community Social Activities

Settlers and Siksika people interacted socially in ways of which I had not been aware. Elder A said,

> *Some of our people mingled with them (settlers) in other ways, but I don't know all of them I know some of them played hockey together. My brothers used to play hockey in Strathmore. And I don't know how many of those we played with, those boys from any of the Mennonites community, played hockey as well. But I know my parents made lots of friends from those relationships. They used to travel on a hockey bus with all those families that went off to hockey games. And a lot of the off-reserve fellows used to come to our rodeo grounds. And a lot of them joined in the rodeo, and I don't know if any of them were Mennonites*.

One of them was Milt Willms who began rodeoing at age fifteen with Blackfoot riders. "*The Blackfoot ran a lot of horses, and they would gather them up and we'd go there to practice on the reserve. We got along really well with them*."

Education

Margaret Buker remembers when the Mennonites arrived and began attending Namaka School, swelling the numbers from the "*thirty or forty*" non-Mennonite children already there. She remembers a few of the Mennonite names but mostly that they didn't speak English at first or like to mix with the others. "*It was pretty hard to have a party or anything when you couldn't have Mennonites*." But her son Gail named Mennonite children with whom he had developed friendships, including Eleanore (Ellie) Janzen whom he took to the prom. He said by his time, most of them were fluent in English, although some were not as articulate as their younger siblings. Speaking of Mennonites brought Hutterites to mind for Gail, and he offered that, "*they were quite different than the Hutterites. The Hutterites are all communal whereas the Mennonites don't want to be communal*." Not everyone knew this distinction.

Historically, Mennonites prioritized education for their children. Throughout their time in imperial Russia, they had directed resources and expertise to establishing and maintaining a robust and relevant education system. Leaders recognized its role as vital for building strong characters, prosperous colonies, and social advantages. The Namaka Farm settlers maintained this priority, sending their children to make-shift schools in homes until the Namaka Farm school was established in 1927. In *Trails to Little Corner*, Gerhard and Tina Dirks's daughter Kate Woelk tells us that when her parents first moved in, the second floor housed the community school. "The commotion and noise from all those little feet on the wooden floors was incredible. Like normal kids, they soon found out that blue ink contrasts nicely with white-washed walls. Many things Tina washed off or painted over, but the carved initials and epithets remained to provide much amusement and speculation for her own children."[128] On Sundays, the space was used for church services until a dedicated building could be built in 1933.

Children learn quickly and can adapt more easily to new environments than adults. This makes them assets in facilitating their family's acculturation. Attending public schools where they interact with others from different backgrounds can accelerate this adaptation. The children from Namaka Farm attended one of four schools, depending on their address. Those on the north end of the Farm attended Namaka School in the village of Namaka. Those on the western side went to school in nearby Carseland or Cairnhill. The majority, however, went to the one-room Namaka Farm School on the south side of the CPR tracks on Range Road 250, just north and across the road from where Dad lived. Prior to their arrival, the few children of ranch hands that may have lived there before 1925, on what was then a single large ranch, would have attended the nearest existing school. The arrival of the first twenty-five Mennonite

families increased the population density and necessitated the establishment of Namaka Farm School District No. 4249 in 1927 to accommodate the swelling number of settlers.[129] Because of its location, most of the students were Russlaender. In Namaka and Carseland, Mennonites mixed with other white settlers, although some recalled a couple of Siksika students later in the 1940s. The Blackfoot children living on the west side of the reserve, and closest to Namaka Farm, attended Old Sun Residential School run by the Anglican Church. Those on the east side went to Crowfoot Indian Residential School in Cluny, run by the Roman Catholic Church.

Milt Willms, whose parents lived on the north end of Namaka Farm, attended Namaka School. When I asked about the nature of interactions with the non-Mennonite and Blackfoot children who attended, he said, "*We were all people. I never heard the word 'racist' or understood the concept, until probably in the 80s. We had a very good relationship with the Blackfoot people.*" Milt also spoke of an insular upbringing. "*A good part of the people that lived in the community were my relatives and so many of my classmates were cousins. But outside of that, I had never been to Carseland, right until I got put into Grade Eleven. We stayed right in our own little community, and I'm talking a three- or four-mile radius*."

Although Milt's parents saw the value of education for their children, it did not interest Milt. "*I always rode my horse to school. I'd get out of the yard and think that Mother was satisfied that I was going to school, and I couldn't get that horse near that school. From Grade One to Grade Two, I passed on trial, because I was often late for school. It was the horse's fault. From Grade Two to Grade Three I passed on trial. And then I finally changed horses*."

Irene Morrison lived at the south end of Namaka Farm and attended the one-room Namaka Farm School. She remembered the layout clearly. "*The teacher was at the front of the*

class. The back faced the railway track. That's where I started school and attended until part way through Grade Three when our family moved away." With the school so close to the railway tracks, it was not surprising that children would experiment with placing coins on the rails and waiting for the trains to flatten them. Irene said she had put a dime on the track, and it was totally flattened. Then she corrected herself. "*It would have been a nickel because I wouldn't have had a dime*," she said, laughing.

David Wall remembers his dad Gerry talking about going to school and getting there by horse and sleigh.

> *In the bitter cold of winter, Oma, Gerry's mom, would heat up rocks by the stove at night and put them in the sleigh so that they could put their feet on these rocks to get to school, although it wouldn't get them home. They were young kids with a horse and a sleigh and away they would go, likely heading across the field to the school. I got the impression that it was an open sleigh with a windbreak. When they arrived, they'd have to unhitch the horses and put them in the little stable behind the school. After school, they would hitch them up and head home. There was never a question that you would go to school. They weren't told they could stay home from school because they were needed at home. No, you were going to school.*

Another participant told me that forty degrees below zero Fahrenheit was the cutoff point. If it got that cold, you could stay home, but anything less than that, like minus thirty-eight, you went.

Susan McMillan's mother, Mollie Willms, loved school, remembered the teacher fondly, and spoke of surprising opportunities for farm children. Susan remembers her mother telling her, "*There was a music adjudicator that would go through the prairies and check out local talent and try to help immigrant kids. He showed up at our schoolhouse in Namaka and had them each sing. As soon as he heard Ella,* (Mollie's sister*), sing, he went to Oma and Opa's (Ella's parents) house and said, 'Your daughter is a very gifted natural singer. If you ever have*

the money, she should take voice lessons.'" Two of the girls eventually earned advanced singing designations and performed. Marilyn Redekop, Ella's daughter, said. "*Mom also taught in various choirs. And it all started at that farm school in Namaka*."

Elsie Thiessen Nikkel attended Namaka Farm School for Grades One through Six although given her location, she would ordinarily have begun school in Carseland. "*My dad thought that most of the Mennonite kids were going to Namaka Farm, so he petitioned, and we were able to go to that school too*." During her time, all the students were Mennonites. She says,

> *They were cousins from one side or the other, other than the Trent kids who lived at Strangmuir Station, but that was before my time. My parents lost two babies, one before and one after me. So, my brother and I grew up almost like only children because of our age difference. I remember begging mom to let me go to school because my brother was already there. And she said, 'No, not before you learn to knit and crochet.' I was five years old trying to crochet. When I was seven, my parents adopted a baby boy, bringing much joy to our family.*
>
> *My older brother went to school on a black horse. When I started school, my dad built a little buggy. Switching to Carseland after Grade Six was very traumatic because I had lived a very sheltered life—not spoiled, just sheltered from reality, other than occasional trips into town with Dad for groceries. There were three of us cousins at Carseland, girls, that were all in the same grade and we all were given the most complimentary nicknames. I was Elsie the Cow. Another time, we were getting off the school bus, and there were all these kids all lined up on the steps of the school yelling, 'Here come those bloody Mennonites!'*

It helped that the three cousins had each other for moral support.

Gerta Janzen West's parents lived on Namaka Farm's northwest corner, so she attended Namaka School. "*We had permission to walk across Nikkel's field to get to school but strictly told to just make one path. We also had to cross the railroad tracks to get to Namaka School*." Gerta's older sister Nellie also recalled the path across the field. She and Ellie were two of the few who remembered Blackfoot children in their classroom.

Ellie said, "*There weren't always Blackfoot children in the Namaka school, but there were two girls in one of my grades. One was Rachell Many Heads or Many Bears. I have forgotten the other girl's name.*"

Because of her address, Vera Penner attended Cairnhill School beginning at age seven. "*Being the only Mennonite in the school didn't bother me. It didn't bother anybody. It didn't even bother them that I didn't know how to speak English. They were all like Danes, or Swedish people, and all so nice. Nobody ever laughed at me, and I never felt out of place. Maybe I was too dumb to realize it. They were all just nice, nice people*."

Learning English in school was not just the purview of Mennonite children. Wayne Christie's family came from Belgium. "*My grandfather said when they went to school, he said they sat there, and the teacher let them go out and snare gophers because they couldn't speak English*."

Mennonite-Mennonite / Family Socialization

In a tradition with which I grew up, extended family gathered often for special events. "*The Thiessens were a large group and so were the Willms and my mom was a Willms*," said Elsie Thiessen Nikkel. She said,

> *Most of them moved away eventually but we had a lot of family get togethers. One year we'd have Christmas Day with the Thiessens and would get together with the Willms on Boxing Day. Next year it would switch. Invariably, we would stop at my grandparents' place on Sunday on the way from church for lunch. And so did all my other relatives. Grandma was always prepared for it.*

After-school visits with her grandparents, who lived "straight south" of the school were special for Elsie. She recalled,

> *My grandpa would go to Namaka to get the mail and we would stop at their place and pick it up. Grandma always baked the yummiest brown bread. I have never in*

my life liked honey, but she had fresh, warm brown bread with a slab of butter and honey. It was the most delicious treat a girl could have right after school. I also remember that we had a horse that was so tame, we used to pull into Grandpa's yard and leave him there while we went in for just a short visit. We never tied him up. One time we'd overstayed our visit and the horse left without us. So, he got home before we did that day.

The long walk home, and probably another to retrieve the buggy, would have served as prompts to always tie up the horse. Fortunately, no harm came out of the adventure.

Gerta Janzen West, born in the early 1940s attended Namaka School. She says their only interactions with non-Mennonite children were at school or school-related activities like plays. "*It wasn't like we went to each other's houses. But then, I didn't really socialize with Mennonite children either. With thirteen siblings, there were enough kids around!*"

Irene Morrison's friends were all Mennonites. She said,

I don't think I knew anybody, except for the Native people who worked for us, that were not Mennonites. Except there were adults at Strangmuir working for the railway. I wouldn't have understood them or the Native people that were there. There was a Native girl almost my age and we sort of got talking to each other but neither one of us knew each other's language. All I remember is that her family was a beautiful family. They were very, very nice people.

Irene recalled swimming in the creek in summer and skating on it during the winter.

We made our own games. Anywhere we lived, as soon as Mom could get enough money, she would buy a ball, like a softball. And eventually, she and dad would make up a bat and we could make a ball game. Other than that, we always had some kind of ball we kicked around. Our family was big enough that 'Hide and Seek' was always a popular game. Another favorite was 'Run Sheep Run', where someone would guide a player to escape while the others looked for them.

Dad loved to ride his horse named Pony. They were a good match. The horse was small, and Dad was a slight boy. He would have to lead Pony to a fence so he could climb on her bare back. Boy and horse would go down to the nearby Bow River to cool off in the summer. They also had fun with other children. Dad recalled a time when he and a Mennonite girl his age

were riding their horses home together and challenged each other to a race. Pony never won races, but he was doing well this time, until they got to the Jansen's driveway. Pony made an abrupt left turn, throwing Dad, and throwing the race to the girl who kept on riding.

Dad longed to skate, but skates were out of financial reach. He would join his friends when they headed out to Eagle Lake, north of Namaka, but sit on the sidelines and watch them play hockey, unable to participate. Years later, I would camp on the shores of Eagle Lake, imagining the young boy who once sat there and all he had taught me.

Vera Penner recalls good times on the flats down by the Bow River. "*That's where the church picnics were always held. That's where our young people always went on Sunday afternoons and played baseball. And that is where we all went to pick Saskatoons*."

Don's father, Jake Janzen, fourth child of Nicolai and Marie, was born while the family was in Provost and arrived on Namaka Farm as an infant. Don said,

> *Grandpa rented the land through the big farm operation (George Lane). When that was falling apart, they offered to sell the land. My grandpa had brothers here too, Great-Uncle John was one. They started buying whatever quarter sections they could afford at that time. My brother Larry is on the main farm they started on and farms most of the land that Grandpa would have owned. Larry bought the land across from the main farm when he started farming, which was the field that young Jake and his siblings once walked across to get to school. My dad ended up buying his brother out, so stayed on the home farm operation. Later my dad bought this piece of land and I eventually bought from him*.

Stories about the early days in Namaka were scarce for Don's generation. He said, "*When we were kids, Grandpa and Grandma talked to Mom and Dad mostly in Low German. Dad didn't really want us to speak German at that point, just English. So, when we went down there to visit, we couldn't understand what they were saying*."

Meeting at the Mower

Connections formed between Mennonites during their formative years lasted a lifetime, as exemplified by the bond between Dad and Gerry Wall. Gerry's father Aron, along with H.H. Willms, was responsible for Peter Jansen moving to Namaka Farm[130]. Both families moved from Namaka to Niagara, Ontario when Dad and Gerry were adolescents. Both Dad and Gerry became fruit growers, farming only a few miles apart. Our families attended the same elementary school. My first job, other than on our farm, was picking strawberries at Wall's farm. When Dad retired in his eighties, he and Mom remained on the farm and rented the operation to David Wall, Gerry's son, who farms it to this day.

David summed up their relationship saying,

> *I know our dads were friends, even though our families didn't really do things together. But I remember for years, our dads shared a mower for cutting the grass in the orchards. Your dad would have it and my dad would say, 'The weeds are kind of high. Ben, are you done with the mower? Okay, I'll send Dave over to pick it up.' We'd have it for a week or two, and your dad would call, 'Gerry, are you done with the mower?' And then he'd come and pick it up. I can still picture that old relic of a mower. Then they bought a new one together. Then that one got old, and I think finally my dad bought his own. That went on for many years and I think that's the only thing that they shared.*
>
> *There was a bond there between these four or five Namaka families that ended up in this area. My dad wasn't fast friends with them. But he was good friends with them, and they mattered. Maybe that's why they didn't just go and buy their own mower when they easily could have. It would have been a lot more convenient. No one wanted to think that they were hurting the other guy's feelings. That's my connection to your dad because we'd meet at the mower.*

I, too, remembered the mower and the lifelong bonds.

Conclusion

The Russlaender on Namaka Farm knew they would have to establish and engage with connections outside of their community if they were going to adapt and integrate into their

new country both short and long term. This would have been usual practice in Soviet Ukraine, especially for the men. All indications are that connections with the Siksika people were initiated by the Siksika getting to know these newcomers on what until recently had been Siksika land. Their interactions proved that they did not need to learn English to build congenial relationships, but if they were going to succeed economically in the existing colonial structure, at least some of the Mennonites needed to speak English. Many had farmed in the Soviet Union and assumed the implements and techniques with which they built their reputation as esteemed agriculturalists would transfer to the open pastures of Alberta seamlessly. They had not considered that the soil and climate of this open prairie, which looked similar to that they had known, would require them to adapt. They had to understand market conditions, which crops to plant, and how to sell their grain to the elevator agent. A. W. Klassen's idea to bring in agricultural experts in 1930 to educate was brilliant. The Mennonites knew they had to adapt and valued, and utilized, the expertise available to them.

They had to feed and clothe their families. Many of the women planted gardens and preserved food which kept them over the winter. Some of them sold the butter, eggs, and cream to customers in Calgary which they would leave at the Namaka station to be delivered. Each family raised livestock for personal and some commercial use. Many of their clothes were made at home but they still needed to buy cloth, coats, and footwear, either at Buker's General Store or from Eaton's or Simpson-Sears' catalogues. Even then, they were socializing through sports like hockey and rodeoing.

Proselytization, a core tenet of their belief system, had been forbidden under the terms in which they were allowed into imperial Russia. This was not the case in Canada and the

Mennonites welcomed “outsiders” to their church services, weddings, funerals, and picnics. Aside from their religion, the way of life they envisioned was not significantly different than their non-Mennonite neighbours. It was only a matter of learning how it all transpired. Their white privilege connected them with resources and opportunities not afforded their Siksika neighbours.

Chapter 3: Spirituality

Introduction

A deep desire to understand and unpack the Mennonite perceptions and embodiment of spirituality drove me to learn more about my ancestors so I could discover the forces that had shaped me. Why had they clung to what I considered a staunch, constrictive belief system? I respected and revered aspects reflected in their altruistic tenets and charitable tendencies but could not abide by the exclusionism and proselytizing. Seeking resolution to this internal struggle was what had originally brought me to Namaka. During the Siksika Elders' Circle, those present were curious about whether I called myself a Mennonite. I told them the answer was not straightforward. I was raised in that culture and always respected my family, and believed in their lived values of peace, compassion, and charity. It was the fundamentalist religion with which I disagreed, and I stopped attending church in my teens. Predictably, the Elders asked why. I responded with two primary reasons. First was the belief that humans were superior to other beings, and the second was that the Mennonites believed that their Christian faith was the *only* right one and that failure to follow that faith would land you in hell. The Elders then kidded me that I was a recovering Mennonite. It occurred to me that if these Elders did not understand what a Mennonite was, then how could the Siksika of 1930, when the two groups spoke different languages, possibly understand Mennonite spirituality, other than through their actions? Likewise, how could Mennonites understand a spirituality that was so foreign to them and assess their need for "conversion" before even getting to know Siksika ways? Spirituality, to me, goes beyond religious beliefs and dogma. It is characterized by a sense of connection to a

Higher Power and a oneness with all other life. It is reflected in how one lives their life. Yet the Mennonite spirituality and spiritual practice of 1930 was key to their adaptation.

Growing up, well-intentioned parents, concerned for the fate of my soul, would ask about the state of my spiritual life. The inference was whether I was a believer, obeyed Mennonite dogma, and was in right relationship with Jesus. This caused me great angst because I hated to hurt my parents, but I could not reconcile a loving, compassionate God with one who would tun his back on you if you stopped listening and obeying. How could one practice spirituality while believing one was separate from the rest of creation? Adhering to the confession of faith was more important than how you felt about it. Disbelief or asking questions branded you a sinner. I never understood or experienced what I considered spirituality until I moved away from the Mennonite church. Oddly enough, it was not until after my motorcycle crash, when I determined that I would be open yet respectful about who I was, that my relationship with my parents, especially my father, reached a new level of understanding and warmth.

This chapter explores how the religious beliefs Mennonite settlers brought with them influenced how they embodied their spirituality, and what effect that had on how they developed relationships. It will also expose actions that on the surface appeared selfless, righteous, and respectful, while at the same time, they reinforced and propagated dangerous injustices.

Spirituality in Practice

Herman Yellow Old Woman offered a perspective I had not thought of. He said,

> *One thing I've heard from Mennonite people*," said, "*is that they really appreciate how much our people were very religiously respectful. That our people really*

> *respected religion, no matter if it was Catholic, or it was Mormon, or whatever. As long as it had to do with praying, they respected that, and the Mennonites, they were very faithful people. They called themselves pacifists! Well, the Blackfoot people learned to be pacifist, because they were overruled by newcomers. And they knew that they couldn't fight anymore. Our people were very vicious, and fighters, protectors of the land. Well, now their hands were tied behind their backs. And here were these Mennonites that kind of taught them their way. And they were very amused about the pacifist ways of the Mennonites.*

Perhaps that respect the Siksika observed from Mennonites was why they were open to teaching them how to live on the land.

Following my 2014 motorcycle crash on the border of the Siksika reserve, I consulted with a Blackfoot (Piikani, not Siksika) man, both in person and via email. At that time, he told me that their culture doesn't separate religion and spirituality. They express their spirituality by how they live their life every day. It occurs to me now, that it is like the absence of a Blackfoot word for "Mennonite," or a word to differentiate different groups of settlers. The Blackfoot term for all whites or Europeans, "Naapikowaiks," didn't differentiate between Europeans of different cultures or origins. The Siksika saw and lived their lives based on a concept of reverence and oneness. That made total sense to me. Spirituality is not what you say. It's how you live your life!

It has been my experience that Mennonites do differentiate between religion and spirituality, something Elder C had also observed after commenting on the origin of Mennonites in Ukraine. Elder C said, "*There's the spirituality or the religious component of your people as Anabaptists*." Semantics aside, it appeared the Siksika focused on how Mennonites lived their life, including how they respected others. They accepted that external behaviour as Mennonite spirituality, but Mennonites did not appear to appreciate the pervasiveness of Siksika spirituality in their interactions.

This had not been the Siksika experience with other organized religions who professed Christianity but acted abhorrently. Bryan Little Chief expressed the history, when he said, "*They all practiced religion, but how religion hit the North American Indigenous people, like, we had our own belief systems, and everything like that, and these people came and tried to convert us. It was an imposition on a healthy culture. And a lot of Indigenous cultures were erased as a result of that approach. Those are just facts that we know*." I was shocked to hear that the Mennonites did not try and convert the Siksika people because that was a key priority of the Mennonite Brethren practice with which I had grown up. They were always trying to convert anyone who was not "of the faith." The missing spiritual connection I yearned for had sent me to Indigenous spirituality because it made so much sense to me. It was what had been missing from my "religious" upbringing. Even all the Mennonite denominations could not agree with one another on how their beliefs were interpreted and practiced. However, these differences that had originated in imperial Russia appeared to be kept as an internal issue, indiscernible to outsiders.

Background

Shining a spotlight on a fractious time in Mennonite history illustrates how settlers carried the outcomes of an 1860s rupture to Namaka Farm. At that time, growing dissention over what some members considered decadent behaviour resulted in a contentious rift that divided communities and families. Some members felt the need to get back to their Anabaptist roots. In 1860, founding members of what would become the Mennonite Brethren (MB) denomination (the one I was raised in) met and over the next weeks created a "Document of Secession" which was submitted to church leadership. The Document outlined their articles of

disagreement, two of which were the acceptable method of baptism and eligibility to partake in communion. They avowed their complete disassociation with the "decadent churches."[131] The bitterness between the denominations was not officially reconciled until a conference held in Reedley, California in 1960, a century later.[132] Interestingly, Dr. John A. Töews (1912-1979), an internationally recognized MB scholar who explored this history, grew up on Namaka Farm, son of Agnes and A. A. Töews, minister of the Namaka MB Church.[133] Both my paternal and maternal grandparents had "mixed" marriages and although it continued to divide other families, it was a nonissue in mine.

The Russlaender who settled on Namaka Farm came from both denominations. For the most part, this acrimony was eclipsed by their immediate needs for survival. Many arrived with little holding them together other than their faith. Connection to their church and religion including regular Sunday worship and other meetings would have played a vital role in keeping them grounded. Words written by Nicolai Janzen in *Der Bote* were as relevant in 1926 as they were in 1939 when he penned them. Janzen wrote, "Even if things don't always go according to plan economically, we still have enough reason to be grateful for the quiet and peaceful life we can lead here, for food, clothing and shelter and many other things."[134] They were words spoken by my grandparents daily.

A. A. Töews had been the leading minister at the *Allianz Gemeinden* (Mennonite denomination) in Lichtfelde, Molotschna, Ukraine, and became a vocal spokesperson, minister, and prolific letter-writer for the Namaka group. Töews arrived in Canada in 1926 and was quickly marked by B. E. Elmore, Secretary of George Lane Co. Elnore reported that, "There are three men Peters, Töews, and Dahl who are possibly brighter than the others in some ways at

least. I have heard in fact that they are too smart, and they are very expert in picking holes in legal documents, also very suspicious of the Lane Company trying to tie them up to buy the land. They believe no man and are quite able to make a mountain out of a mole hill."[135] Töews, not a farmer, another point of contention with George Lane Ltd., took on the role of reestablishing the community they had known by spearheading initiatives to reestablish their church and school, including the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church on Namaka Farm in 1927.[136] This would have been helpful and comforting to the new settlers. The first church services, conducted in German, were held on the second floor of the home of Gerhard and Tina Dirks, after the bedding was rolled up and piled against the wall to make room for the service, wrote Agnes Froese.[137] Her grandfather, H. H. Willms, and A. J. Wall, original Namaka settlers, founded the Landskroner Mennonite Church, affiliated with the GCs, as the "other" denomination was known, and began services in 1925, also in German. Once Namaka Farm School was built in 1928, services moved there until an official church was dedicated in 1933. The structure was built on donated land with lumber salvaged from the Revelstoke Lumberyard office after a fire in the hamlet of Namaka.[138] The thrifty, resilient, and resourceful Mennonites were living up to their reputation.

Mennonite Practice on Namaka Farm

For the most part, this schism did not seem to be a barrier for families, and they had worked out a worship arrangement. All worshiped regularly at the MB service but for special services, the "GCs" would travel to a GC church in Rosemary. Also, the GC church would send a minister to Namaka once a month.[139] Everyone, even non-Mennonites, gathered for church picnics down at the flats by the beaver dam on the Bow River.

Nicolai and Maria Janzen belonged to the GC denomination. Gerta Janzen West remembers the importance of a religious education to her parents. She said, "*Even though this was incredibly difficult, they would pay, do their best to send each child to Bible school after they finished whatever public school system they went to*." There was one thing, however, that she could not understand. She remembers, "*Whenever the (MB) church would have communion, my parents and one or two other families would have to leave. I wondered what was wrong with my parents. Why did they have to leave the church? But I felt I could never ask*." That was another pervasive practice that distanced me from the church. You were to accept what you were told in blind faith. Questioning demonstrated a lack of faith and was a sin. Now Gerta knows her parents had to leave because the MB church would not offer communion to anyone who had not been baptized as an adult and who was not a member of the MB church, including GC Mennonites. Otherwise, she never felt like they did not belong.

Katie Willms' journal records another dispiriting display of this division. Her father, H. H. Willms, died suddenly in April 1937 at age sixty-three, leaving the settlement without one of its leaders and the extended Willms family without their patriarch. The Willms were already contemplating moving to Ontario. Their time on Namaka Farm had been grueling, and Peter Jansen, who, with Liese, Dad, and three small children, had moved in 1937, had written an encouraging letter to the Willms. After much deliberation, they decided to follow. In April 1938, they had an auction, which went well, but they remained unhappy about leaving. That night, on the eve of their departure, the family went to the home of a Rev. Willms (MB) for communion. A. A. Töews, the lead MB preacher, heard about it later and forbade Willms from preaching or

attending communion services because Willms had served communion to GCs.[140] It was not the send-off the already heavy-hearted family had envisioned.

One reason why I was surprised at the relatively favourable perspective of the Namaka Farm Mennonites by the Siksika was the seeming absence of proselytization and campaigns to convert "non-believers." I had been raised in an MB church and knew that converting anyone who wasn't Mennonite was a priority. Having a zealous preacher leading the Namaka Farm congregation next door presented a perfect opportunity and launching point. My fears were both confirmed and allayed by A. A. Töews' December 1932 column in *Der Bote*. He wrote:

> On November 27, we celebrated a mission festival, where the dear speakers commemorated both the Inner and Outer Missions. There were preacher brothers from Crowfoot, Gem, and Munson who shared the precious Word of God with us. The mission call that day and the associated collection amounted to over 100 dollars. The Jewish mission in Winnipeg and the Indian mission in Oklahoma should be remembered in particular. The former is important to us because the salvation we are looking forward to comes from the Jews, and the Indians are our closest neighbours here. Unfortunately, this Indian reservation of Blackfoot Indians has been taken over by the Catholic Mission. I wonder if there is no Protestant mission among the Indians in Canada. Could any of the readers of the "Messenger" [German translation of *Der Bote*] shed some light on this?[141]

Töews missed mentioning the Anglicans who ran Old Sun Residential School, possibly because he may have viewed them as close to Catholics. Reading this through my eyes of today makes my blood run cold for the arrogance, racism, privilege, and disregard for the beliefs of others it portrays.

Reciprocity

While preacher Töews was eloquent and fervent, it appears that members of the congregation were keener to live their spirituality rather than preach it. Herman Yellow Old Woman told me,

> *It wasn't so much of them [Mennonites] trying to convert our people from being Blackfoot, or from being Catholic and Anglican. The people of my grandmother's age, and these other people, their families from this area, had already left the Anglican faith because of the abuse that happened at the residential school, and it was going into the homes. So, they didn't want to have anything to do with the Anglican faith and they went on their own. And that's where the Mennonites and the Three Hills (Prairie Bible Institute, now Prairie College) came in and assisted them. Because in the 50s, almost, maybe less than ten percent of them did not speak English. So, their communicator was one by the name of Bernard Tailfeathers. And Bernard was one of the only English-speaking Blackfoot who interpreted for these missions that came in to help them*.

Upon first hearing of the religion being translated, my skeptical mind wondered how the fundamentalist message had been delivered. My fears were relieved upon learning that the translator was Bernard Tailfeathers, respected Siksika Elder, who was consulted in the interpretation of Treaty 7.[142] Herman said, "*They didn't actually start a Mennonite church, but they assisted our community, especially my family, my extended family, my grandparents, and some of their friends. They were also affiliated with the Three Hills Prairie Bible Institute. And so, people would come from the Bible Institute on Sunday to help with services."* Again, Herman was describing Mennonites living their spirituality in a meaningful way, not preaching it or trying to convert Siksika people. That was what I valued about how the Mennonites lived their faith.

Alvin Lepp (1932-2018) was held up by the Mennonite Church as exemplary of one who lived his spirituality. Born on Namaka Farm, he and his wife were honoured in 2010 by Siksika Nation for their service. Herman Yellow Old Woman, quoted in the article, says Alvin was remembered for his exceptional ability to build relationships and had become part of the Siksika Community. He farmed near Rosemary and drove a school bus, but he loved to "spread

the gospel," and could read scripture in the Blackfoot language. He always tried to help those in need.[143] Unfortunately, I was unable to contact anyone in the Lepp family for this research.

Bryan Little Chief shared more insight, saying,

> *So, when these immigrants came, there were the unscrupulous ones. And then there were the religious ones, like the Mennonites or the Hutterites. They weren't like that, you know? So, we weren't aware of their arrival here. You know, it's just the Treaty opened up this thing, and then you've got all these unscrupulous people surrounding the Reserve. We've had more unscrupulous relationships with ordinary settlers, rather than those that seem to have respect, like the Hutterites and or Mennonites, those who seem to have gotten along, you know. These guys didn't push anything on us. That's how my parents, grandparents say they interacted. The other Europeans that were not in that, those are the ones (that were unscrupulous)*.

Injecting levity into the conversation, Elder A, said, "*One of the ones I was speaking to said, 'Oh, what we can remember is they would come on the reserve and take all our berries and try to sell them back to us*.'" (laughter)

Herman's revelation about the expanded role of Mennonite women on Namaka Farm initially created a new level of respect and admiration within me. Not only did some of them keep their households running, gardens tended, meals prepared, clothes sewn, and food put down for winter, they enlarged and diversified their social circles to include their Siksika neighbours. They also made a tangible and heartfelt difference to families on both sides of the fence who were undergoing massive social and economic transitions.

Yet, something felt amiss. As I contemplated this surprising story and discussed it with a cousin, we recognized the underlying value system and its unintentional implications. Offering charity and compassion, as these women did, was a core Mennonite tenet, and one I hold in high esteem. It is a hallmark of Mennonite organizations. What was unsettling, however, was that the Mennonite women would not accept reciprocity from the Blackfoot women.

Mennonite charity was directed to those less fortunate economically and socially. Mennonites were fine with giving gifts of charity but were not about to accept charity, especially from those they considered less fortunate. In this case it was Siksika people, but it could be any other group. This behaviour was unintentional but unquestionably racist and reflective of white supremacy.

Balancing receiving as well as giving was a lesson that I have had to learn. The most obvious example is when I was recovering from injuries sustained in my motorcycle crash in 2014. I was forced to accept help from others, and it felt uncomfortable. Once I noticed this pattern, I could not help but see how it transpired in other aspects of my life.

Accepting help from Siksika apparently did not apply when it came to survival. Mennonite men had accepted Siksika wisdom when it came to animal husbandry and learning how to farm on land only recently stolen from them. Siksika were extending help to those in need and Mennonites accepted it.

Siksika understood reciprocal relationships. They wanted to participate, at least to some extent, with Mennonite culture in the 1930s and 40s. Although it was an unintentional oversight, George Fox had been disappointed not to be invited to speak at Milt Willms' mother's funeral. Siksika people regularly visited Mennonite farms for social calls and to either purchase, barter, or trade for vegetables or gas. I wonder how many of the Mennonite families, unfamiliar with this practice, saw that it was intended as a balanced transaction. Some of them may have, but the language used by others to describe the transactions, like "begging," or even "asking," would have reflected Mennonite perception of their superiority, not equals. Actions like listening, learning Siksika history, and appreciating their spirituality, could have been

interpreted as respectful and receiving, but none of the stories from Mennonite participants conveyed that.

Conclusion

Spirituality cannot be skived off from any aspect of living. It cannot be exclusive or hierarchical. It is expressed in how you treat your animals, respond to hardship, express gratitude and reverence, conduct business, and even walk down the gravel road! It is reflected in the way you honor the land, the water, the air, and view the cosmos. You express your spirituality with every thought and action. It is not something preached in church or performed out of a sense of obligation.

Mennonites were pressed to express their spirituality during their early days on Namaka Farm. Cramped living in rudimentary buildings, economic poverty, and an unacceptable communal tenancy arrangement would have stressed the saintliest. Although it was not recognized or spoken of at the time, many would have been experiencing PTSD, with no resources to deal with it. Families had been separated and many would never again see loved ones they had left behind. Spirituality can be practiced but it is easy to understand the deleterious effects of tensions arising from living, as one said, “like herrings in a barrel,” that could lead to friction. Even worship services at their makeshift church, established in 1927, could not eliminate the conflicts. Although there was family turnover, by 1930 the situation had stabilized, and thirty-six families were calling Namaka Farm home.

Mennonites would have said that they were practicing their spirituality but ironically, they were so entrenched in their belief system, they were blind to the implications of their actions. They did not understand that their gratitude was rooted in privilege, not their

"worthiness." Their charitable acts, which were well received, also reinforced systemic injustices.

Both the light and shadow aspects of their beliefs pervaded how Mennonites sustained themselves and how they interacted with their neighbours. Mostly those were seen as honorable and respected by observers. Ironically, these same well-intentioned spiritual practices unintentionally perpetuated privilege, white supremacy, and racism as Mennonites adapted to their surroundings.

Conclusion

Introduction

In 1925, twenty-five German-speaking Mennonite families, part of a mass immigration from the Soviet Union, were settled on Namaka Farm in southern Alberta by the MLSB. Their arrival inserted a new culture between the British colonists and the Siksika People. The unaccustomed and objectionable living and financial arrangements into which they were forced led to a tumultuous transition period that fractured relationships, led to turnover for perceived better opportunities elsewhere, and saw changes introduced that made living there more tenable. By 1930, the 12,265-acre settlement, the remnant of a grand colonization scheme now owned by Dominion Bank, stabilized at thirty-six families on individual parcels of land. By the time they had been in Canada and on Namaka Farm for five years, Namaka Farm Mennonites were well into the process of building comfortable lives.

This thesis has elucidated how the experiences Mennonites brought with them from Soviet Ukraine influenced how they adapted and formed relationships with their neighbours and the land. Some of their experiences facilitated adaptation, especially in the longer term; others created stumbling blocks. An analysis of stories from descendants of Namaka Farm Mennonites, non-Mennonite settlers from the surrounding area, and Siksika Elders has revealed how the wisdom derived from those times can inform intercultural relationships today. Archival research of relevant personal writings, commercial correspondence, and legal transactions during that time have added substantial insights.

A glance ahead from those hopeful times in 1930 illustrates the toll drought and economic depression would take on the community, as well as a noteworthy perspective on its

role. Nicolai Janzen, whose farm is now stewarded by the fifth generation of Janzens, was one of the families who persisted. In a 1939 *Der Bote* column, he wrote,

> The Namaka settlement has often been described as a transit camp, because the population of the settlement has often changed. There are probably only a few families left here from those who once took over the Namaka Farm. Also, last fall and this spring, eleven more families left us and moved east to Ontario to find a new home, or as one family father told me, to start a 'home of their own.'[144]

One of the families who left for Ontario in 1937 was Liese and Peter Jansen, with their children, Dad aged eleven, Albert six, Hilda four, and Irma two. They would move many more times and it was not until after Peter's death in 1945 that they found a home they could call their own.

Sixty years later, descendants from the original Namaka Farm settlers met for two days in Strathmore, AB to celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary. They shared similar reflections. In a publication capturing the proceedings, the unnamed author writes, "We came to Canada and to Namaka, where there was room for us, and found freedom and liberty of conscience. We had unique experiences in survival and orientation. Namaka became a staging area, a place to group and prepare for the move to designated locations and vocations."[145] It is hard to say whether those first Russlaender viewed it as temporary stop or potentially a permanent home in Canada. If it was the former, particularly if they were there after 1930, I have never heard it articulated as such.

Namaka Farm may have been seen in retrospect as a "transit camp," or a "staging area." However, now, almost 100 years later, I view it as land where the seeds of understanding that were sown many years before the arrival of Russlaender continue to bear fruit accessible to anyone who wants to partake. This is land where colonial vicissitudes brought disparate cultures together and left lessons relevant to us a century later.

Many Mennonites had recent cultural muscle memory of their economic prosperity and established way of life in imperial Russia. Most began life on Namaka Farm indebted from travel expenses and land, impoverished and traumatized, carrying their meagre belongings in battered wooden chests and suitcases. They were starting life again and needed to generate income and provide for their families, beginning with basic needs of shelter, food, and clothing, health care, and education. Not all had farming experience, although collectively, they likely had more expertise than "the English" settlers. Mennonites had to understand how to make commercial agriculture viable, and feed and shelter their animals. Many did not understand or speak English and tended to distrust non-Mennonites in positions of authority. They assumed they could farm in Alberta using the same approaches that had worked so well for them in Soviet Ukraine, but the soil, climate, and hydrology differed, requiring them to adapt their techniques, implements, and crops. As a group, those who remained were resourceful, resilient, and assertive. They knew how to make things work in ways that may not have appealed to or been accessible to other settlers.

In the new Soviet state, many Mennonites had been suspicious and unsure of how their lives would be affected by economic, political, and spiritual changes. Integration into the dominant culture here was more palatable and transparent. Despite the requirements during the first five years to farm and not draw from the public purse, they could maintain their culture, their religion, and their language. They had a large community to draw on for advocacy and support. Those on Namaka Farm had the additional leverage created by thirty-six families on one larger property. They could travel freely and purchase land. Once they became citizens,

they could vote! For all these advantages, they were genuinely and demonstrably grateful. Yet, none of these rights were available to their Siksika neighbours.

Wisdom comes from experience and awareness of how our actions affect others, both short and long term. We learn when things go well, but the greater lessons and the growth of wisdom emerge from our mistakes. The strengths the Russlaender embodied helped them through the transitions of the 1920s and 30s. Yet, some of the values they held tightly had unforeseen and inadvertent repercussions. At the same time Mennonites were giving thanks, whether they were aware of it or not, they were reinforcing the colonial hegemonic structure and perpetuating systemic injustices and racism. They did not see that at the time, but we have the advantage of looking back at the history they were creating and contributing to. Their ramifications can only be understood by including the perspectives of others who were involved in their interactions.

Observations in this research were portrayed through three primary chapters: how Mennonites acted to sustain themselves short- and longer term; how they developed intracultural, intercultural, and ecological relationships; and how their spirituality reflected their adaptation. Those categories cannot be separated into homogenous units if one seeks a comprehensive story. Likewise, it was not surprising that the greatest realizations emerging from the research came by bringing together stories from the same times and events, carried, and told through three different lenses, then observing and critically analyzing the whole, and deducing the implications. They were also the most difficult to process and accept.

The analysis of archival records and stories from descendants of Namaka Farm Mennonites, non-Mennonite settlers from the surrounding area, and Siksika Elders has

revealed how the wisdom derived from those times can inform intercultural and ecological relationships today. Recollections from other European settlers tended to convey how Mennonites were integrating into life in Canada in a positive and constructive light, although not without challenges. Siksika people, with a dramatically different culture and history, including ongoing egregious treatment, spoke from a different perspective. They were illuminating, insightful, and astute. Close reading of the relationships and interactions of those times, considering each perspective, creates the greatest wisdom.

The synthesis of stories that were told by white settlers, enlightened by these newly spoken stories from Siksika Elders, are shared, not to judge, but to learn so we can move forward together in healthy, reciprocal relationships. Four practices summarize key approaches to creating action for better intracultural, intercultural, and ecological relationships today.

Key Practices

Listening

Listening means listening holistically with all one's senses and asking questions. No one story or perspective can be taken at face value. The story of Mennonite adaptation on Namaka Farm could not have been told simply by listening to Mennonite stories. All stories involve interactions with others and those diverse perspectives and interpretations are necessary to correct the historical record. Prior to this research, stories from Mennonite settlers, non-Mennonite settlers, and Siksika people have not been synthesized, and they have not been analyzed through the lens of settler-colonialism. I saw the Mennonite culture as distinct from other European settlers, yet that is not what I heard from non-Mennonites. Partly this came from the Mennonite assertion of practicing the "only" right religion, thus better than those

from any other belief system. Siksika people saw them as more white settlers. School children saw their Mennonite cohorts as “the kids from Namaka Farm.” I viewed them as either refugees or immigrants, revered for the experiences they had survived during the social and cultural revolution in Russia. I certainly had not identified them as settlers, complicit even inadvertently in perpetuating systemic injustices.

Nonetheless, their lived spiritual practices of non-resistance, integrity, and charity earned them the respect of the Siksika people, an advantage not accessible to their British neighbours. Consequently, Siksika neighbours taught them how to care for the land, water, and animals, even before they could speak a common language or understand each other’s cultures. Hearing this from a Siksika Elder was information I had not heard about through Mennonite channels, and it evoked new awe for the Siksika people. Mennonites were occupying land stolen from them, yet Siksika were teaching them how to adapt and sustain themselves.

Stories conveyed from Mennonite and non-Mennonite settlers described interactions with Siksika using terms such as “begging,” “asking,” or “wanting,” yet terms used by Siksika described those same transactions with, “trading,” “buying,” or “bartering.” This terminology speaks volumes about the perceptions of power differentials when participating in unfamiliar customs. White settlers, including Mennonites, were helping the “less fortunate,” while the Siksika were engaged in a reciprocal relationship.

Reciprocity

The practice of Mennonite women going into Blackfoot homes to teach survival skills like quilting, food storage, and baking, along with conducting a Bible study, was appreciated by

Siksika women but not reciprocated by the Mennonites. I had never heard those stories. This would have been seen by Mennonites as a blend between charitable work and missions, nonetheless, their help in developing relationships and vital skills was well-received by the Siksika. However, when the Siksika women offered to teach Mennonite women bead and quill work, or how to tan hides, the Mennonite women did not accept this gift. Independence and self-sufficiency from outsiders, especially those considered less fortunate, was a weakness, and a detriment to developing rich intercultural relationships.

Elder C raised the same topic as it applied to agriculture. Elder C said,

> *Certainly, there were those good relationships. It wasn't violent because you folks preach nonviolence. And so, you know, there was certainly that goodwill. And up until I would say, ten years ago, our agriculture for the farmers here on the reserve, our agricultural technology, always lagged with your people, you know, the big tractors with the four-wheel drives and 40-foot cultivators or whatever the length is. And we've always lagged not because we're not smart enough, or we don't have those attributes of ingenuity and accommodation and all those kinds of things*.

Mennonite farmers benefitted from privileges not accessible to Siksika, but their gratitude does not balance the scales.

The bartering terminology example above suggested another question involving Siksika coming to Mennonite farms for gas for their vehicles. Did the Siksika see this as a reciprocal transaction, even though no cash passed hands? Treaty 7 Chiefs had agreed the "topsoil," to a depth of two feet could be used by newcomers for cultivation. They never gave up rights to the resources below that depth.[146] By getting gas from settler farmers, did Siksika see this as reciprocity? The settlers certainly did not.

Reciprocity is also a relevant practice for land-use and an area for future research. Taking more than we need, inundating the land with chemicals and pesticides to increase

production for financial gain, and depleting sub-surface resources, including water, for use beyond our needs, defies reciprocity. We need food and we need to survive, but exploitive, extractive practices beyond those needs harm all beings. We are living those consequences now.

Respect

Mennonite settlers would never have considered that they were showing disrespect to people, animals, or the land through their actions. They were "breaking" the land so it could produce crops for food, and they could pay their debts. Their courage and persistence in the face of adversity was admirable and traits I hope I carry and emulate. None of their actions would have been motivated by malice or harm. Food, shelter, and income were sorely needed for their survival. Yet their actions *did* cause ecological and cultural harm. Today we have more knowledge and awareness of structural injustices, and the responsibility to rectify them. Listening, as described above, is the first step. As well, showing respect for another being, human or other, including the land and the water, is a practice to be done every day. Bryan Little Chief said numerous times that, "*It's the religious sects* (like Mennonites and Hutterites*) that seem to have respect for us.*" He based that on how those "sects" treated the Siksika. As a result, Siksika were more open to forming relationships and extending a hand when they could. This happened when they taught Mennonites about the land and how to care for their animals. When we learn from each other, we all benefit.

Bryan Little Chief spoke of the ongoing unfulfilled need to be respected, referring to an invitation received from the Lieutenant Governor to speak at a celebration of Alberta's centennial about how Alberta became prominent. After careful thought, he said,

> *This province is built by prominent people like Peter Lougheed, and all these other people, Guy Weadick, and George Lane. It is a rich province. We even have a heritage account that should have been shared with us. But the thing is, that kind of history is in the museums. They forget who owned that land before. We helped to establish Alberta the way it is, but nobody gives us credit. Hopefully, reconciliation will bring some light to us because we're important. We were here. And we signed that treaty and that's how Alberta became prominent.*

Bryan's words demonstrated how short-sighted we can be when relating with others, intent on our own agenda.

Elder A, a distinguished and venerated scholar, added another example. Elder A said,

> *They tried to bring us in as advisory people to help them develop strategies. And when they want me to sit on an advisory committee, I refuse. I'm too busy at home at my own institution because we want to develop the courses, we want to offer them, we want to collect the tuition. Whenever I speak publicly, I say, 'Yes, you have good intentions, but you punt all those dollars to the public off-reserve, so they can do it. Why would I do it for you? We're doing it for ourselves*.

Here again, Elder A has highlighted how ongoing failure to reciprocate and respect the value of others harms interpersonal relationships. Moreover, we harm ourselves by not honoring the contributions of others.

Elder C spoke of our need to respect the land. Elder C said,

> *For the sake of money, financial economics, what are we doing to the land? We've got these big things that dig away at the earth, or drill into the earth, or farmers who pollute the land with all sorts of chemicals to enhance productivity. And west of here at Siksika, there's a bunch of farm land out there. And the watershed, precipitation, whether it is on Mennonite land, non-Mennonite land, all those chemicals flow into the Bow River. And downstream, there are disastrous consequences for us. Like we say, okay, we're dealing with the opioid crisis or the alcohol or the violence in our reserve. But the violence that has been committed off the reserves, is violating our health*.

Relating cultural crises on reserves to environmental degradation we have created, portrayed the issue in a deeper, more insightful way. The greatest lesson to me from this realization, is

asking ourselves, “What is downstream from our actions when we do not focus on the whole?” If we adopt that consideration as a daily practice, we will all be better off.

Sharing

The message I received five years ago at Writing-On-Stone Park said, “The land has stories you need to hear and share.” Hearing the stories through the generous participation of interview participants has divulged wisdom we would not otherwise have known. Knowing it means we must come to terms with it. Elder C spoke about a church group, whose reaction upon learning about atrocities committed by their culture against Indigenous people immediately said, “*It can’t be. We’re not that kind of people*.” That is what I had said about the Mennonites on Namaka Farm. They were not the kind of people who would cause harm. They were not “settlers!” As Elder C said, “*There's a denial that needs to be unmasked*.” Coming to terms with seeing my ancestors as settlers and acknowledging how their actions led to harm has been a long and painful process.

Education, with input from all relevant parties involved in creating the story, can address misunderstanding and ignorance. To receive the benefit from those stories, they, and their meaning, need to be shared so relevant action can be taken. This project has been one of the ways to share the stories from Mennonites, Siksika, and non-Mennonite settlers, along with their implications, and the wisdom we can apply today.

One action we can take is through advocacy, especially those of us who have privilege and resources to act when we see injustices and imbalances. Elder C said,

> *You've heard some of the dynamic, injustices that we continue to live with each day. You're a peace-loving people. And likewise, in our hearts, we're a peace-loving people who have been brutally assaulted in so many ways. If that's in your heart to*

> *tell that story, Amen. Glory to God. I know you'll shake the foundations to start just because they're going say it can't be true. We're good Canadian folks.*

Yes, we are. Yes, the Mennonites of Namaka Farm (and today) were peace-loving people. We're all good folks no matter where we are from, and we want the best for ourselves, our families, and our country. That requires regular action, asking questions, listening, more questions, and action, not indolence.

Recommendation for Future Work

My research uncovered relationships between the land and its peoples that were far more complex and unbalanced than could be addressed within a Master's thesis. Immigrants were attracted to Canada for better opportunities and a better life. White settlers, including my Mennonite ancestors, were given disproportionate advantages with which they built economic prosperity for themselves and Canada. Hegemony and structural imbalances, both intentional and inadvertent, perpetuated systemic injustices. How did the Siksika people react to this latest colonial incursion? How did the colonial government, in its pursuit of economic expansion, regulate each group? How did settlers—the beneficiaries of land, resources, and privilege—justify the disparity between themselves and Indigenous peoples? How were settlers complicit in perpetuating white supremacy and land degradation?

Drawing from the Mennonite culture from which I descended—a culture known for practicing peace, compassion, and charity—my doctoral project will explore the effects of colonization and agricultural development in southern Alberta in the early 1900s, centering on Mennonites and their relationships with others. Exposing structural inequities that led to desecration of water, land, and peoples is the subject of my continuing research.

Closing Prayer

Siksika Elders closed the Circle with a prayer to the Creator in their language. The words were unfamiliar, yet the sanctity and intent were clear. Most of what was spoken and then conveyed to me, remains private and sacrosanct, and what is shared here has been approved by those in attendance. They asked for intercession to help us understand each other and what we are working toward without negative thoughts. They prayed for my safe journey and that the project will be successful.

Their actions left me humbled and in awe. No one else had even suggested a prayer. An Elder who had barely spoken, gave me the warmest, heart-felt hug, and told me this project would be successful.

The Elders' comments stayed with me as I drove east across the prairies. What would make this project successful? Descendants of those who lived on Namaka Farm, Siksika, and the surrounding area between 1925 and 1940, have passed on the stories shared in this project. It is important to know our history and share the stories, no matter what our background. They all have lessons. Success to me, would be embodying the four practices above every day—listening, reciprocity, respect, and sharing. Each action will cultivate and revitalize intercultural and ecological relationships whatever our background, wherever we are.

Notes

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[36] Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, 159.
[37] Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, Developing Qualitative Inquiry (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 43, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315433370.
[38] Kathleen E. Absolon, *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know : Indigenous Re-Search Methodologies*, 2nd edition. (Halifax, N.S.; Fernwood Publishing, 2022), 316.
[39] Absolon, 2.
[40] Transcription and translation services by Alfred Redekopp.
[41] Everett L. Worthington et al., "Religion and Spirituality," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 67, no. 2 (2011): 205, https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20760.
[42] Worthington et al., 205.
[43] Robin M. Boylorn, "Gray or For Colored Girls Who Are Tired of Chasing Rainbows: Race and Reflexivity," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 2 (April 2011): 179, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708611401336.
[44] Karen Lumsden, *Reflexivity: Theory, Method, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2019), 2, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315692319.
[45] "Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen," 2.
[46] Klassen, "The Mennonites of the Namaka Farm," 10.
[47] W. R. Dick, "Memorandum Re Namaka Farm Pricing," November 13, 1926, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[48] Correspondence to CCA, "Rumours Re Mennonite Settlement at Namaka," May 12, 1925, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: This document is unsigned but given others mentioned within, it appears to be internal CCA correspondence, likely from W. R. Dick.
[49] Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, 141.
[50] Correspondence from T. O. F. Herzer to W. R. Dick, "Only Eight Families Experienced Farmers," May 13, 1925, CPR papers, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[51] F. L. Patton to T. O. F. Herzer, "Namaka Farm Mennonite Colony," May 11, 1925, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[52] F. L. Patton to T. O. F. Herzer, "Namaka Farm Mennonite Colony," May 11, 1925. Note: Mennonites were commonly conflated with Hutterites who had settled in colonies in the area. It is likely that the reference to "the colony" reflects that.
[53] "Rumours Re Mennonite Settlement at Namaka," May 12, 1925.
[54] R. C. Duncan, "Results of Conference Re Sale Namaka Ranch," September 16, 1926, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[55] W. R. Dick, "Memorandum Re Namaka Farm," June 26, 1928, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[56] G. W. Parker, "Memorandum Re: Namaka Purchasers," November 23, 1928, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1765, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[57] G. W. Parker, "Memorandum Re Namaka Farm December 3, 1928," December 3, 1928, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1765, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.

[58] John Warkentin, "Mennonite Agricultural Settlements of Southern Manitoba," *Geographical Review* 49, no. 3 (1959): 344, https://doi.org/10.2307/211911.
[59] W. R. Dick, "Memorandum Re Common Grazing Area," March 15, 1929, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1764, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: The year is absent from memo but inferred from location in history and the archives.
[60] W. R. Dick, "Memorandum Re Situation at Namaka Farm," May 23, 1928, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[61] Correspondence from W.R. Dick to R.C. Duncan, "Namaka Farm Individual Contracts," December 26, 1929, CPR fonds, M2269, B177, F1764, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[62] Cornelius Krahn, "Terek Mennonite Settlement (Republic of Dagestan, Russia)," in *GAMEO,* 1959, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Terek_Mennonite_Settlement_(Republic_of_Dagestan,_Russia).
[63] W.R. Dick to J. G. Gibbon, Esq, "Conditions of Mennonite Settlement," December 21, 1926, CPR Fonds, M2269, B113, F1047, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[64] W. R. Dick to S. G. Serjeant, Esq, "Letter Re Lands for Sale in Beaverlodge District," December 21, 1926, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[65] Gordon Berdahl, "16E-254 Klassen," Email message to author, January 27, 2017.
[66] Elizabeth Klassen, "Die Mennonitische Rundschau Beaverlodge, AB," trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, July 4, 1928, Vol 51 Iss 27 edition, https://archive.org/details/sim_die-mennonitische-rundschau_1928-07-04_51_27/page/n8/mode/1up. Original German text translated by family member.
[67] Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 184.
[68] Dennis Molinaro, "Deportation from Canada," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, October 20, 2011, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/deportation.
[69] Molinaro, "Deportation,".
[70] Siobhan Peeling, "Cossacks | International Encyclopedia of the First World War (WW1)," in *1914-1918-Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel and et al, October 8, 2014, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/cossacks.
[71] "CMBoC Immigration Card for Peter Janzen," July 3, 1926, Mennonite Heritage Archives, https://www.mharchives.ca/holdings/organizations/CMBoC_Forms/4300s/cmboc4310a.jpg. Note: Mennonite Heritage Archives will be abbreviated to MHA in subsequent entries.
[72] G. H. Thielmann to P. H. Thielmann, "Dear Brother," trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, March 2, 1929, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1764, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[73] P. H. Thielmann to G. H. Thielman, "Response to G. Thielmann re assignment," March 4, 1929, CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1764, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[74] "Indenture Agreement between Gerhard Thielmann and Peter Jansen," March 6, 1929, CPR Fonds, M2269, B123, F1194, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: This issue is also described in handwritten letters in German from George Thielmann to Peter Thielmann on February 28, 1929 and March 2, 1929.
[75] A. A. Töews, "Namaka, Alta, March 18, 1930," trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, *Der Bote*, April 2, 1930, MHA. Original German text: *Den 9. März, am Sonntag, feierten wir im Hause A. W. Klassens eine Hochzeit: Peter Janzen, Farmer auf Nakamafarm No. 3, verheiratete sich mit Witwe Liese Klassen, geborene Friesen, deren Mann in Grand Prairie vor circa 2 Jahren gestorben ist.*
[76] Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 189.
[77] Marg Watson, ed., *Trails to Little Corner: A Story of Namaka and Surrounding Districts* (Calgary, AB: Namaka Historical Community Committee, 1983), 632.
[78] Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 115.
[79] James Urry, "Wealth and Poverty in the Mennonite Experience: Dilemmas and Challenges," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 27 (2009): 15.
[80] Victor G. Wiebe, "Dennis, John Stoughton (1856-1938)," in *GAMEO*, March 2009, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Dennis,_John_Stoughton_(1856-1938).
[81] *Reiseschuld Ledger*, vol. 2363 (Winnipeg, MB: CMBoC, 1925), MHA, 63.
[82] *Reiseschuld Ledger*, vol. 2365 (Winnipeg, MB: CMBoC, 1926), MHA, 9.

[83] A.P. Willms, “Out of My Life” (n.d.), 23. Note: A. P. died in 1959 and references his 2nd wife whom he married in 1947. The book would have been written between those dates. A note in the typed English document, from the editor, a grandchild, says the manuscript was handwritten in German and translated.
[84] Willms, "Out of My Life," 23.
[85] Note: Quotes from oral interviews are italicized.
[86] Katie Willms, “Katie Willms Notes 14,” n.d.
[87] Agnes Amalie (Mollie) Willms Froese, “Life Story from 1925 to 1943,” 2000, 4.
[88] This house is likely the same one described by A. P. Willms.
[89] There may be other spellings of his name such as Nikolai but his children believe he identified himself as Nicolai.
[90] Nicolai Janzen, “My Life’s Story,” 1975, 6.
[91] Janzen, "My Life's Story," 9.
[92] “Province of Alberta Families Settled (Prior to July 31st., 1932),” July 31, 1932, CPR Fonds, M2269, Box 123, F1192, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[93] Richard D. Thiessen, “Herzer, Traugott Otto Francis (1887-1958)),” In GAMEO, December 2016, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Herzer,_Traugott_Otto_Francis_(1887-1958).
[94] Correspondence from W. R. Dick to T.O.F. Herzer and Bishop David Toews, “Letter to T.O.F. Herzer Re Farm Education Meeting,” April 10, 1930, CMBoC Fonds, Namaka Farm, Vol 1291 F752, MHA.
[95] CCA, “Mennonite Settlement at Namaka” (Canadian Colonization Association, 1930), CPR fonds, M2269, B164, F1667, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: The report is unsigned but based on location in archives and content, is from CCA.
[96] A. A. Töews, “Namaka, Alta., March 18, 1930.” trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, *Der Bote*, April 2, 1930, MHA. Original German text: *Wir fühlen’s immer mehr, dass wir eine große Familie bilden. Der Kaufkontrakt für die Zukunst ist in manchen Stücken bedeutend erleichtert worden, so dass wir hoffen, besser unser Fortkommen zu haben. Der alte Manager, Mr. David Thompson hat seinen Posten verlassen müssen, und jetzt haben wir Mr. A. W. Klassen, der in der Siedlungsbehörde in Calgary arbeitete, als Stellvertreter hier auf Namaka. Er wohnt samt Familie in dem großen Herrenhause und fühlt sich ganz heimisch hier unter uns. Seine Arbeit in Calgary setzt er weiter fort, indem er seine helbe Zeit derselben weiht. So haben wir jetzt immer jemand in der Nähe, der uns guten Rat in der Farmerei erteilen kann, weil er langjährige Erfahrung darin hat.*
[97] Robert P. C. Joseph, *21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act* (Port Coquitlam, BC: Indigenous Relations Press, 2018), 68.
[98] Watson, *Trails to Little Corner*, 632.
[99] Janzen, “My Life’s Story,” 9.
[100] Note: G. O. Hall, “Preserving Eggs in Water Glass,” *Poultry Science* 24, no. 5 (September 1, 1945): 451–58, https://doi.org/10.3382/ps.0240451.
[101] A. A. Töews, “Namaka, Alta., November 29, 1932.” trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, *Der Bote*, July 1, 1931, MHA. Original German text: *Es wehen bereits die Frühlingsstürme über Alberta’s Prairien und heben manche Staubwolke in die Luft... Wird’s auch im nächsten Jahre wieder so schwer gehen, wie es bereits nun schon etliche Jahre gegangen hat? Oder werden wir endlich aufatmen können, die Schuldenlast abschütteln und freie Menschen werden?*
[102] Töews, “Namaka, Alta, June 18,” trans. Alfred W. Redekopp *Der Bote*, July 1, 1931, MHA. Original German text: *Was viele Farmer in diesem Frühlinge mutlos machen wollte, waren die vielen heftigen und lang anhaltenden Stürme, die viel Schaden am Getreide angerichtet haben. Viele Felder sind ganz ausgeblasen, viele arg zugerichtet, andere dagegen wieder stehen im besten Grün. Man soll eben das Land und besonders die Brache anders bearbeiten, als man es von der alten Heimat gewohnt war.*
[103] H.S. Kent to Dominion Bank of Canada, “Oats for Namaka Farm,” December 22, 1933, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[104] Isaac Zacharias to George Lane Co. Ltd, “Request for Advance to Purchase Oats,” January 2, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: This letter is signed “Inspector” but based on other information in the file, is most likely from Zacharias.

[105] W. R. Dick, “Memorandum for Mr. Zacharias,” January 30, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[106] W. R. Dick, “Memorandum Re Namaka Farm,” August 15, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[107] W. R. Dick to United Grain Growers Ltd., “UGG Re Settlement for Grain Sales from NF,” October 9, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[108] K Flurey to CCA, “Response to Letter from CCA Re Grain Payments,” October 10, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[109] “Purchaser’s Name and Land Use/Crops on Namaka Farm 3,” nd, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: This undated document is likely from 1934, consistent with similar documents in the same folder.
[110] “Memorandum for Namaka Farm Re Mares,” November 12, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: Document is unsigned but given others archived together, likely from Isaac Zacharias, CCA.
[111] “Memorandum for Namaka Farm Re Binder Twine Distributed,” November 12, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: Document is unsigned but given others archived together, likely from Isaac Zacharias, CCA.
[112] Isaac Zacharias, “Memorandum for W. R. Dick Re Application for Seed Oats and Feed Oats,” December 6, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary.
[113] Isaac Zacharias, “Memorandum for W. R. Dick Re Sweet Clover,” December 6, 1934, CPR Fonds, M2269, B127, F1241, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary. Note: Nurse crops are annual plants seeded to help perennial plants become established. They also help prevent the growth of weeds, erosion, and damage from excessive sunlight. https://kingsagriseeds.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Nurse-Crops.pdf.
[114] Klassen, “Die Mennonitische Rundschau Beaverlodge, AB.”
[115] Mary Ann Levine, “The Fabric of Empire in a Native World: An Analysis of Trade Cloth Recovered from Eighteenth-Century Otstonwakin,” *American Antiquity* 85, no. 1 (January 2020): 51–71, https://doi.org/10.1017/aaq.2019.81. Note: European cloth was the most common object of exchange with North American Indigenous peoples. It was used to individual and group identy and indication of social power.
[116] Froese, “Life Story from 1925 to 1943,” 8.
[117] W. Norman Smith (Ed.), “Why Colonization Company Prefer Settlers on Land Whose Wants Are Few,” *The U.F.A.*, April 6, 1927, Vol. VI, No. 11 edition, UFHS. https://ia802207.us.archive.org/5/items/theufav6n11ufoa/theufav6n11ufoa.pdf
[118] Smith (Ed.), "Why Colonization Company," 2.
[119] W. Norman Smith (Ed.), “Immigration and Living Standards,” *The U.F.A.*, May 2, 1927, Vol. VI, No. 13 edition, 15, UFHS. https://archives.ufa.com/viewer/theufav6n13ufoa-15?q=mennonite&p=15
[120] Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 252.
[121] Library and Archives Canada, “I. and C. [Immigration and Colonization] - Rescinding O. C. [Order in Council] - 1915-06-09 - P. C. [Privy Council] 1915-1204 - Prohibiting the Landing in Canada of Hutterites and Mennonites Etc - ,” January 2, 1922, https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=ordincou&IdNumber=406639&q=order%20of%20canada%20%20mennonite.
[122] “Namaka U.F.A. Local 122 Minute Book 1928-1935” (U.F.A., n.d.), A14 Fond 33 Series 1 File 2, United Farmers of Alberta.
[123] Henry D. Goerzen, *Namaka, 1925-2000: Celebrating God’s Faithfulness from Generation to Generation* (Didsbury, Alta: Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 2000).
[124] Watson, *Trails to Little Corner: A Story of Namaka and Surrounding Districts*, 530.
[125] Joseph, *21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act*, 65.
[126] Joseph, *21 Things You May Not Know,* 34.
[127] Joseph, *21 Things You May Not Know,* 75.
[128] Watson, *Trails to Little Corner,* 628.
[129] “Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta – Namaka and Namaka Farm School Districts,” August 10, 2013, https://mennonitehistory.org/namaka/.
[130] See p. 42.

[131] John A. Töews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno, Calif: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1982), 32–37.
[132] Töews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 50.
[133] Töews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 515.
[134] Janzen, trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, *Der Bote*, March 1, 1939. Original German text: *Dieses wäre nun in kurzen Umrissen etwas über das Leben auf unserer Ansiedlung. Wenn es wirtschaftlich auch nicht immer nach Wunsch geht, so haben wir doch genug Ursache dankbar zu sein für das stille und ruhige Leben, das wir hier führen können, für Nahrung, Kleidung und Obdach und manches andere mehr*.
[135] "Rumours Re Mennonite Settlement at Namaka," May 12, 1925. CPR Fonds, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, U of Calgary
[136] John A. Töews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church,* 166.
[137] Watson, *Trails to Little Corner*, 620.
[138] Watson, *Trails to Little Corner,* 134.
[139] Marlene Epp, "Landskroner Mennonite Church," in *GAMEO*, July 1986, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Landskroner_Mennonite_Church_(Namaka,_Alberta,_Canada)&oldid=178046.
[140] Willms, "Katie Willms Notes 14."
[141] A. A Töews, "Namaka, Alta., November 29, 1932." trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, *Der Bote,* Dec. 7, 1932, MHA. Original German text: *Am 27. November feierten wir ein Missionsfest, wobei durch die lieben Festredner sowohl der Inneren als auch der Äusteren Mission gedacht wurde. Es waren von Crowfoot, Gem und Munson Predigerbrüder zugegen, die uns das teure Wort Gottes sagten. Der Missionsausruf an dem Tage mit der damit verbundenen Kollekte ergab über 100 Dollar. Es soll besonders der Judenmission in Winnipeg und der Indianermission in Oklahoma gedacht werden. Erstere ist uns deshalb wichtig, weil das Heil, dessen wir uns freuen, von den Juden kommt, und die Indianer sind unsere nächsten Nachbaren hier. Leider ist diese Indianerreserve der Schwarzfußindianer von der Katholischen Mission in Beschlag genommen worden. Ob es in Canada keine evangelische Mission unter den Indienern gibt? Könnte jemand von den Lesern des „Boten" darüber Aufschluss geben?*
[142] Sarah Carter, Dorothy First Rider, and Walter Hildebrandt, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, McGill-Queen's Native and Northern Series 14 (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 353.
[143] Donita Wiebe-Neufeld, "'That Is a Christian!,'" Canadian Mennonite Magazine, January 16, 2019, https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/%E2%80%98-christian%E2%80%99.
[144] N. Janzen, "Report from Carseland-Namaka-Strathmore District," trans. Alfred W. Redekopp, Der Bote, March 1, 1939. Original German text: *Die Namaka Ansiedlung hat man öfters als ein Durchgangslager bezeichnet, weil der Bestand der Ansiedlung schon oft gewechselt hat. Es sind wohl nur noch etliche Familien hier von denen, die einmal die Namakafarm übernahmen. Auch in dem letzten Herbst und in diesem Frühjahr haben uns wieder 11 Familien verlassen und sind nach dem Osten nach Ontario, gezogen, um dort ein neues heim zu finden*.
[145] Goerzen, Namaka, 1925-2000, 13. Note: The author is likely Henry D. Goerzen who organized the event.
[146] Carter, First Rider, and Hildebrandt, The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7, 144.

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