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**Manitoba Mennonite Archives And  
Canadian Mennonite Collective Memory**

BY

DON KROEKER

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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University of Manitoba  
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**by**

**Don Kroeker**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

**of**

**Master of Arts**

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## Abstract

“Collective memory” is the term given to the widely shared reconstructed versions of the past that are assembled by both individuals and groups in order to define their present and prepare for the future. The construction of a collective memory is often the result of conflict between opposing groups with differing agendas but collective memory can also serve as a unifying force that provides a society with inspirational symbols in a time of crisis.

Although archives contain many of the materials out of which collective memory is constructed, the literature is still largely silent about the contributions that they make to this process. This thesis focuses on two Mennonite archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba and the attempts that they have made to assist in the construction of a collective memory for their respective denominations.

Mennonite archives face two main problems. First, they serve Protestant denominations with an active interest in missions and social issues and are often forced to defend the spiritual necessity of preserving the past. Second, Mennonites are often uncertain as to whether they should be defined by their religious faith or their ethnicity. Many Mennonite leaders are reluctant to commemorate their ethnic heritage out of a fear that such an emphasis might prevent cross-cultural outreach.

The archives at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies serves a denomination (the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches) that has been heavily influenced by North American evangelicalism. It seeks to influence collective memory in its Conference by stressing the spiritual necessity of preserving archival materials. The

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies has been active in producing resources designed to inform its constituents of their Anabaptist heritage.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre has portrayed itself as more of an ecumenical institution, due in part to the more open nature of its denomination, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. It seeks to assist the larger Mennonite community in reconciling the religious and ethnic aspects of its heritage. For the supporters of the centre and archivists at the Conference of Mennonites in Canada collective memory should (ideally) act as a kind of balance against various sorts of distorting or limiting tendencies which may arise in the Canadian Mennonite community.

Both institutions are actively involved in the forging of a new collective memory that finds inspiration in the words and deeds of the first Anabaptists as well as in the suffering and triumph of the global Mennonite church.



## Acknowledgements

First of all, I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. Tom Nesmith, for introducing me to the topic of collective memory and for his patience and diligence in seeing this thesis through to its conclusion. I also want to acknowledge the helpfulness of the staffs at both the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Abe Dueck, Lawrence Klippenstein, Ken Reddig and Alf Redekopp graciously consented to be interviewed for this thesis and I thank them for their willingness to fit me into their busy schedules. Thanks also go out to the excellent people in the Document Delivery department at Neil John Maclean Library for their efforts in tracking down the articles that I requested.

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## Introduction

In this thesis I propose to examine the role that the two leading Manitoba Mennonite religious archival institutions (the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies) attempt to play in shaping the public memory of their supporting communities. Historians have reminded us that memory and identity, whether individual or public, are not fixed, but, as John R. Gillis writes: “representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena.”<sup>1</sup> In order to make sense of the world we live in, we are constantly revising our memories and tailoring them to suit our current identities. At the regional or national level, history often becomes a tool that aids in the construction of a public identity that serves a present purpose. This “public memory” is defined by John Bodnar as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society to understand both its past and its present, and, by implication, its future.”<sup>2</sup> According to Bodnar, the dominant power in a society attempts to impose its own version of the past on the general populace which responds in various ways, depending on how closely the official history resembles local and individual “memories”.

In recent years, a number of books have been published that seek to illuminate the history of the struggle to define public memory in the United States. Authors such as Michael Kammen, John Bodnar and David Glassberg describe how cultural institutions and events became focal points in the effort to shape the present by evoking the past.<sup>3</sup> These books maintain that museums, heritage villages, dramatic re-enactments and ethnic festivals were only the most prominent of the various means used by the political and cultural elites to create official histories around which their particular constituencies

would hopefully be united. As archivist Richard Cox points out, however, in a 1993 review essay, the authors mentioned above pay little attention to the role of archives in the creation of public memory. This is odd since archival institutions are products of public memory activities; a significant number have been created in conjunction with major celebrations such as anniversaries or centennials. Indeed, as Cox writes: “It can be logically argued that a large portion of our archival and historical manuscript repositories are themselves artifacts (or documents?) of public memory discussions and activities.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, archival institutions are making a concerted effort to prove that they are indeed vital components of the cultural and social fabrics of the communities that they serve. Consequently, any study of collective memory that neglects to examine the role of archives cannot be regarded as complete.

Archivists Gabrielle Blais and David Enns define archival “public programming” as “those activities that result in direct interaction with the public to guarantee the participation and support necessary to achieve an archival repository’s mission and fulfil its mandate.”<sup>5</sup> In the past, the public programming of most archival institutions was largely limited to the preparation of research guides and assisting individual researchers. In the last few decades, however, archivists have come under increased pressure to devote more resources to promotional and outreach activities in order to increase their visibility and compete more effectively for funding in an era of decreased public spending on the arts and culture.

An early supporter of increased public programming is American archivist Elsie Freeman, who urged that archival administration should be “client-centered, not materials-centered.” She accused archives of catering almost exclusively to a small

group of professional historians even though studies indicated that their principal and most significant users were casual researchers.<sup>6</sup>

David Gracy, another early proponent of increased archival public programming, wrote in 1985: “We must demonstrate to our contemporaries why archival services are fundamental to social cohesion now and in the future. Without their interest and concern, archival services gradually will cease to exist, and so preservation of materials for the future will terminate as well.”<sup>7</sup> He advised archivists to regard promotion and outreach as every bit as essential as the traditional activities of gathering, appraising and description.

The winter 1990-1991 issue of the Canadian archival journal *Archivaria* contained a number of articles that called for an increased focus on attracting the attention of the general public. Ian E. Wilson (now the National Archivist of Canada) wrote that archives should emulate museums by providing more structured historical experiences such as displays and classroom teaching kits.<sup>8</sup> Blais and Enns called for the incorporation of promotion and outreach into what they referred to as “core archival programs”. The four key concepts that they emphasized were “image, awareness, education, and use”. Archives must cultivate the image of a dynamic and vibrant organization worthy of support, promote an awareness of their services through the use of proven marketing techniques, provide a systematic education in the central principles of archival science, and assist users by providing more effective research tools.<sup>9</sup>

The increased emphasis on public programming also has its critics, including Richard Cox himself. One of the conclusions of Cox’s article on archives and collective memory is that, despite all their vigorous efforts at outreach and promotion, archives

have largely failed to make much of an impact on the public consciousness. Studies of collective memory show that there is “a natural ebb and flow of public interest in memory” and archivists need to be wary of trying to satisfy the whims of a fickle clientele. Cox adds: “This does not mean that they [archivists] should abandon the idea of public programming, but that they should keep in mind priorities and not allow themselves to be caught in the changing winds of society’s interests in the past.”<sup>10</sup> Terry Cook, while not rejecting public programming out of hand, cautions his colleagues against developing concepts of public service in isolation from the essential archival task of appraisal and description. “[A]rchives must not be turned into the McDonald’s of Information, where everything is carefully measured to meet every customer profile and every market demographic. . . .”<sup>11</sup>

Despite these words of caution, it is unlikely that too many archival institutions will abandon public programming in order to remain true to the teachings of archival pioneers such as Jenkinson and Schellenberg. There are too many cultural institutions competing for funding, and archives, like other potential recipients of governmental and/or private largesse, are feeling the obligation to demonstrate their usefulness and prove that they can exert a positive influence on the community from which they draw their support.

The desire to play a more active role in shaping the collective memory of the community should be especially strong in the archives of religious denominations or institutions. Most of their funding comes from the gifts of individual members who must be convinced that their money is indeed going to assist in some meaningful purpose. Archival and other cultural institutions can be especially vulnerable in a religious

organization that places a strong priority on outreach and evangelism. When preparing souls for the future is the main reason for existence, the preservation of the past may seem like an unnecessary distraction from the ultimate goal. Therefore, we should expect that the archives serving these organizations will be especially eager to demonstrate that they can exert a positive, and perhaps even a spiritual, influence on their benefactors. If they have no influence at all on the collective memory of the supporting community, their very existence may well come under attack.

A comprehensive examination of the role played by religious archives in the shaping of public memory is, of course, beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I propose to focus on the archival institutions of the two largest Mennonite denominations in Western Canada. The Mennonite Heritage Centre, which primarily serves the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC), and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, which serves the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren, are both located in Winnipeg and both are accountable to active denominations that place a high priority on maintaining an evangelical witness that transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre holds the records of a number of conferences and groups, including those of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. It also contains a significant collection of community and personal papers. In addition to its archival program, the Heritage Centre also mounts frequent exhibitions on Mennonite themes in its public gallery. The centre, located on the grounds of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, was dedicated in 1979.

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, located on the campus of the former Concord College, holds the papers of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren as well as a large collection of personal papers. The centre was designated as one of the three official Mennonite Brethren archival depositories in North America in 1975. It moved to its present location in 1979. The Heritage Centre and the Centre for MB Studies jointly publish the *Mennonite Historian* and organize and sponsor numerous historical commemorations and scholarly symposia.

Due to the nature of their parent denominations, these two archives should prove to be particularly interesting subjects for a thesis on collective memory. Although both denominations have their origins in the ethnic Mennonite community they believe that they possess a message that transcends ethnic boundaries. As a result of vigorous evangelistic programs, the two conferences have gained new members from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds in North America. In addition, overseas missions programs have resulted in the formation of new national churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The realization that the word "Mennonite" still possesses a strong ethnic connotation in North America has posed a dilemma for many Mennonite religious leaders. They often wonder how the general public can be instructed to make the distinction between a small North American ethnic group and a global faith that claims one million adherents from a wide variety of races and cultures. In a sincere effort to do away with any confusion, many Mennonite leaders try to downplay the ethnic heritage of their churches. In fact, many new churches started by Mennonite denominations do not have the word "Mennonite" in their official name and a few smaller denominations have

dropped it altogether. Celebrations that have a strong ethnic connotation, such the centennial of the arrival of the first Mennonites in Manitoba, are denounced by many Mennonite church members as an unnecessary diversion of resources from the more significant task of building the universal church.

On the other side of the debate are those who claim that a church cannot face the future without a firm knowledge of its past. They worry that the effort to transcend ethnicity will result in the loss of distinctive Mennonite teachings such as pacifism and make their denominations indistinguishable from other mainstream evangelical groups.

Mennonite archives, therefore, face a unique problem: Most of their funding comes from religious denominations but most of their holdings have been created by the ethnic group out of which the denominations originated. Many of their clients are researchers interested in studying the ethnic Mennonite population of Western Canada or genealogists interested in researching the origins of a particular ethnic Mennonite family. At the same time, however, these archives are supported by tithes from the members of their religious denomination and are thus under an obligation to justify why they should receive funding that might otherwise go towards the support of a missionary couple or the construction of a new church building. How can an archival institution participate in the formation of its denomination's collective memory if the denomination itself regards that memory as a handicap?

This thesis will attempt to demonstrate how the two most important Mennonite archives in Western Canada have responded to this dilemma. Due to the differing natures of their parent denominations, these two institutions each face their own unique set of challenges. Their stories provide the basis for the third and fourth chapters. The first



chapter contains a general overview of the field of collective memory studies while the second is a brief historical survey of the key features of collective memory in the Mennonite community of Western Canada.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> John Bodnar, "Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland," in *Commemorations*, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Cox, "The Concept of Public Memory and Its Impact on Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> Gabrielle Blais and David Enns, "From Paper Archives to People Archives: Public Programming in the Management of Archives," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Elsie T. Freeman, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Administration from the User's Point of View," *American Archivist* 47 (Spring 1984), pp. 112, 116.

<sup>7</sup> David B. Gracy II, "Our Future Is Now," *American Archivist* 48:1 (Winter 1985), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ian E. Wilson, "Towards a Vision of Archival Services," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Blais and Enns, "From Paper Archives," pp. 103-106.

<sup>10</sup> Cox, "The Concept," p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Terry Cook, "Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-1991), p. 127.

## Chapter One: Recent Trends in the Literature on Collective Memory

Our sense of identity, whether individual or corporate, is to a large extent governed by our impressions of the past. Memory, in both individual and corporate form, is the means by which these impressions are recovered. While we might like to think that our recollections of the past are reliable, most of us will grudgingly admit that memory is a notoriously untrustworthy tool. Even if we are largely ignorant of the scholarly literature on the subject, our own experience has shown us that our memory of a particular event may differ considerably from those of others who were present. As David Lowenthal writes: “However voluminous our recollections, we know they are mere glimpses of what was once a whole living realm. No matter how vividly recalled or reproduced, the past progressively becomes more shadowy, bereft of sensation, effaced by oblivion.”<sup>1</sup>

Scholars no longer regard memory as the simple act of retrieving information; it is now viewed as an active and constructive process in which the past is sometimes deliberately manipulated for current use. “To remember,” says the historian Barry Schwartz, “is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present.”<sup>2</sup> David Lowenthal, in somewhat loftier terms, describes the past as a “foreign country whose features are shaped by today’s predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges.”<sup>3</sup>

This deliberate manipulation of the past can occur on any number of levels but scholars of memory are particularly interested in the formation of the collective memory of groups, ranging from families and tribes to entire nations. Since a group’s identity is

determined to such a large extent by its past, the ways in which this past is commemorated and articulated are frequently contested.

The traditional scholarly view of memory, formed by the discipline of psychology, assumed that it would fade and lose its authority as time passed. By the 1930s, however, scholars were already expanding the frontiers of memory research to concentrate on its collective and persistent nature.<sup>4</sup> The study of collective memory did not attract much attention outside of France until the 1970s when it was seized upon by historians and social scientists dissatisfied with definitions of memory rooted in psychology. Subsequent scholarly activity has broadened the subject considerably, crossing many disciplinary boundaries in the process.<sup>5</sup>

The major inspiration behind the modern study of collective memory is Maurice Halbwachs, a French psychologist who died in the Buchenwald concentration camp shortly before the end of World War II. Halbwachs was a disciple and younger colleague of Emile Durkheim and, in his studies on memory, made use of his mentor's insight that creativity was not the result of individual accomplishment but largely rooted in collective phenomena. According to Halbwachs, memories were not the unique product of an individual consciousness but collective entities formed through social interaction: ". . . [I]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories."<sup>6</sup> The past was not simply preserved but rather reconstructed on the basis of the present. In each generation, a collective framework existed on which individual memories were placed to be shaped and molded in order to conform to the prevailing ethos of the time. "Society from time to time," said Halbwachs, "obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous

events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complicate them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess.”<sup>7</sup>

Memories, therefore, cannot be produced in a vacuum. It is the framework of collective memory that keeps alive many details that an individual could not possibly remember without outside assistance. This same framework also provides the platform on which individuals construct their own histories, usually without any conscious sense of its existence.<sup>8</sup>

Halbwachs’ approach to the study of memory seems to be verified by the research produced by scholars investigating how memory is shaped in various groups. Barbara Allen, for example, noticed in her study of pioneer memories in the Pacific Northwest that the recollections of the early settlers sounded alike in spite of differences in locale, time period and individual experience. She theorised that people could only perceive of themselves as pioneers after the fact; their individual recollections of the pioneer experience were dependent on a collective consciousness that had been shaped through organizations and activities intended to reify the pioneer experience. As a result of this collective activity, an acceptable narrative framework was created around which individuals could organize their experiences. The tendency towards conformity was aided by oral historians whose notions of what to ask their subjects were shaped by this communal reminiscing. Ultimately, the pioneer narratives were not so much about what happened but about what both the narrators and their audiences thought ought to have happened.<sup>9</sup>

Religious experiences are also not immune from this phenomenon. The validity of an individual's personal faith testimony, for example, does not have to be denied by acknowledging the likelihood that it has been shaped by the collective consciousness of a particular denomination or sect. In a lecture on the topic of memory in the Mormon Church, Roger Launius notes that personal testimonies of church members often include a description of a unique religious experience resulting from a pilgrimage to a church historic site. He believes that their similarity is the result of a collective memory that has been constructed over many years and is repeatedly reinforced through the conscious efforts of church leaders to create a specific historic ideal.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of (or perhaps because of) Halbwachs' influence on the future course of collective memory studies, his ideas have inevitably attracted their share of criticism. American historian Barry Schwartz has challenged the notion that collective memory, particularly in a modern literate society, is totally detached from historical memory: "Given the constraints of a recorded history, the past cannot be literally constructed: it can only be selectively exploited."<sup>11</sup> In addition, this exploitation cannot be arbitrary; events selected for commemoration must have some factual significance to begin with if they are to be successfully incorporated into the collective memory of a group.<sup>12</sup>

James Fentress and Chris Wickham have faulted Halbwachs for placing too much emphasis on the collective nature of social consciousness and neglecting to investigate how an individual consciousness might relate to the collective consciousness of which it is a part. They stress the need to elaborate a conception of memory that does not simply portray the individual as an automaton passively obeying an interiorized collective will. Instead, they argue that each individual accommodates remembered facts into a

predisposed internal context. For this reason they prefer to use the term “social memory” rather than “collective memory”. Fentress and Wickham describe “social memory” as a continual process of active restructuring in which various elements may be retained, reordered or suppressed, depending on the disposition of the individual.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these criticisms, the key theme of Halbwach’s writings – that memory is a social construction rather than an individual psychological response to past events – has formed the basis for most of the subsequent work on the subject of public memory. As a result, customs and celebrations once regarded as timeless traditions are now exposed as rather recent constructs deliberately designed to appear more venerable than they really are. Eric Hobsbawm’s groundbreaking work on the nature of tradition provides numerous examples of this phenomenon that was particularly prevalent in the 30 or 40 years preceding the First World War.<sup>14</sup> Another historian, in fact, describes the later nineteenth century as an age of “invention of tradition.”<sup>15</sup> Rapid social and political changes, including the birth of a new industrial economy and the emergence of the modern European nation-states provided the impetus for a search for new traditions that could be used by the state to justify its existence. Other scholars have uncovered further evidence of the increase in invented or revived tradition during periods of social and political upheaval. Yael Zerubavel, for example, has documented the means by which the modern Israeli state created and maintained an almost entirely new set of traditions to provide a sense of stability in a strange and often hostile environment.<sup>16</sup>

If a new tradition is to be widely accepted, it must be in accord with the community’s core belief system. Zerubavel suggests: “Whatever is invented must be adjusted to meet various social considerations and cultural conventions. Most of all, the

invention must also have an emotional appeal for the general public if it is to be at all viable.”<sup>17</sup> In modern Israel, for example, new commemorative rituals and narratives were not simply imposed from above but were the result of an ideologically motivated collaboration between educators, writers, politicians, ordinary settlers and Hebrew youth.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the success of a new tradition depends on its ability to pass as an old tradition. Zerubavel writes: “An awareness of its deliberate construction inevitably undermines its acceptance as tradition.”<sup>19</sup> Halbwachs himself concurs: “Society must persuade its members that they already carry these beliefs within themselves at least partially, or even that they will recover beliefs which had been rejected some time ago.”<sup>20</sup>

The means by which the past is manipulated to serve the needs of the present have come under intense scrutiny by historians and other academics. It is generally conceded that tradition can aid in bringing about social cohesion in an otherwise heterogeneous society. According to Halbwachs, the past is distorted as a means of introducing greater coherence. Society can survive only if there is a sufficient unity of outlook among the individuals and groups comprising it. Therefore, society tends to erase from its memory anything that might create dissension between individuals or distance one group from another.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, there is also the fear that this manufactured cohesion is simply a tool used by controlling elites to maintain their supremacy. Le Goff states bluntly that collective memory is “an instrument and an objective of power.”<sup>22</sup> Fentress and Wickham describe the articulation of public memory as belonging essentially to the political elites; it is only rarely contested by other social groups and very rarely with



success. These elites are given assistance by the education system and media who serve as mouthpieces for their propaganda and also by the professional historians whose function is "less to analyze the 'pastness' of the past than to give an objective veneer to the preoccupation with self-legitimation of national bourgeoisies."<sup>22</sup> George Lipset sees evidence of this conspiracy in the denigration of so-called "popular culture" by the political and academic elite. Popular culture is feared by the elites because it provides a venue for those who have traditionally been denied a voice in society. It creates a collective memory of sorts for an audience that otherwise possesses no shared history and no reciprocal responsibilities and obligations. Therefore, although the creators of popular culture may have agendas every bit as serious as those of "high" cultures, they are denied access to the arenas of serious discussion.<sup>24</sup>

Other historians, while not denying the existence of memory manipulation by the elite, argue that the resistance from below is much greater. Instead of a simple top-down model, they picture a fierce struggle between a number of competitors with no one group ever gaining complete control. John Bodnar, who has written extensively about the dynamics surrounding public commemoration in the United States, describes public memory as the clash of official and vernacular interests. Cultural and political leaders orchestrate commemorative events for any number of self-serving reasons, such as the desire to calm anxiety over political change, the elimination of citizen indifference toward official concerns or the promotion of exemplary patterns of citizen behaviour. Ordinary citizens, by contrast, react to these actions of their leaders in a variety of ways. They may sometimes accept the official interpretations of reality but they are just as likely to come up with their own alternative interpretations. Sometimes, an official

agenda is appropriated by the vernacular interests and put to a use that the official interests had not intended. So, for example, a national flag may be designed to promote patriotism and reinforce the citizenry's sense of duty to the state but it can also be appropriated as a symbol in a fight to protest racial oppression or to demand more political rights for the disenfranchised.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, any control that an elite possesses over the collective recollections of the larger group will inevitably dissipate with the passage of time. The continuing conflict between personal and public memory prevents any single interpretation or intention from controlling how an event or personage will be perceived in the future. As Gary Taylor writes, a powerful person or group may erect a monument but they cannot force future generations to gather there.<sup>26</sup>

While differing to a slight extent in the finer points of their theoretical models, the scholars mentioned above all seem to share the notion that collective memory is a product characterised by manipulation and divisiveness, arising out of the clashes between various economic and social classes. The only positive effect it seems to produce is heightened class consciousness among the oppressed. Barry Schwartz has countered this Marxist model with a much more positive view of collective memory as a largely positive force that can be of inestimable value in times of crisis.

Collective memory, says Schwartz, is not only a "model of society" but a "model for society". He describes it as a program that defines a society's experiences, articulates its values and goals and produces cognitive, affective and moral orientation for realizing them.<sup>27</sup> Schwartz notes that sociological literature is filled with accounts of how

collective memory symbolically encodes and reproduces class conflicts and interest structures but contains little or no information about memory as an entity in itself.<sup>28</sup>

Memory, according to Schwartz, is an ordered system of symbols that makes experience meaningful. Drawing on the work of Clifford Geertz, he writes: “Collective memory is located in society’s ‘latent pattern maintenance’ subsystem, whose agents representing both the state and civil society, sustain cultural values by invoking the past and recounting its grand narratives.”<sup>29</sup> In Schwartz’s model, a primary framework of shared memories, not depending on or harking back to any prior or original interpretations, underlies our collective consciousness. This framework serves as the background for the perception and comprehension of current events.<sup>30</sup>

“Keying” is the term that Schwartz uses to describe the mechanism of the interpretative process that makes shared memories continually relevant for succeeding generations. In this process, the meaning of activities understood in relation to one primary framework is transformed by comparing them with activities understood in relation to another: “Keying arranges cultural symbols into a publicly visible discourse that flows through the organizations and institutions of the social world.”<sup>31</sup> To illustrate this, Schwartz describes how the image of Abraham Lincoln was successfully invoked by the United States in the early 1940s as a means to inspire and define America’s entry into the impending global crisis. The image of Lincoln as the honest and upright gentleman reluctantly entering into a bloody conflict in order to uphold what he knew to be right was deeply ingrained into the collective psyche of the nation. It took very little effort on the part of the nation’s leaders to transform Lincoln into a symbol of fortitude that would help define America’s participation in the fight against fascism.<sup>32</sup>

Schwartz disputes Bodnar's assertion that any image of the past is a product of elite manipulation. A conflict theory that assumes dissension to be the natural state of society ignores the very real possibility that the image-makers might embrace the same values and goals as their audience; shared symbols can be invoked to articulate rather than manipulate sentiment. Schwartz worries that we are living in a "post-national" age when national memories are losing the capacity to mobilize and heal; he wonders if collective memory will be able to retain its traditional capacity to organize experience and endow it with human values. He notes that collective memory, as a model for society, has inspired resistance and reform as well as consensus and conformity. His most pressing concern is the fact that American history is now regarded in many quarters as a source of shame. Schwartz asks whether a nation is weakened when its grand narratives are discredited and its citizens conceive of the past as something to be repented of rather than embraced.<sup>33</sup>

Schwartz's alternative model, with its much more optimistic view of the unifying power of collective memory, is a valuable counterpoint to the prevailing trends in the field and should prove especially useful in an analysis of a religious group, usually the possessor of a potent set of latent symbols. It is impossible, however, to ignore the numerous accounts of conflicts that arise around the creation of a collective memory. The power to define the past is also the power to determine the present and thus, with the stakes as high as they are, the efforts of the dominant component of a group to shape its collective memory seldom go unchallenged. This struggle usually climaxes over the various forms of commemorative activity employed by the group to publicly articulate and celebrate its past.

In his study of the creation of collective memory in the modern state of Israel, Zerubavel emphasizes the central importance of commemoration in our understanding of the dynamics of memory change. The vitality of collective memory is fuelled by a wide range of formal and informal commemorative activities such as holiday celebrations, festivals, monuments, songs, films, dramas and parades. Despite the best efforts of historical writers and researchers, it is these commemorative events that play the primary role in shaping a society's knowledge of the past.<sup>34</sup>

Zerubavel posits the existence of a "master commemorative narrative" that is fashioned selectively and creatively by drawing upon the available historical sources. This "master commemorative narrative" is designed to provide an overall sense of group identity by demonstrating the existence of roots in a distant past. It tends to focus in particular on the event that marks the group's emergence as an independent social identity.<sup>35</sup>

Existing alongside and challenging the hegemony of the "master commemorative narrative" is a "countermemory". This "countermemory" offers a divergent commemorative narrative that represents the views of marginalized individuals or groups within the society. Zerubavel explains: "The commemoration of the past can thus become a contested territory in which groups engaging in a political conflict promote competing views of the past in order to gain control over the political center or to legitimate a separatist orientation."<sup>36</sup>

This conflict model of commemoration is expanded upon in the writings of John Bodnar, who tends to define struggles over memory in terms of class. He regards the shaping of a past worthy of public commemoration as a struggle for supremacy between

the advocates of various political ideas and sentiments. In his view, the cultural leaders who engineer public commemorative activities are usually middle-class professionals whose careers and social positions depend upon the survival of the very institutions that are being celebrated. Commemorative events almost always stress the desirability of maintaining the social order while dramatic or revolutionary events from the past are re-interpreted in ways that soften the idea of transformation and instead promote patriotism and national growth. The rest of society (or the “ordinary people”), in contrast, will usually participate in these events but will keep a watchful eye to ensure that their interests are protected.<sup>37</sup>

Evidence of this struggle between official and vernacular interests is provided in David Glassberg’s study of historical pageantry in America. This unique form of commemoration attained its peak popularity in the early twentieth century, mainly as a result of its use by reform groups to undergird their attempts to improve society. It was hoped that these pageants would provide tangible evidence of the community’s connection to its past and that the resulting sense of continuity would serve as a psychological keel amid rapid social change.<sup>38</sup>

The desired effect, unfortunately, was not always achieved. The high-blown patriotism characteristic of these events was often ignored by both participants and spectators who usually had other motives for their involvement. As Glassberg demonstrates in his book, these could range from the chance to flaunt one’s wealth or influence to the expression of ethnic or cultural identity. As in other public forms of commemoration, the power to articulate the meaning of the past for the larger group is not absolute. Public historical imagery is not simply a collective representation or an

expression of the culture speaking for itself but the result of a continuous struggle between competing groups. Glassberg notes that civic officials will occasionally even include dissenting voices in their public historical representations, thus giving rise to the possibility that the desired impression will be subverted.<sup>39</sup>

The power of the official culture is further limited by the heterogeneity of the audience it is trying to cultivate. Depending on their individual backgrounds, audience members attach different meanings to the public images they are shown. These alternative meanings are learned from other sources of tradition, such as family customs and tales, co-workers, friends, or the teachings of a particular religious denomination or sect.<sup>40</sup>

The current state of public memory is a subject of some debate. Bodnar writes: "By the latter part of the twentieth-century public memory remains a product of elite manipulation, symbolic interaction and contested discourse. Leaders continue to use the past to foster patriotism and civic duty and ordinary people continue to accept, reformulate, and ignore such messages."<sup>41</sup> John R. Gillis, however, claims to see a new democratisation in memory that has slowly developed in the last few decades. He regards the turning point as the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. Instead of a statue of a general or a tomb dedicated to an unknown soldier, the wall includes the names of every American soldier who died in the war. This inclusiveness is a symbol of the growing conviction that everyone now deserves equal recognition at all times in equally accessible places.<sup>42</sup>

Gillis also notes the declining influence of traditional narratives of the past. In an age of rapid globalisation, the nation-state is losing its distinctiveness and people are

devoting more time to local, ethnic and family memories. The lack of a grand overarching narrative places an increasing burden on individuals, who are forced to place greater reliance on the resources of their immediate or local surroundings. In fact, says Gillis, the possession of only a single memory is frowned upon in our modern era that celebrates diversity and disparages monocultural nationalism. An increasing number of persons are forced to contend with multiple identities and multiple memories.<sup>43</sup>

An excellent example of this phenomenon is the Mennonite population of North America. Apart from the obvious national and regional identities that accompany life in any locale, North American Mennonites face the challenge of dealing with both an ethnic identity and a religious identity that are not easily separated. This theme will be expanded upon in the next chapter but, for the moment, it is necessary to briefly examine these two facets of identity on a more general level.

Ethnic identity, like other forms of identity, is now considered by many scholars to be more a conscious construction rather than simply some primordial inheritance bestowed at birth. Anya Peterson Royce defines an ethnic group as “a reference group invoked by people who share a common historical style . . . based on overt features and values, and who, through the process of interaction with others, identify themselves as sharing that style.”<sup>44</sup> She defines ethnic identity as “the sum total of feelings on the part of group members about those values, symbols, and common histories that identify them as a distinct group.”<sup>45</sup>

Developing and maintaining an ethnic identity is especially important when a particular group finds itself in an alien environment where absorption by the dominant culture appears to be imminent. Suddenly, it becomes imperative to define and create an



ethnic culture that can unite the group and mobilise members in the effort to achieve economic and political influence. Royce emphasises the necessity of symbols, such as language, music, dances and historical and/or mythical heroes, in maintaining a viable identity system.<sup>46</sup> Noting the similarity between ethnic and religious identity, Richard Handler writes: “To serve as a collective symbol heritage must be widely accepted by insiders, yet inaccessible to outsiders.”<sup>47</sup> The socially binding traditions that make up this heritage must be accepted on faith and not reason. Once the need exists to articulate and explain the meaning of a symbol it has lost its effectiveness and needs to be replaced. This is one of the reasons why flexibility is also an integral component in the maintenance of ethnic identity. The relationship between a minority group and the dominant culture will inevitably change over time. At the outset, the hostility of the dominant culture or simply the need for companionship in an alien environment may be sufficient to keep the group together. As its social and economic status improves, however, and as its members become more fully integrated into the dominant society, new strategies are needed to maintain a distinct identity.<sup>48</sup>

John Bodnar, in his study of ethnic festivals in the United States, asserts that these new strategies are not the result of chance. Just as in the dominant culture, there is a struggle in smaller groups as well over who will take the dominant role in shaping collective memory. In a description of the commemorative activities of the Swedish community in Illinois, Bodnar notes that the earliest celebrations centred on the first pioneers and their perseverance in the quest for religious freedom. Gradually, however, as the ties to these early settlers became more distant, the formal ceremonies began to be followed by various forms of entertainment that allowed participants to use the occasion

as a means to reaffirm social ties and pursue personal pleasures. Further changes took place when the group's social and economic elite took over the celebrations. Having achieved success through ties to American political and economic institutions, the leadership class was motivated less by the need to affirm an ethnic or cultural distinctiveness than by the desire to promote local businesses and affirm its loyalty to its adopted country. Consequently, ethnicity tended to be downplayed and was portrayed as little more than an exotic overlay that posed no threat to the dominant culture.<sup>49</sup> Bodnar

notes:

Patriotism and the reformulation of homeland symbols into bland expressions such as food or music did not come about because of some vague assimilative process but because of the determined efforts of powerful people within and outside of ethnic communities and institutions to define the celebration and presentation of ethnic heritage.<sup>50</sup>

The struggle over the collective memory of an ethnic group, however, pales in comparison to the epic battles over the control of the past that continually occur in the religious realm. Religion, after all, claims to have the ultimate answers to the three questions that are central to any collective identity: "Where did we come from? Why are we here? What is our ultimate destination?"

Scholars specialising in memory studies have not overlooked the importance of memory in the two religions that have had the most significant impact on Western culture and society. Le Goff points out that both Judaism and Christianity are both firmly anchored historically and theologically in history. Christianity, for instance, locates its origin in the events of the Passion Week, a definite and datable occurrence that serves as a focal point for all subsequent commemorative activities.<sup>51</sup>

Paul Connerton has studied the formation of social memory by what he defines as "commemorative ceremonies." These are ritual performances characterised by stylisation

and repetition that are performed out of a sense of obligation. Many of these ceremonies make their connection to the past explicit by ritually re-enacting a narrative of events that is held to have occurred at some definite point in history. The constant repetition of the ceremony over time helps to shape collective memory and embed it in the group's psyche until it becomes a matter of routine and is performed almost instinctively without any conscious thought given to the reasons for its origin. Connerton distinguishes three main distinguishable modes of articulation: Calendrical, Verbal and Gestural. Christianity, of course, contains excellent examples of all three of these.<sup>52</sup>

The Calendrical mode refers to the commemoration of the past through the organisation of time. In Christianity, rites of remembrance are focused on the life of Jesus through the annual calendar. Literary scholar Frank Kermode has described the means by which the Christian liturgical calendar used to provide a framework around which to organise personal memories. For instance, a particular event would be recalled as having happened just before Christmas or a few weeks after Easter.<sup>53</sup> The verbal mode can be found in the various oral exercises that are performed in religious services, including the daily mass, the prayers and the recitation of the creeds. It can also be marked by the insistence on using a particular language such as Latin or, in the case of the Mennonites, Low German. The gestural mode, which Connerton refers to as "sacred action," refers to physical activities that recreate past events in stylised form. Christians, for instance, partake of the bread and wine in Communion in a symbolic re-enactment of the crucifixion. The rite of baptism is also a stylised recreation of the death and resurrection of Christ that represents the believer's participation in the atonement.<sup>54</sup>

Halbwachs himself took considerable interest in the origins of Christianity. He was particularly eager to demonstrate how Christian traditions had formed as a result of collective memory acting over generations. He maintained: “[Religious memory] does not preserve the past but reconstructs it with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts, and traditions left behind by the past, and with the aid moreover of recent psychological and social data, that is to say, with the present.”<sup>55</sup>

Halbwachs noted how the religion’s leaders gave privileged status to the early years of Christianity. The period from the birth of Christ to the death of the first apostles was essentially taken out of time and detached from all developments that followed. The life of Christ and the early missionary efforts of his first followers as recorded in the Canonical literature were to form the core of Christianity’s collective memory, a memory that was now claimed to be permanently and completely established for all time. All subsequent philosophies and modes of thought would either have to adapt themselves to this dominant representation or be systematically ignored.<sup>56</sup>

The establishment of tradition in Christianity developed as the events on which it was based gradually receded into the past. At the outset, Christianity was immersed in the present and freely interacted and compromised with other contemporary groups. The leaders of the faith, however, soon realised that the groups it was attracting were preserving their own memories and that this mass of new remembrances could not easily be located within the frameworks of its own thought. It was at this point that traditions began to be established and official doctrines formulated. Christianity’s leaders were transformed from functionaries and administrators to a hierarchy of clerics that could impose its authority on the laity. Christianity thus became a closed tradition that, at least

in theory, separated itself from the world and turned entirely to the past for its sustenance.<sup>57</sup>

Halbwachs also attempted to describe what he saw as the essential conflict that shaped the church's collective memory. This is the ongoing struggle between "dogmatics" and "mystics" to control and define tradition. As beliefs harden into dogma and ritual they gradually lose their luster and need to be rethought and reproduced in order to appeal to the next generation. Mystics typically draw attention to heretofore neglected aspects or personages of Christianity and accuse the dogmatics of hewing too closely to dead ritualism and dogma. The mystics, however, despite claims to the contrary, still act within the confines of established tradition and interpret the past in terms of the present.<sup>58</sup>

The dogmatics, in turn, may accept the mystics after an initial reluctance if the ideas that are presented can be incorporated within the church's basic theology. So, attacks against dogmatism are eventually appropriated by the dogmatics themselves and become part of a new and improved dogma that will inevitably come under attack by the next generation of mystics. Both factions are necessary to ensure the continued vitality of the church. Mystics are needed to shake up established tradition and ensure that the spiritual life of the individual remains fresh and vibrant while dogmatics are needed to protect the basic structures of theology and prevent spiritual anarchy by channelling new ideas into areas where they can further the goals of the church.<sup>59</sup>

The religiously devout might object to the idea that their doctrinal statements are simply the result of an ongoing power struggle but even scholars sympathetic to a particular faith are acknowledging the power that is obtained through the control of

collective memory. The Mormon historian Roger Launius has described how the General Authorities of the LDS Church have sought to manage its collective memory in order to ensure the strongest possible organisation. Over the years the institutional church has defined the way in which major issues and themes are to be recounted and interpreted and has permitted only a moderate degree of latitude from the agreed-upon story. “The official consensus,” says Launius, “amounts to an official effort to control memory for the Saints and to create an identity with specific attributes, an identity that has led to the development of a number of *a priori* assumptions about what is good and bad in Mormon history.”<sup>60</sup> The Mormon historical community, according to Launius, has largely gone along with the official line: “[M]ost writing on the Mormon past has been oriented toward producing a rather simple, celebratory, nonanalytical narrative that argues in subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways that God’s word as defined by the Mormon prophets is spreading throughout the world in a never-ending advancement of the Church.”<sup>61</sup> The result, claims Launius, are historians who write histories that, if not blatantly, at least tacitly defend the faith. As the following chapters will indicate, a similar trend can be discerned in the Mennonite church and it is only in the last few decades that serious challenges to the dominant accounts have arisen from historians working both within and apart from the traditional faith community.

Although Christianity focuses on the ritualistic commemoration of the life and death of Christ, the very nature of the faith has also caused much ambivalence and even some hostility towards memory. Although a large part of the Bible is composed of historical literature, there is also an emphasis on forging ahead towards the end of the world and the coming of the heavenly kingdom. The decision to follow Christ and

renounce the world is explicitly described in the New Testament as a death and rebirth experience. Sins, both past and present, will be forgiven upon confession and then forgotten by an all-knowing God.<sup>62</sup> To the Apostle Paul, achieving the will of the God involves “forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.”<sup>63</sup> As a result, attempts to re-examine the sins of the past have often met with disapproval from Christians who believe that forgiveness cannot be accomplished without forgetfulness.

Ambivalence over preservation of the past also arises out of the belief that the Church’s main objective is to proselytise and save souls. An excessive focus on the past is regarded as an unnecessary and possibly even harmful activity that prevents the faithful from carrying out their mission. Consequently, historic church buildings may be torn down and replaced with modern sanctuaries that can accommodate larger crowds and, as the following chapters indicate, symbols and names with historic significance may come to be disparaged as cultural barriers that hinder evangelistic outreach.<sup>64</sup>

Mennonites, in particular, have struggled to transcend ethnicity and bring their distinctive faith to a wider world. As the Mennonite church, both in North America and around the world, becomes more ethnically and culturally diverse, efforts are growing to forge a new, distinctive Mennonite identity that takes into account the collective memories of all the various groups that now make up the global Mennonite church. The next chapter will specifically focus on the role that collective memory has played in the development of the Mennonite church with a special focus on the Russian Mennonites who settled in Western Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.192.

<sup>2</sup>Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61:2 (Dec. 1982), p.374

<sup>3</sup>Lowenthal, *The Past*, p. xvii.

<sup>4</sup>Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* 12:2 (June 1995), pp. 214-215.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 215-216.

<sup>6</sup>Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>9</sup>Barbara Allen, "Shaping History: The Creation of a Collective Pioneer Experience," *Columbia* 7:4 (1993), pp.6-13.

<sup>10</sup>Roger D. Launius, "Mormon Memory, Mormon Myth, and Mormon History," *Journal of Mormon History* 21:1 (1995), pp. 6-7. I have also noticed, through my experience as a member of a rural Mennonite church heavily influenced by evangelicalism, that the personal testimonies of baptismal candidates tend to follow the same general narrative framework. In this framework, a childhood conversion is followed by youthful waywardness; after a recommitment at some event such as a church camp or a revival meeting, the individual's faith is gradually strengthened until he or she makes the decision to take a public stand by receiving baptism.

<sup>11</sup>Schwartz, "Social Context," p. 396.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), pp. ix-x, 58.

<sup>14</sup>See his essay "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 263-307.

<sup>15</sup>Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in Thomas Butler, ed., *Memory, History, Culture and the Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 167.

<sup>16</sup>Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*



<sup>20</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, Trans. By Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Clemons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, p. 127.

<sup>24</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 6-7, 20.

<sup>25</sup> John Bodnar, "Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland," in John P. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 75-76.

<sup>26</sup> Gary Taylor, *Cultural Selection* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II," *American Sociological Review* 61:5 (1996), p. 909.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 910-911.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 911.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 923-924.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>37</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 13-16.

<sup>38</sup> David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2, 64.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in Gillis, ed., *Commemorations*, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>44</sup> Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies in Diversity* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Handler, "Is 'Identity' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept," in Gillis, ed. *Commemorations*, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup> Royce, *Ethnic Identity*, p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, pp. 43-55.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> Le Goff, *History and Memory*, pp. 68-71.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 40-45.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Butler, "Memory: A Mixed Blessing," in Butler, ed., *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 65-70.

<sup>55</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 119.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-91.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-108.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>60</sup> Launius, "Mormon Memory," p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Some examples are: Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34; and Hebrews 10:17.

<sup>63</sup> Philippians 3:13b (New American Standard Version).

<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of the issues surrounding the preservation of historic churches see Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), pp.101-104.

## **Chapter Two: Aspects of Canadian Mennonite Collective Memory**

Today's Mennonite Church traces its origin back to the radical movement known as Anabaptism that arose out of the Reformation in sixteenth-century Western Europe. Its name is derived from Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest who provided leadership for an uprising in the Netherlands that began in 1536. Historian T. D. Regehr lists five beliefs which differentiated the Anabaptists from other Christian groups: an emphasis on the Bible as the sole authority on spiritual matters; "a Christ-centered discipleship"; an ethic of love and non-resistance; an allegiance to God above that of the state; and the importance of a visible believer's church composed of baptized adults. As a result of their refusal to recognize the authority of the state in matters of conscience and faith and their establishment of a separate church, the Anabaptists and their descendants continually had to flee from persecution. Consequently, Mennonites were forced to be outsiders, living in alien cultures, speaking a different language and practising a distinct way of life. No matter where they settled, they had to endure the ignorance and suspicion of the dominant culture, especially in times of war when their strange language and pacifist beliefs were sure to arouse hostility.<sup>1</sup>

Although the ancestors of the Mennonites have not always been farmers, the repeated search for security and the freedom to live out their faith free from persecution usually led to settlement in isolated rural areas. The Swiss Mennonites were among the many groups of European religious dissenters who settled in colonial America. After the Revolutionary War, a significant number moved north to Upper Canada along with other Loyalists.

The Mennonites of Dutch-German extraction, however, moved eastward, first to Prussia and later, by invitation of Catherine the Great, to southern Russia and the Ukraine in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was in Russia, as the historian Frank Epp wrote, that they underwent the transition “from a prophetic protest movement to a withdrawn, peaceful, largely rural culture and then to a full-fledged ethnic identity.”<sup>2</sup> These Russian Mennonites were the ancestors of the majority of Western Canada’s Mennonite community.

The first wave of settlers emigrated to North America in 1874 in order to escape the Russian government’s plan to take a more active involvement in governing the colonies. As a rule, the wealthier and more liberal immigrants settled in the midwestern United States while the landless and more conservative groups settled in southern Manitoba. Later to be known as the *Kanadier*, they at first attempted to replicate their traditional village-based way of life on the Canadian prairies but were forced to adapt at least somewhat to Canadian society through the political and social pressure of the provincial government. In the years before the First World War some of these first settlers moved further west, to be joined by more immigrants from Ontario, the United States, Prussia and Russia.

The second wave of Mennonites arrived in Canada after the First World War. They were fleeing the devastation of the Russian Revolution and the onset of Communism. These *Russlaender* Mennonites had built up a prosperous and highly advanced society but with the onset of Communism, the results of years of hard work were wiped out in a matter of months as roving gangs of murderous bandits terrorised the colonies. In the years after 1923, some 20, 000 *Russlaender* came to Canada in an

emigration largely made possible by the intensive lobbying and financial support of the *Kanadier* Mennonites. One of the most significant results of this effort was the formation in 1920 of the Mennonite Central Committee as a means of coordinating the relief activities of the various Mennonite groups in North America.

From 1920 to 1940 the number of Mennonite congregations in Canada almost doubled, largely due to the influx of Russian immigrants. These years were also marked by tensions between the *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* who, although sharing a common heritage and language, regarded each other with a mixture of suspicion and mistrust that had originated many decades ago in Russia.

In 1939, on the eve of World War II, the Mennonites of Manitoba were still an overwhelmingly rural and agricultural people, living in relatively isolated communities. Sociologists of that time who studied the Mennonites believed that their distinctive identity would be lost if they moved to the cities. One exception was E. K. Francis who believed that social organization could be maintained if the group adjusted to the dominant society as a whole rather than individually.<sup>3</sup>

Francis turned out to be remarkably prescient. According to T. D. Regehr, between 1940 and 1970 Canadian Mennonites largely succeeded in entering the mainstream of Canadian culture without serious erosion of their identity, values and traditions. In the words of Regehr, they “became a people transformed, but not assimilated.”<sup>4</sup> A 1989 study concluded that urban Mennonites had largely succeeded in maintaining their identity thanks to a strong religious commitment and community support. The authors of the study wrote that the tendency towards secularization had

been countered by “strong religious, family, community, and institutional identity that provides a sense of peoplehood.”<sup>5</sup>

For many, the assimilation process began during the war when more than seventy percent of Mennonite men of military age served their country in either the military or alternative service programs. The alternative service camps exposed the men to a greater variety of experiences and brought them into contact with people from a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds. As a result, many of those who served as Conscientious Objectors became convicted of the need to become more actively involved in the world rather than constantly retreating from it.<sup>6</sup>

In the years after World War II Mennonites in western Canada made the transition from a rural to a largely urban people. This trend was accelerated by the arrival of 7700 refugees from Europe, most of whom were forced to settle in the cities. Winnipeg’s Mennonite population grew especially rapidly after the war, resulting in its eventual emergence as the largest centre of Mennonites in Canada and the largest concentration of urban Mennonites in the world. This growth in population was accompanied by the development of an infrastructure that included two colleges and a number of media and publishing outlets as well as the Canadian headquarters of the Mennonite Central Committee.

A new Mennonite self-understanding was also under development in the postwar era. The publication of the American Mennonite historian Harold S. Bender’s seminal article “The Anabaptist Vision” provided North American Mennonites with the basis to develop a new theology in which physical and/or cultural separation from the world was replaced by an ideological separation. Inspired by their experiences as conscientious

objectors, many Mennonites went out into the world as relief workers with the Mennonite Central Committee or as missionaries serving under various denominational and faith missions agencies.

Mennonites were confronting the world in the secular arena as well. Many achieved success in business, academia and the professions. The postwar era also saw an unprecedented flowering of artistic and literary talent in Mennonite communities. Mennonites entered politics and served at both the provincial and federal levels.

Mennonite denominations became more decentralised as individual churches gained greater independence and the traditional lay leadership was replaced by a new generation of college educated professional ministers. American evangelicalism and fundamentalism as well as the social gospel theologies of the mainline Protestant denominations all made their impact on Mennonite churches. Many Mennonite groups became caught up in ongoing identity crises as they struggled to find a common ground between their traditional beliefs and these new influences. The situation was complicated by the fact that a combination of inter-marriage and evangelism was bringing people from outside the traditional ethnic boundaries into the churches. Some Mennonite leaders began to wonder if their ethnic identity was a hindrance to further cross-cultural outreach.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Mennonites in Canada are still, in many ways, struggling to find a common ground. The Mennonite community is “a complex mosaic of customs, lifestyles, and theological beliefs.”<sup>7</sup> There are, however, several signs that point to a growing desire for unity. The two largest denominations in North America, the Mennonite Church and the General Conference of Mennonites in

North America, have undergone a merger that will result in the creation of a new conference known simply as the Mennonite Church. In Canada, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Mennonite Brethren are attempting to overcome differences that date back to 1860 in Russia. Several inter-conference congregations have been started and the two conferences are jointly operating a number of educational and cultural institutions. They have also established a new Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, with classes beginning in the fall of 2000.

Although Mennonites have always been conscious of their historical origins, a tradition of historical writing and reflection has been a relatively recent development. The beginnings of a modern Mennonite historiography can be traced back to the social and spiritual turmoil of Russia in the latter half of the nineteenth century. According to historian David Rempel, one of the great weaknesses of the early historiography was that every Mennonite historian of the pre-revolutionary era was a minister:

Our minister-historians were all too prone to view past events through the prism of the Bible and the tinted lenses of their minister's spectacles. It was too easy to sweep difficult issues and those things considered to be derogatory to the congregation or to prominent people under the proverbial rug.<sup>8</sup>

There is little evidence that they ever made use of the Russian archives or that they bothered to consult the many Russian sources on Mennonites that had been published in Russian government and technical journals.<sup>9</sup>

James Urry regards the early historians as members of the Mennonite intelligentsia who were eager to uphold the ideals of social and cultural advancement that they were promoting in their leadership roles. Any criticism in their writings was reserved for those figures from the past who had resisted change and were now



condemned for their unwillingness to share in the philosophies that had shaped the “Golden Age” of Mennonite society in Russia.<sup>10</sup>

A more sophisticated style of history writing gradually developed in Canada as assimilation caused Mennonite intellectual and religious leaders to search for a new identity based on an ideological rather than a cultural distinctiveness. The trauma of the Russian Revolution also caused many of the survivors to rethink the traditional triumphalist version of their history that had held sway in the pre-revolutionary era. Several enterprising men began to assemble collections of archival material and the establishment of the two colleges in Winnipeg in the 1940s provided libraries in which Mennonite historical material began to find more permanent homes. In the 1960s both the Conference of Mennonites of Canada and the Mennonite Brethren set up central offices in Winnipeg and would subsequently initiate archival programs that were designed at least in part to look after the records created by these new offices.<sup>11</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s saw the appearance of a number of important historical works that were solidly based on archival sources. The most significant writer to emerge was Frank Epp, whose *Canadian Mennonite* newspaper had become the forum for a new generation of young liberal Mennonite intellectuals. His first important work, published in 1962, is a history of the efforts of *Kanadier* Mennonites to rescue and resettle the survivors of the Russian Revolution.<sup>12</sup> In 1967 a joint committee composed of members of a number of Canadian Mennonite historical societies appointed Epp to produce a new scholarly history of the Mennonites in Canada. The first volume was published in 1974 to coincide with the centennial of the Mennonites in Manitoba. In the foreword, T. D. Regehr wrote that the book

marks a departure from the old isolationism and an acceptance of the invitation to share with other Canadians the philosophy and history of Mennonite life in Canada. To many this may appear to be merely a further step in the process of assimilation. It would be more correct, however, to view this book as a contribution to a true Canadian multiculturalism and a true religious pluralism.<sup>13</sup>

The second volume of the history appeared in 1982. Due to ill health, Epp was unable to write the third volume which was completed by Regehr and published in 1996.

The Mennonite historical community also became intrigued with the writings of James Urry, an Oxford educated anthropologist who made himself one of the world's leading experts on the history of Mennonites in Russia. As the first significant "outsider" to study Russian Mennonite history, Urry brought a fresh perspective to the material and soon became a fixture at seminars and conferences in both Canada and the United States. His writings initially aroused some concern among more conservative Mennonites who wondered if he was a "true believer".<sup>14</sup>

The current generation of Mennonite historians has built on the work of Frank Epp by expanding into areas that had previously been largely ignored. Topics dealing with subjects such as gender, class and economics are now being explored with the assistance of other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and women's studies. There is also a move towards comparing the Mennonite past with the histories of other ethnic groups. For example, a 1995 conference at the University of Manitoba brought together historians from the Mennonite, Jewish and Ukrainian communities to discuss their common experience of emigration from Russia and eastern Europe. Another significant development in the last decade has been the opening of Russian archives and the uncovering of a large amount of previously unavailable material that promises to challenge many preconceived notions about the Mennonite sojourn in that country.

The study of the subject of collective identity among Canada's Russian Mennonite population poses some challenges. Apart from the usual ethnic conflicts, there is a strong religious element present as well. The fact that many North American Mennonite churches contain members from outside the traditional ethnic circles also complicates matters. This chapter will highlight a number of areas of conflict that have developed in the ongoing quest for a collective identity. It is necessary to begin, however, by invoking the more unified model of Barry Schwartz.

As Schwartz has written, the primary framework of shared memories that underlies a society's collective consciousness can be a powerful force for unity and, in a time of crisis, it is often able to provide potent symbols that are invoked for inspirational purposes. In the case of the Mennonite community, it is the persecution and suffering of the first Anabaptists that forms the basis of this framework.<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of their place on the theological spectrum, Mennonites never fail to claim that their particular church or denomination draws its primary inspiration from the lives of the original Anabaptists. Mennonites on the theological right picture them as godly men and women who suffered because of their willingness to boldly witness for Christ while Mennonites on the left regard their spiritual ancestors as social revolutionaries who were unwilling to be reconciled to an unjust world. With few exceptions, every denominational and local history book begins with a chapter on the first Anabaptists, even if the subject's origins only date back to the turn of the century. For example, two smaller Canadian Mennonite conferences have published histories that both feature lengthy opening chapters on the origins of Anabaptism, even though one of the conferences originated in 1812 and the other only in 1937.<sup>16</sup> Even a popular history of

the Manitoba town of Steinbach begins with the sentence: “The story of Steinbach and the Mennonite East Reserve in Manitoba begins with the Anabaptist movement in Europe in the sixteenth century.”<sup>17</sup>

The most important vehicle for the stories of the early Anabaptists is *The Martyr's Mirror*, an account of their sufferings that was written by a Dutch Mennonite in 1659 in order to strengthen the faith of his fellow believers. It was translated into German in the late 1740s and into English in 1886. This massive volume has traditionally been one of the few books apart from the Bible that could be found in even the most conservative home. Along with the *Martyr's Mirror*, most Mennonite families possessed a handful of other books, including the writings of Menno Simons and some hymnbooks and catechisms. These books were carried from one country to another “and in time they became the very symbols of group identity.” Historian Royden Loewen writes: “Young people were taught that they were part of a distinctive historical process, comprised of people who had suffered in the past and who should be prepared to do so in the future.”<sup>18</sup>

The key figure behind the modern interest in the early Anabaptists was the American historian Harold S. Bender who in 1944 published his seminal essay *The Anabaptist Vision*. Bender drew a clear separation between the original evangelical Anabaptists and the various mystical, revolutionary and even antinomian groups that previous scholars of the Reformation had lumped together under the word “Anabaptist.”<sup>19</sup>

According to Bender, the Anabaptists were inspired by a “great vision that shaped their course in history and for which they gladly gave their lives.” The three main components of this vision were: an emphasis on Christianity as discipleship, the concept

of the church as a brotherhood with voluntary membership based upon adult baptism, and an ethic of love and resistance that preached the complete abandonment of all warfare. Bender described Anabaptism as “the culmination of the Reformation, the fulfilment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli.”<sup>20</sup>

Many of Bender’s claims have been challenged by succeeding generations of Anabaptist scholars but while reports on new historical developments sometimes appear in the popular Mennonite press, it is doubtful that they have had much effect in diminishing the power of Bender’s “vision” thesis.<sup>21</sup>

Today, Mennonites often compare their current experience as Christians in a hostile pluralistic society to that of the early Anabaptists. Instead of retreating into cultural and/or physical isolation as was the practice of their ancestors, modern Mennonites are encouraged by their leaders to bravely confront society and, like the first Anabaptists, courageously provide a witness to Jesus Christ through word and deed. The actions and teachings of the first Anabaptists are now taken to represent the essence of the Mennonite faith while the isolation of Russia and the early years in Canada are regarded as an unfortunate detour that served to stultify the witness of the Anabaptist movement for hundreds of years.<sup>22</sup>

The continuing influence of the early Anabaptists can be seen in such events as the popular *Mirror of the Martyrs* travelling exhibit that came through Manitoba in 1994 and the many special events that were held all across North America in 1996 in celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Menno Simons’ birth.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, the sufferings of the first Anabaptists provide one of the few, if not the only, collective memories upon which all Canadian Mennonites can agree. Even a

cursory examination of this subject must inevitably devote a majority of space to the various conflicts that continue to thrive within the Mennonite community in Canada. It appears that the model advanced by John Bodnar can be applied within this context although the unique setting does provide a few interesting twists.

Many collective memory studies focus on class and it is necessary to see if such a division, which many historians regard as the conflict around which all human experience revolves, exists in the Mennonite community. Class divisions were indeed present in Russia and current sociological studies indicate that this division is also present in the current Canadian setting. As an academic subject, however, class has received scant attention from Mennonite scholars and there is little evidence of the existence of any class-based identities within Mennonite circles.<sup>24</sup>

Several reasons can be offered to account for this. First of all, any class divisions that arose in Russia were rendered meaningless by the trauma of the Russian Revolution. The devastation and suffering of the post-revolutionary years provided a set of collective memories that, at least for a while, subsumed any class consciousness. In addition, a shared religious and ethnic heritage among Russian Canadian Mennonites as a whole has succeeded in easing class tensions to a certain extent. Liberal Mennonite activists have tended to concentrate their energies on national and international issues and when they do pay attention to the local church, they tend to focus on divisions involving gender and sexual orientation rather than class. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the horrors that Communists wrought in both World War I and World War II produced a deep loathing of all proletarian class action within the *Russlander* community that has been slow to subside.<sup>25</sup>

There are, however, signs that point to a growing division among the classes and some commentators are worried about the future of the church if trends continue. As Mennonite Brethren leader John H. Redekop wrote in 1971: "After all, how will you keep calling a person your brother if he is three classes removed from you in society and the distance between you and him is not bridged in the church."<sup>26</sup> Kauffman and Driedger's 1989 study of five major Mennonite denominations revealed that support for the peace position and the social programs of Mennonite Central Committee tended to rise along with the respondent's socio-economic status. Findings such as these suggest that any developing class consciousness in the Mennonite community might be too entwined with religious and social conservatism to have the kind of impact that a doctrinaire Marxist might desire.<sup>27</sup>

If class has not played a major role in the development of collective memory among Canada's Russian Mennonite community, there are certainly other forces whose influence can be more readily documented. This chapter will include brief discussions of three of the most significant: the conflict between the *Kanadier* and the *Russlaender*; the debate over the effects of Evangelical/Fundamentalist doctrines on traditional Anabaptist theology; and the effort to avoid an obsession with ethnic identity that might hinder cross-cultural outreach. The first item on the list is mainly of historical interest but the other two are still constant sources of dissent in Mennonite denominations.

The conflict between *Kanadier* and *Russlaender* Mennonites dates back to the 1874 migration when the most conservative Mennonites left Russia for North America with the prospect of maintaining their way of life without government interference. Those who left tended to castigate those who stayed behind for their perceived liberal

religious beliefs and their willingness to accommodate the wishes of secular forces. These old prejudices flared up when accounts of the suffering of Mennonites in postwar Russia began to reach North America. Genuine horror over the plight of their brothers and sisters was tempered to a certain degree by the often unspoken belief that this was a punishment from God for relinquishing religious orthodoxy in favor of earthly riches. Thanks to the vigorous fundraising and lobbying efforts of a few visionary leaders, the *Kanadier* Mennonites did rally to the cause and succeeded in rescuing some 20, 000 *Russlaender* from starvation and persecution in Russia.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, the differences between the two groups were only exacerbated by the arrival of the *Russlaender* in Canada. *Kanadier* Mennonites thought that *Russlaender* Mennonites were too proud and aggressive, too enthusiastic about higher education and too anxious to exercise authority and control. It seemed to them that their hospitality and financial support had been repaid by a takeover of the leadership positions in religious and educational institutions that they had founded.<sup>29</sup>

*Russlaender* Mennonites, meanwhile, tended to see the *Kanadier* as too withdrawn, simple-minded and afraid of higher learning. They prided themselves on their mastery of the High German language and belittled the Low German dialect of their *Kanadier* counterparts as low and uncultured.<sup>30</sup>

Mennonite educational and cultural institutions in western Canada have traditionally been dominated by *Russlaender* Mennonites and, as a result, the historiography also bears their stamp. The Mennonites who came to Canada after both World War I and World War II had suffered tremendously. Many of those who survived the experience were determined to preserve the memory of the prosperous society that



had been destroyed and, if possible, come to terms with the traumas that they had endured. The result was a flood of diaries, memoirs, novels and poems; these stories combined to form a powerful collective memory that has cast a shadow over the less dramatic experiences of other Canadian Mennonites.<sup>31</sup>

Popular historical accounts of the sufferings have met with considerable success in Canada. The rise to prosperity, the suddenness of the destruction and the ultimate redemption are powerful themes with strong Biblical overtones. The title of *Henry's Red Sea*, a children's historical novel about the rescue of Mennonite refugees from the divided city of Berlin, makes an explicit comparison with the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, an analogy that many of the survivors did indeed take to heart.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the most important contribution to the popular Mennonite historical consciousness has been the film *And When They Shall Ask*, a widely seen 1983 documentary about the post-revolutionary Russian experience that combined dramatic re-enactments with interviews of some of the survivors.

The differences between *Kanadier* and *Russlander* have largely disappeared with time but flashes of the old resentment still surface periodically. In recent years, a number of historians of *Kanadier* descent, such as Royden Loewen and Delbert Plett, have challenged traditional interpretations of the *Kanadier* experience. Delbert Plett, in particular, has vigorously debunked the old stereotype of the narrow-minded, uneducated *Kanadier* pioneer with the revisionist view that the 1874 pioneers were the only Mennonites who had remained true to the vision of their Anabaptist ancestors. He has been especially harsh on the trilogy by Frank Epp and T. D. Regehr which he regards as

“an example of marginalizing conservative Mennonites by omitting them from the historical record and disparaging them.”<sup>33</sup>

A second conflict, and one that is still being fiercely waged, is the theological struggle in the major Mennonite denominations between the proponents of Anabaptism on the one hand and the supporters of Evangelicalism/Fundamentalism on the other. This controversy cuts across the entire Mennonite spectrum, causing dissension at both the congregational and denominational level. Due to the populist nature of their faith, the Mennonites, like most other radical Protestant groups, have not been afraid to split over doctrinal disagreements.

The sociologist Leo Driedger identifies the Mennonites as a “Middleman Minority” – a minority group that has historically occupied a precarious economic and political niche within the dominant society. A “Middleman Minority” tends to isolate itself and usually integrates more slowly into the dominant society. Due to their religious “Middleman” status, the Mennonites have historically been pressured by both the Catholic Church and the various Protestant groups to conform their particular theologies. In their quest to find their place within the dominant society, North American Mennonites, at one time or another, have latched onto most of the major Christian theological trends of the last two centuries. The central theme in the religious history of Russian Mennonites in Canada has been the delicate effort to incorporate outside influences while remaining true to their Anabaptist roots. Of course, the means by which the writings of Menno Simons and his compatriots are to be applied in a modern, pluralistic society are open to debate and Mennonites in both the conservative and liberal camps claim that their particular camp remains true to the original Anabaptist vision.<sup>34</sup>

The Pietist teachings of German itinerant evangelist Eduard Wuest were one of the major influences behind the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russian in 1860. The conservative *Kanadier* Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were regarded as a legitimate mission field by evangelical Mennonite groups from the United States and many of the current Canadian denominations can trace their origins back to this period. Fundamentalism, propelled by vigorous American tract and radio ministries, made significant inroads into Canada's Mennonite population in the 1920s. Its conservative nature no doubt appealed to many Mennonite survivors of the Communist nightmare. Fundamentalism was also a means of breaking out of the ethnic ghetto while simultaneously avoiding a total immersion in the dominant society. Frank Epp writes: "Fundamentalism allowed them to remain true to the biblicism of their Anabaptist traditions and at the same time to step outside of that tradition into a wider Christian identity."<sup>35</sup> According to Bruce Guenther, it served as both an emancipating influence and as a conservative force.<sup>36</sup>

In the years after World War II, evangelistic campaigns were a frequent aspect of Mennonite religious life. They were usually conducted by ambitious young preachers who had studied at fundamentalist Bible schools. Those who were affected by these campaigns tend to have conflicting memories about them. Many young men and women of that era made what turned out to be life-long commitments to the Christian faith and their churches at a revival meeting. Others remember them as emotionally traumatic experiences that filled the participants with guilt and needlessly disrupted many lives. Some of the evangelists have been accused of being too impatient with what they regarded as outmoded linguistic, social and cultural traditions.<sup>37</sup>

North American evangelicalism, which grew out of fundamentalism, has been a major influence on most large North American Mennonite denominations in the latter half of the twentieth century. Combining fundamentalism's emphasis on Biblical authority and a personal conversion experience with a more sophisticated approach to theology and a greater willingness to interact with the larger society, evangelicalism has proven to be somewhat more accommodating to the tenets of the Anabaptist Vision.<sup>38</sup>

The rise of fundamentalism and evangelicalism in Mennonite circles was met on the left by a renewed emphasis on peacemaking and its relevance in the modern world. The goal of a new generation of young liberal ministers and activists was to "reconstruct pacifist beliefs in ways that paid deference to Anabaptist tradition and yet rang credible in modern Mennonite ears."<sup>39</sup> The traditional passive "nonresistance" practised by the preceding generations was replaced by a more activist stance and a greater willingness to focus on contemporary social issues. Mennonites were no longer simply to hope that the earthly powers would allow them to live in peace; instead, they were to confront the governing authorities and protest against unjust and militaristic policies. Peace and service activism became the identity symbols for a new generation of young Mennonites.<sup>40</sup>

The Mennonite Central Committee, formed in 1920 to coordinate relief efforts for the Mennonites in post-revolutionary Russia, became the focal point of this new activism. In the decades after World War II, MCC won praise for its innovative and effective international relief and development programs but also generated criticism among its more conservative supporters with its increasing emphasis on peace and social justice issues.<sup>41</sup>

Another important voice of the Mennonite left in Canada was the *Canadian Mennonite*, a newspaper founded in 1953 by Frank Epp. Written entirely in English, the *Canadian Mennonite* was geared to a youthful and more liberal audience and was not afraid to attack political conservatism and the more militant anti-communism of some Mennonites. It also took a liberal stance on controversial issues such as the presence of United States draft dodgers in Canada.<sup>42</sup>

Despite efforts on both sides to remain cordial, the debate can become heated. Proponents of a more liberal theology emphasising peace issues and social justice argue that fundamentalism and evangelicalism cannot coexist with classical Anabaptist values. Prominent academic Harry Loewen has accused Mennonites of gravitating toward conservative politics and theology, resulting in a support of the status quo rather than a challenging of the kingdom of the world with the radical message of the kingdom of God.<sup>43</sup>

In their sociological profile of five North American Mennonite groups in the early 1970s, Kauffman and Harder asserted that “assent to the Anabaptist vision is a potent influence among Mennonites.”<sup>44</sup> Their study indicated that adherence to Anabaptism exceeded all social background factors in accounting for behavioural differences. Kauffman and Harder accused fundamentalist orthodoxy of undermining pacifism, racial tolerance, and concern for the welfare of the poor. They concluded that it had had a mostly negative impact on twentieth-century Anabaptism.<sup>45</sup>

In a 1989 follow-up study, Kauffman and Driedger concluded that a strong Anabaptist orientation supported a dual service thrust that included both evangelism and social activism while a more fundamentalist orientation only emphasised evangelism.

They wrote: “We conclude that an Anabaptist orientation succeeds best in synthesizing the two dimensions – the transcendental relationship to God and immanent relationships with fellow human beings.”<sup>46</sup> Kauffman and Driedger argued that the preservation of Anabaptist beliefs was essential to maintaining a sense of peoplehood in a mobile, stratified society.<sup>47</sup>

Supporters of evangelicalism respond by claiming that it has largely been outside religious influences that have brought revival and renewal to the Mennonite church. The fundamentalist and evangelical influence is credited with offering an escape from a spiritual sterility caused by over-emphasis on maintaining cultural and ecclesiastical tradition.<sup>48</sup> Evangelical Mennonites worry that an excessive concern for peace and social justice will result in a distortion of the Christian message. The historian Bruce Guenther writes that many Mennonite scholars often unfairly caricature evangelicalism and use it as a scapegoat rather than attempt to provide more complex explanations for historical diversity.<sup>49</sup>

In large, theologically diverse conferences such as the Mennonite Brethren, attempts to assert traditional Anabaptist values can result in controversy, especially when many converts from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds do not identify with the historical tradition. A recent example is the response generated by a short article in the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* that tried to explain why Mennonites do not observe Remembrance Day. Mennonite Brethren members of both Mennonite and non-Mennonite backgrounds responded with a barrage of angry letters that defended the accomplishments of family members who had served in past wars and, in some cases, given their lives for their country.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the appearance of an unbridgeable divide between the two sides, Mennonites ultimately find themselves unable to feel comfortable in either the camp of the solid left or the solid right. As Kauffman and Harder write:

Although sharing some orthodox beliefs and moral codes with fundamentalists, Mennonites strongly disavow the stridency, nationalism and militarism of fundamentalists. Although they share much with evangelicalism, Mennonites find more understanding and sympathy for their peace and social concerns among the more liberal mainline Protestant denominations.<sup>51</sup>

It appears that the ongoing struggle between conservative and liberal theologies in the Mennonite church is a classic example of Halbwachs' "dogmatics vs. mystics" theory. In this particular case, both sides take turns playing the roles of "dogmatic" and "mystic", with one group bringing fresh energy and excitement to the faith before gradually solidifying into orthodoxy and generating a response from the opposing group. Both groups, of course, claim that their opponents have abandoned the teachings of the first Anabaptists and that their particular brand of theology represents a return to the original tenets.

A third conflict that has been a constant presence in the development of a Mennonite collective memory is the struggle to determine whether or not ethnicity can be separated from religious faith. The push by many Mennonite denominations to transcend historical and ethnic origins has resulted in a deep ambivalence towards the commemoration of the past. Religious leaders are especially concerned that highly publicised commemorative events that focus on the historical activities of ethnic Mennonites will send out the message that Mennonites are simply a European ethnic group and not adherents of a faith with a message of hope for everyone, regardless of race or culture. Closely allied with the effort to downplay ethnicity is the attempted

creation of a new collective memory that is anchored in the notion of the Mennonite Church as a racially and culturally diverse global faith rather than a homogenous ethnic sect.

As indicated in the previous chapter, ethnic identity is considered by most scholars to be a conscious construct that is produced through the interactivity of people who share a communal history or a common set of values. Russian Mennonites obviously possess many of the traits that comprise an ethnic identity, such as a common history, common culture and a shared language in Low German. Although their origins lie in an outbreak of radical religious protest, persecution and the resulting isolation allowed ethnic traits to develop. Some scholars still insist, however, that it is incorrect to refer to Mennonites as an ethnic group. According to the sociologist Calvin Redekop, Anabaptism-Mennonitism is and was a religiously-motivated utopian movement that was constantly faced with “ethnicizing tendencies” but never accepted or capitulated to becoming a sociological ethnic group because of the religious ideology that was at the heart of its origin.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite protest movement has indeed evolved into a people with a self-conscious awareness of its past, present and future, but the awareness has been continually informed by, or critiqued by, a religiously based conflict with the secular environment.<sup>52</sup>

Redekop’s assertion that religion has always taken precedence over ethnicity within the Mennonite community appears to be confirmed by its historical inability to develop any type of ethnic solidarity. The history of Russian Mennonites in Canada has been characterised by disunity except in moments of extreme crisis, such as the military



conscription controversy during World War II. The wide variety of religious influences present in the Canadian Mennonite community has meant that a unified Mennonite voice on any social or spiritual controversy is usually impossible to achieve.

One of the reasons for the absence of a strong sense of ethnic solidarity is the growing diversity of Mennonite churches, traditionally the most important institutions in the community. In the post-World War II era, a new generation of ambitious church leaders led the push to minister to the wider society outside of the traditional ethnic boundaries. They argued that certain practices such as the use of German in church services had to be eliminated in the interest of missionary outreach. As T. D. Regehr notes, "Discarding of distinctive cultural, linguistic, or ethnic Mennonite concepts of Christian discipleship was more easily justified if it could be shown that they impeded effective evangelism and thus the building of the Kingdom of God."<sup>53</sup> The struggle to transcend their ethnic origins has continually forced Canadian Mennonites to confront their heritage and determine which of its aspects should be retained and which should be modified in order to present a more relevant gospel message.

Attempts to commemorate the Mennonite experience in Canada, therefore, have met with mixed results. Many ethnic Mennonites are eager to celebrate the accomplishments of their pioneer ancestors; some liberal Mennonites, however, may worry that commemorative activities are tailored towards the wealthy business and professional classes while conservative Mennonites may charge that an obsession with ethnic history will hinder evangelistic efforts. The situation is further complicated by the presence of non-ethnic church members who may feel out of place during the commemoration of a heritage with which they cannot identify.

Ethnic pride among Russian Mennonites in Canada reached its peak in the years between the 1967 Canadian centennial and the 1974 celebrations surrounding the centennial of the arrival of the first Mennonites in Manitoba. The Mennonite Heritage Village Museum opened in Steinbach, Manitoba in 1967 and an exhibit on the Mennonites and Hutterites was unveiled at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature in 1972. In conjunction with the 1974 centennial celebrations, a flood of commemorative books were published, including the first volume of Frank Epp's history. In a reflection of the Trudeau government's new emphasis on multiculturalism, Mennonites were beginning to view themselves as one of the many ethnic groups that had helped to construct a distinctly Canadian cultural mosaic.

The 1974 centennial celebrations, however, did produce mixed reactions. One supporter wrote: "Why celebrate the centennial? Because it expresses who we are and who we want to be in the future. It expresses that faith is historical, and that our faithfulness to Christ is expressed as a community in history."<sup>54</sup> Other commentators on both the left and the right were more sceptical. Even Frank Epp cautioned about celebrating the past without looking ahead. In a 1972 editorial he wrote that the goal of any commemoration should be the spiritual renewal of the movement.<sup>55</sup> Another writer asked: "Are the people who celebrate centennials the same people who are radical Christian disciples in our society?"<sup>56</sup>

Other commentators worried that emphasis on ethnic culture was betraying the original vision of the Anabaptists. Walter Klaassen wrote:

It is ironic that the emphasis on ethnicity rejected by the early Anabaptists should have become a special characteristic of their descendants. For an outsider to become a member of a Mennonite church implies the contradiction of accepting a totally different ethnic identity as well. It is

no wonder that the various centennial celebrations of these years evoke little enthusiasm among Mennonites of other than white Germanic background.<sup>57</sup>

In the years following the 1974 centennial, other attempts at celebrating ethnicity continued to arouse controversy. In 1980 several cultural and student groups jointly sponsored a pavilion at Winnipeg's annual Folklorama multicultural festival. This drew a heated response from many church leaders who worried that the wrong message was being sent out. In an editorial entitled "What business do we have in Folklorama?" *MB Herald* editor Harold Jantz asserted that Mennonites are not simply another piece of the ethnic mosaic but a global people. What, he asked, would Mennonites in Zaire and India think about this pavilion?<sup>58</sup> In 1986 *Herald* writer Jim Coggins expressed concern over the presentation of a "Mennonite" quilt to a federal government representative as part of the celebrations surrounding the bicentennial of Mennonites in Canada: "We must repeatedly find ways to state clearly that we are a church and not an ethnic group."<sup>59</sup>

In the late 1980s, an effort to raise funds for the construction of a Mennonite Heritage Centre in Chilliwack, British Columbia failed to generate much interest. The moderator of the Conference of Mennonites was quoted as saying that he preferred "living, current institutions" as opposed to "dead museums". He asked: "Can we afford another kind of cultural museum? Our spiritual heritage must come first."<sup>60</sup> The Historical Society Board responded by promising that the center devote considerable space to portraying the Mennonite faith story and that the faith experiences of other cultural and ethnic groups could also possibly be highlighted.<sup>61</sup>

Other critics have tended to focus on what they regard as the wasteful spending of money that could be put to better use elsewhere. In a letter that appeared in the

*Mennonite Reporter* in 1973, a reader questioned the necessity of the expensive events planned for the centennial and suggested that the money could be spent on better things. In 1978 an MCC worker in Jamaica wrote to the *Herald* to express her shock at seeing an ad for a \$75 leather-bound edition of the new translation of P. M. Friesen's history. In her opinion this was too extravagant and sounded like idol worship.<sup>62</sup>

The growing ethnic and cultural diversity of Mennonite churches has led some denominations to seriously consider eliminating all signs of their ethnic origins, including dropping the word "Mennonite" from their names. The Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference, in fact, did so in 1987 when, with little opposition, it changed its name to the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches.<sup>63</sup>

A serious debate over the name issue has raged continually in the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Canada for at least the last thirty years. The controversy came to a head in 1987 with the publication of moderator John H. Redekop's book *A People Apart* and a related symposium in Fresno, California. Redekop wrote that, while it was healthy and even admirable to celebrate Mennonite ethnicity, the Mennonite name provided an unnecessary barrier to evangelism: "Menno Simons, who constantly cautioned his followers about tying the faith to anything human, would surely be amazed and saddened to see how some of us have put so much emphasis, in the church, on his name."<sup>64</sup> Paul Toews, an American historian and one of the presenters at the symposium, responded that it was dangerous to sever all connection between faith and culture.<sup>65</sup>

Other Mennonite commentators have agreed with Toews, claiming that Mennonite churches needed to have a firm grasp of their own past if their message is to

remain relevant. *Mennonite Reporter* editor Ron Rempel remarked in 1985 on the irony of encouraging church planting among ethnic groups while simultaneously bemoaning one's own ethnicity.<sup>66</sup> A 1996 textbook on Mennonite history concluded with a plea to retain the roots that provided stability: "Only when the family of faith knows its own roots will it be able to support new growth."<sup>67</sup>

Non-ethnic members of Mennonite churches have had mixed feelings about the ethnic dimension of their denominations. Some have been quite willing to identify completely with the Mennonite past. In 1984, John and Brenda Cosens, members of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, wrote that they considered the early Anabaptists to be their "spiritual forefathers": "People, Mennonite and non-Mennonite alike, will often point out to us that Cosens is not a Mennonite name. 'Well,' we respond, 'it is now.'"<sup>68</sup> Others have openly expressed their resentment over sometimes feeling like second-class citizens in their own churches. In a 1986 letter to the *Reporter*, a reader complained that "the fact that my background and my cultural roots are not Mennonite should not cause me to feel like an outsider, as often as I do."<sup>69</sup> Another reader of the *Reporter* wrote in 1997: "Although I admire and respect the ethno-cultural heritage of my Mennonite friends, I am not interested in identifying myself with their ethnicity and culture. What we share is a vision and community of faith that transcends culture."<sup>70</sup>

One of the ways in which Mennonite leaders have tried to deal with the thorny issue of identity has been to focus on the larger global church. Instead of deriving their identity solely from their past in Russia and Canada, Canadian Mennonites are urged to see themselves as part of a global faith community that encompasses many racial groups and cultures. A 1989 study found that Mennonites spoke 78 different languages and that

Mennonites in Africa, Asia and Latin American would soon outnumber the older communities in Europe and North America. By 1998 the global Anabaptist and Mennonite population had reached one million and the numbers indicated that there were indeed now more Mennonites in the “southern” part of the globe than in the north.<sup>71</sup> Back in 1970, John H. Redekop had written that the existence of tens of thousands of Mennonites outside of Europe and North America “effectively destroys the myth that there is an all-inclusive identity.”<sup>72</sup>

Most Mennonite histories now conclude with a chapter or two that describes the growth of the church around the world. A 1996 textbook aimed at high-school students includes chapters entitled “Anabaptism grows around the world” and “Becoming partners in a global community”. The authors write: “The Mennonite family speaks many languages, worships in a wide variety of ways and looks quite different from one place to another.”<sup>73</sup> An explicit attempt is made to compare the persecution faced by Mennonites of the “Two-Thirds World” with that suffered by the first Anabaptist martyrs.

A similar effort was undertaken by the organizers of the “Mirrors of the Martyrs” exhibit that travelled across Canada in 1994. The original copper etchings used in the printing of the first *Martyrs' Mirror* were accompanied by a section portraying the stories of contemporary martyrs and prisoners of conscience in places like Siberia, Burma and South Africa.<sup>74</sup>

The main forum for the global church is the Mennonite World Conference. Held every seven years, it usually includes a number of inspirational sessions along with many smaller workshops, cultural events and organised tours. The first Conference took place in Zurich in 1925 and for many years was dominated by European and North American

participants. The 1978 Conference in Wichita, Kansas is generally considered to be the first to include a truly representative group of non-Western Mennonites. One participant commented appreciatively that this conference “gave the clear message that not all Mennonites look alike, sing the same songs, have German-sounding names or talk about their faith in the same way. Our president was Black and uttered not one word of German.”<sup>75</sup> The 1990 World Conference in Winnipeg was the largest ever and received a considerable amount of local and national media attention, much of it focussing on the ethnic diversity of the participants.

Conferences such as these, however, can exacerbate differences as well as heal them. The vast range of theological beliefs within the global church, running the gamut from right-wing American fundamentalism to Latin American liberation theology, inevitably leads to numerous controversies. Participants from the more evangelically oriented denominations have complained that the conferences tend to focus on social issues rather than missions. There was considerable disappointment among many of the local participants at the 1990 conference when their suggestion to hold a large evangelistic rally aimed at the general public was rejected.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the controversies, the world conferences do allow Mennonites, especially those in North America, to demonstrate to the larger society how racially and culturally diverse the Mennonite Church really is. This is the image that most Mennonites, regardless of their theological predilections, desire to present to the world: a multicultural, peace-loving Christian community that welcomes people from all backgrounds and walks of life.

Unfortunately, the historical reality often cannot measure up to this idealized portrait. There are some dark chapters in the Mennonite past and, like most Christian groups, Mennonites often prefer forgetfulness or ignorance over confrontation when dealing with them.

It would be unfair, however, to condemn Canada's Russian Mennonite community for hiding behind a blind triumphalism. Its celebrations of achievement have usually been tempered by an uneasiness over the fact that a theology of simplicity and counter-cultural living cannot be easily reconciled with earthly success and a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle. There is also the memory of another prosperous society in Russia that was destroyed in a matter of months. At the 1973 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the arrival of the first trainload of *Russlaender* settlers in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, John B. Toews reminded the audience that God had been able to use a wealthy Mennonite society less effectively than a poor one.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, Mennonites have usually been eager to present themselves in the best possible light to the rest of society. In part, this is the result of many years of life as a minority surrounded by an often suspicious and sometimes hostile majority. Consequently, Mennonites have become adept at what the writer Margaret Loewen Reimer describes as the "art of making images". The favourite image, according to Reimer, is that of "the persecuted people who made good and are now benevolently sharing their gifts with the world."<sup>78</sup>

As discussed in the first chapter, the Christian theology of forgiveness contributes to a culture in which an historical investigation of the past can be condemned as the needless revisitation of old controversies. The early Mennonite historians in Russia were



reluctant to write anything that they feared might cause dissension. The first historian of the Mennonite Brethren, P. M. Friesen, was unwilling to challenge pious traditions, especially when memories of some of the leaders were still fresh in peoples' minds.<sup>79</sup> Even today, Mennonite historians still feel obligated to assure their constituencies that they are writing with honourable intentions. In a 1992 article designed to solicit information for her history of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba, Anna Epp Ens acknowledged that records were still withheld sometimes "because of their sensitive and controversial nature". She urged the constituency to overcome its reluctance and allow these records to be examined: "We will pay tribute best to those who struggled in the birthing and nurturing of the CMM by letting their records inform and inspire our church in our time."<sup>80</sup>

Mennonites have also been reluctant to deal with events or people that challenged or upset established traditions. Popular historical accounts of the Terror in Russia, for example, have tended to portray the Mennonites as the saintly victims of a godless evil and their coming to Canada as a modern equivalent of the Biblical Exodus. Only recently have there been acknowledgements that their actions were not always those of saints. One of the most dramatic moments of the documentary "And When They Shall Ask" featured a survivor declaring that he would have liked to put a bullet into every one of the bandits who had raided his peaceful village. This admission shocked many viewers and some ministers reportedly demanded that the scene be removed from the film.<sup>81</sup> Commenting on the controversy, Margaret Loewen Reimer wrote that she was glad of the scene's inclusion because of its exposure of the human actions and feelings that often lay

behind the official ideology. It was obvious that many of the survivors were still dealing with feelings of anger and frustration over their experiences.<sup>82</sup>

Another historical event whose traditional retelling has been challenged by newer “counter-memories” is the experience of the conscientious objectors during World War II. Although many of the men who served in the work camps were sincere in their pacifist beliefs, there have been accusations that many others were simply using the church as a means to avoid going overseas. One veteran of the camps later claimed that many of the men in the labour camps were not believing Christians and would often go to the beer parlours on the weekends.<sup>83</sup>

In recent years Mennonites have also begun to confront two historical controversies from which they benefited even though they were not involved in the actual events. A few denominations as well as MCC have acknowledged that Mennonites were the beneficiaries of unjust government policies towards the Aboriginal and Metis populations of western Canada. Apologies have also been given to Canada’s Japanese community for the way in which Mennonite settlers in British Columbia were able to buy farms cheaply that had been seized from their former Japanese-Canadian owners during World War II.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, Mennonites have begun to deal with accusations that their supposedly idyllic villages were fraught with sexual abuse, patriarchy and ethnic and cultural bigotry. Some of the charges have come from outsiders, such as Ernest Sirluck, whose 1997 memoir described what it was like to grow up Jewish in the largely Mennonite town of Winkler, Manitoba.<sup>85</sup> Most of the accusations, however, have appeared in novels and memoirs by ethnic Mennonites, many of whom have left the church. The one major

exception has been Rudy Wiebe, whose 1962 novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* was the first to openly criticise some aspects of the Russian-Mennonite experience. Wiebe's unflattering portrayal of a Mennonite religious leader engaging in sexual immorality was condemned by many readers who saw it as a vicious attack on the Mennonite people and their traditional beliefs. The *Winnipeg Free Press* was forced to drop its plan to publish a condensed version of the novel as a result of pressure from a group of Winnipeg and Steinbach businessmen.<sup>86</sup>

Wiebe is unique, though, in that he wrote and continues to write as an active member of the Mennonite Brethren church. Although he was forced to step down as the editor of the *MB Herald* after the novel was published, he chose to stay in the conference and would later serve on a number of national boards and committees. Other authors such as Patrick Friesen and Di Brandt have also aroused controversy, but their works have usually not circulated much beyond literary and academic circles.

It is obvious that archives serving Mennonite denominations have some major challenges to overcome. A focus on the future, a clash of theologies and an uneasy meeting of ethnicity and religion all combine to make their task a delicate one. The remaining two chapters will examine how two archives have dealt with these problems in their attempts to help shape the collective memory of their respective denominations.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 9-10; A standard if dated introductory text is C. J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1967).
- <sup>2</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 72.
- <sup>3</sup> E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), pp. 6-7.
- <sup>4</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites 1939-1970*, p. 4
- <sup>5</sup> J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale, Penn. & Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1991), pp.271-272.
- <sup>6</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites 1939-1970*, pp. 54-55, 60-61; Kauffman & Driedger, *Mosaic*, p. 169.
- <sup>7</sup> Bruce L. Guenther, "Living with the Virus: The Enigma of Evangelicalism among Mennonites in Canada," in G. A. Rawlyk, ed., *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp. 223-224.
- <sup>8</sup> David Rempel, "Foreword," in James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), p. 13.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.
- <sup>10</sup> Urry, *None But Saints*, p. 26.
- <sup>11</sup> Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Archives in Canada," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 40-41.
- <sup>12</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, Mb.: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962).
- <sup>13</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, p. 17.
- <sup>14</sup> Rempel "Foreword," in Urry, *None But Saints*, p. 14.
- <sup>15</sup> Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," pp. 908-911.
- <sup>16</sup> Harvey Plett, *Seeking to Be Faithful: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference* (Steinbach, Mb.: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1996); Jack Heppner, *Search for Renewal: The Story of the Rudnerweider/Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference* (Winnipeg: Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, 1987).
- <sup>17</sup> Abe Warkentin, ed., *Reflections on our Heritage: A History of Steinbach and the R.M. of Hanover from 1874* (Steinbach, Mb.: Derksen Printers, 1971), p. 13.
- <sup>18</sup> Royden Loewen, *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863 to 1929* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), p. 5; Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A*

*Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1944), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 17-22.

<sup>21</sup> An example is: Jim Coggins, "Anabaptist History: Where is it leading us?" *MBH* 5 April 1985, pp.6-8.

<sup>22</sup> Calvin Redekop, "The Mennonite Romance with the Land," in Harry Loewen and Al Reimer, eds., *Visions and Realities: Essays, Poems, and Fiction Dealing with Mennonite Issues* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1985), pp. 92-93.

<sup>23</sup> *Mennonite Reporter (MR)*, 2 May 1994, p. 3; *CH* 22:3 (Sep. 1995), p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, pp. 170-171. Kauffman and Driedger's *Mennonite Mosaic* contains information on class divisions in the modern North American context.

<sup>25</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970*, p. 246.

<sup>26</sup> *Mennonite Brethren Herald (MBH)*, 31 December 1971, p. 8

<sup>27</sup> Kauffman and Driedger, *Mennonite Mosaic*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>28</sup> Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), p. 167

<sup>29</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, pp. 242-243; Ben Doerksen, "Kanadier and Russlander: Tensions on the Prairies," *MH* 19:2 (June 1993), pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970*, p. 287.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> Delbert F. Plett, *Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia 1812 to 1875* (Steinbach, Mb.: Crossway Publications, 1999), p. 333.

<sup>34</sup> Leo Driedger, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict* (Lewiston and Queenston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), pp. 9, 208.

<sup>35</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Guenther, "Living with the Virus," in *Aspects*, p. 225.

<sup>37</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970*, pp. 208-211, 238-239.

<sup>38</sup> Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Canadian Mennonite Nationalism? The 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel in the Structuring of Mennonite Life," in Abe J. Dueck, ed., *Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism* (Winnipeg, Mb.: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1994), pp. 93-94.

<sup>39</sup> Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1994), p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970*, p. 402.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

<sup>43</sup> Harry Loewen, "The Anabaptist View of the World: The Beginning of a Mennonite Continuum?" in Harry Loewen, ed., *Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural, and Literary Essays Dealing with Mennonite Issues* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), p. 94.

<sup>44</sup> J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale, Penn. and Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1975), p. 329.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Kauffman and Driedger, *Mennonite Mosaic*, p. 85.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>48</sup> For an example of this viewpoint, see the response by *MBH* editor Harold Jantz to *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* in *MBH* 27 June 1975, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Guenther, "Living with the Virus," in *Aspects*, p. 240.

<sup>50</sup> The original article is in *MBH*, 23 October 1998, p. 23. The letters are in *MBH*, 4 December 1998, pp. 10-11.

<sup>51</sup> Kauffman and Driedger, *Mennonite Mosaic*, p. 213.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 322-323.

<sup>53</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970*, pp. 312-314.

<sup>54</sup> *MR*, 24 January 1974, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> *MR*, 16 October 1972, p. 6

<sup>56</sup> *MR*, 4 March 1974, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> *MBH*, 24 January 1975, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> *MBH*, 29 August 1980, p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> *MBH*, 16 May 1986, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *MBH*, 25 June 1991, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *MR*, 28 May 1973, p. 7; *MBH*, 28 November 1978, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> The events leading up to this decision are chronicled in Calvin Redekop, *Leaving Anabaptism: From Evangelical Mennonite Brethren to Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches* (Telford, Penn.: Pandora Press, 1998).

- <sup>64</sup> *MBH*, 15 May 1987, p.4
- <sup>65</sup> Paul Toews, "Faith in Culture and Culture in Faith: The Mennonite Brethren in North America," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 6 (1988), p. 46.
- <sup>66</sup> *MR*, 4 February 1985, p. 6.
- <sup>67</sup> Harry Loewen and Steven Nolt, *Through Fire & Water: An Overview of Mennonite History* (Scottsdale, Penn. and Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1996), pp. 332-333.
- <sup>68</sup> *MBH*, 23 March 1984, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>69</sup> *MR*, 28 April 1986, p. 6.
- <sup>70</sup> *MR*, 28 July 1997, p. 6.
- <sup>71</sup> Kauffman & Driedger, *Mennonite Mosaic*, p. 231; *MBH*, 23 January 1998, p. 21.
- <sup>72</sup> *MBH*, 2 October 1970, p. 10.
- <sup>73</sup> Loewen and Nolt, *Through Fire & Water*, p. 328.
- <sup>74</sup> *MR*, 2 May 1994, p. 3.
- <sup>75</sup> Robert Kreider, "From a hundred cultures," in *MBH*, 6 November 1981, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>76</sup> *MBH*, 24 August, 1990, pp. 2-4.
- <sup>77</sup> *MR*, 26 November 1973, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>78</sup> *MR*, 29 October 1984, p. 6.
- <sup>79</sup> Abraham Friesen, "P. M. Friesen the Historian," in Abraham Friesen, ed., *P. M. Friesen & his History: Understanding Mennonite Brethren Beginnings* (Fresno, Cal.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), p. 83.
- <sup>80</sup> *MH*, 28:2 (June 1992), p. 4.
- <sup>81</sup> *MR*, 9 January 1984, p. 10.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> *MBH*, 25 November 1994, p. 11.
- <sup>84</sup> Anna Epp Ens, *In Search of Unity: The Story of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba* (Winnipeg, CMBC Publications, 1996), p. 4; Alvina Block, "Metis, Mennonites and Land in Manitoba," in *MH* 21:1 (March 1995), pp. 1-2; *MBH*, 27 July 1984, p. 12.
- <sup>85</sup> Ernest Sirluck, *First Generation: An Autobiography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). See the review in *MBH*, 4 April 1997, p. 30.
- <sup>86</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970*, p. 286; For an account of the controversy surrounding *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, see Al Reimer, "The Russian-Mennonite Experience in Fiction," in Loewen, ed., *Mennonite Images*, p. 233.

## **Chapter Three: The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and Collective Memory as Spiritual Purpose**

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg is the official archival repository of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren (MB) Churches. The Canadian and United States Conferences combine to form the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. As of 2000, the Canadian Conference consisted of 195 congregations composed of 29, 674 members.<sup>1</sup>

The history of the Mennonite Brethren has been characterised by a willingness to borrow from a wide variety of non-Mennonite influences. Historian John A. Toews described MB theology as a mixture of classic Anabaptism, pietism, dispensationalism and American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. According to Bruce Guenther, this openness has ensured a continuous renewal of spiritual vitality within the denomination as well as an ongoing ambivalence towards its identity as a faith community. Some critics, in fact, accuse of the MBs of being a virtually indistinguishable part of mainstream North American evangelicalism.<sup>2</sup>

In Kauffman and Harder's 1975 study of five major Mennonite denominations, the MB Church ranked second in commitment to traditional orthodoxy and second on behavioural strictness. The study showed that the Mennonite Brethren were among the most willing of the denominations to engage in "interdenominational" activity. It received one of the lowest rankings, however, for its record on "inter-Mennonite" cooperation, indicating that it often feels more comfortable dealing with mainstream evangelical groups than it does with other Anabaptist denominations.<sup>3</sup>



This reluctance to interact with other Mennonite groups has given the MB Church a reputation, not always undeserved, of being too self-righteous and sure of its spiritual superiority. Its longstanding practice of insisting on immersion baptism as the only true baptism only helped to exacerbate the situation. When Frank Epp was asked to provide an outsider's perspective on the Mennonite Brethren for a 1982 issue of the *Herald*, he chastised them for their insularity and wondered if many of them still believed that they were indeed more spiritual than other Mennonites and other Christians.<sup>4</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren were formed in Russia in 1860 during a time of intense spiritual and social turmoil in the Mennonite communities. There was much dissatisfaction with the perceived dearth of Christian vitality in the established church. A significant number of people were influenced by a travelling Lutheran evangelist named Eduard Wuest. Wuest, whom Toews referred to as the Mennonite Brethren's Moses, preached a message of personal piety and emphasised the importance of a decisive conversion experience. On 6 January 1860 a group of 18 in the Molotschna colony drew up a letter of succession from what they described as a corrupt church. The declaration declared that the only true Mennonites were those whose baptism confirmed a true experience of faith and salvation; they alone were the elect, forming an exclusive fellowship of true believers. According to James Urry, the Mennonite Brethren introduced the practice of immersion baptism as a seal on their claim for a separate identity, distinctive in both spiritual and sacramental terms.<sup>5</sup>

The fledgling group experienced severe persecution from the spiritual and secular authorities that did not fully abate until 1866 when the Russian government officially

recognised the new movement. It became known for its active evangelical work and held its first conference in 1872.<sup>6</sup>

Only about 400 Mennonite Brethren emigrated to the United States between 1874 and 1880 where a number of congregations were established. The first Mennonite Brethren church in Canada was organised in 1888 in the village of Burwalde near the present site of Winkler, Manitoba as the result of missionary work among the *Kanadier* by American evangelists.<sup>7</sup>

The coming of the *Russlaender* had an immediate impact on the MB Church in Canada. The number of organised churches in Manitoba jumped from two to fourteen between 1924 and 1930. The newcomers quickly assumed most of the dominant leadership positions in the conference and its educational institutions. As a result, the MB Church's transition to English was much slower in Canada than in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren viewed other, more conservative, Mennonite groups as targets for their missions programs.<sup>9</sup> Their aggressive missionary activities and the significant influence of American fundamentalism and evangelicalism caused the sociologist E. K. Francis to describe the Mennonite Brethren at the end of the Second World War as "probably farthest removed from the historical type of the old Mennonite church."<sup>10</sup>

Winnipeg was established as the center of Mennonite Brethren life in Canada during the 1940s and 1950s. Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC), the first advanced theological training school established by Mennonites in Canada, was founded in 1944 and Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in 1945.<sup>11</sup>

The 1960s were a decade of change with Conference publications and church services slowly but peacefully making the transition to English. In 1962 the Publications Committee of the Canadian Conference introduced the *MB Herald*, an all-English periodical. It was forced to endure an early controversy when its first editor, Rudy Wiebe, resigned in the summer of 1963 after the publication of his controversial novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*.

In recent decades, the Mennonite Brethren have become a major force in the growth of the larger evangelical Christian movement in Canada. The Canadian Conference has been a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada since its inception in 1964 and a number of its members have served in prominent leadership positions in the EFC. *ChristianWeek*, a national evangelical newspaper, was founded by Harold Jantz, the former editor of the *Herald*, in 1986. The influence of the MB Church on the Canadian religious scene contrasts sharply with that of its American counterpart, which has only a minimal national presence.<sup>12</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren have also had to deal with increasing ethnic and cultural diversity, both in North America and around the globe. Its international missions program dates to the turn of the century when Russian Mennonite missionaries began working in India. Today the global MB Church has national conferences in 17 countries, including large churches in the Congo, India and Indonesia.

In Canada, a missions program in Quebec has resulted in the establishment of a small but self-governing French-speaking conference. Other ethnic churches have been formed, including several in British Columbia, where missionary efforts have made significant inroads within the Chinese, Vietnamese and East Indian communities.

The MB Church's cultural and ethnic diversity are heavily emphasized at national and provincial conferences. At the 1990 British Columbia provincial conference, entitled "A Multicultural Celebration of Jesus," the moderator pointed out that the most common name among MB pastors in B.C. was Chan.<sup>13</sup> In that same year Jim Coggins wrote in the *Herald*: "We must be primarily Christians and only secondarily ethnic Mennonites or Chinese or English or Native or Canadian. A predominant nationalism or ethnicity is a false goal."<sup>14</sup>

As a result of their embrace of evangelicalism and their eagerness to engage in cross-cultural missions work, the Mennonite Brethren have experienced particular difficulty in reconciling their Anabaptist heritage with the more modern influences that they have absorbed in the last two centuries. In an introductory book about the Mennonite Brethren that was published in 1984, American writer Katie Funk Wiebe acknowledged the tension that exists between those who identify themselves as Anabaptists and those who have a stronger affinity with mainstream evangelicalism. Some MBs, she wrote, "think of themselves more like Baptists under a different name and wear the label 'Mennonite Brethren' a trifle reluctantly, convinced it smacks of ethnicity and may be a high wall keeping people from joining them."<sup>15</sup>

A debate over whether to change the name of the Conference has been around since at least the early 1970s. John H. Redekop, a political science professor, Conference official and long-time *Herald* columnist, was advocating a name change as far back as 1971. In 1987 he published his controversial book *A People Apart: Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren* which acknowledged that although the celebration of Mennonite ethnicity was a healthy thing, care had to be taken to separate ethnicity from the Christian

faith. He noted that the term “Mennonite” had both ethnic and religious meanings; a name change would clear up this needless confusion and remove any ethnic barriers that might prevent people from joining the church.

Mennonite Brethren would not cease to be Mennonites. Many of us are and will always remain Mennonites. We have no other race or ethnic identity. But in our conference designation we would not assert an ethnic name and would thus recognize other ethnicities and other faith-culture combinations.<sup>16</sup>

Redekop suggested “Canadian Conference of Evangelical Anabaptist Churches” as one possibility for a new name.

Some critics of the book argued that the controversy over ethnicity was a red herring that prevented the conference from dealing with much more serious problems. University of Winnipeg professor Harry Loewen wrote: “The real issue is a refusal to accept the ‘hard sayings’ of the gospel and a desire among many MB’s to join with the much larger and more popular North American evangelical community.”<sup>17</sup> *The Herald* received many letters from all points of the theological spectrum expressing vigorous support for retention of the original name. A few said that the real culprit was not “Mennonite” but the sexism implied by the word “Brethren”.<sup>18</sup>

The release of Redekop’s book coincided with a seminar on Faith and Ethnicity in Fresno, California in November 1987. After hearing presentations on both sides of the issue, the seminar concluded that the Conference should emphasize its theological distinctives and consider Mennonite ethnicity as only one of the many ethnic flavors that were affirmed in the churches. Although the proposed name change did show up on the agendas of several national Conferences, a decisive vote on the issue was always avoided.<sup>19</sup>

Another difficulty faced by the modern MB Church is a continuous battle between the liberal and conservative wings of the conference over theology. The controversy has been exacerbated by a conference structure that places most of the power in the hands of the local congregations. As far back as 1972 J. A. Toews warned of a growing polarization in theology and ethics in the conference between a “left wing” concerned with social action and a “right wing” wanting to concentrate solely on evangelism and missions.<sup>20</sup> The doctrinal divide in the church became painfully clear during the 1990 North American Conference when many churches expressed a reluctance to adopt a new Confession of Faith that some accused of putting too much emphasis on peace and non-resistance.<sup>21</sup>

Despite experiencing mixed feelings over its ethnic roots, the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church has been well documented. Perhaps life in a Conference struggling to establish a coherent identity has provided its historians with the urgency to uncover the past and ensure that the MB Church does not ignore its Anabaptist heritage.

Its first prominent historian, and probably the most important Mennonite historian of the Russian era, was P. M. Friesen, who in 1885 was given the assignment of writing a history of the Mennonite Brethren on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1860 secession. Friesen’s monumental work *The History of the Mennonites in Russia* was finally published in 1911, and was the culmination of a lifetime of active service in the church. In 1978 the MB Church’s Historical Commission completed a massive project with its highly publicized release of an English translation of the history.

The most important Mennonite Brethren historian of the modern era is John A. Toews, whose *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* was published to coincide with the centennial of the coming of the first MBs to North America in 1874.

Both P. M. Friesen and John A. Toews used their books to advance the claim that the 1860 secession was a return to rather than an abandonment of traditional Anabaptist teachings. This has always been a rather sensitive issue for Mennonite Brethren and the critics who have accused them of being seduced by evangelical and fundamentalist theologies. The participants in the 1860 split were emphatic in the belief that their actions had been motivated by the desire to create a new church wherein the claims of Christ would be taken seriously and the beliefs and practices of the early Anabaptists faithfully upheld. The original secession document makes four specific references to the teachings of Menno Simons.<sup>22</sup>

Mennonite Brethren historians have not been hesitant to draw parallels between the suffering of the first Anabaptists and the persecution that the first generation of Mennonite Brethren were forced to endure before they received official recognition. Friesen's history has been described as a latter day counterpart to the *Martyr's Mirror* in that it was a response to persecution. While the *Martyr's Mirror* was designed to justify the new Anabaptist movement against the external attacks of the state, Friesen's goal was to justify the existence of the new MB Church against attacks of the larger Mennonite community in Russia.<sup>23</sup>

Toews was also eager to demonstrate the close ties between the MBs and the early Anabaptists. The first chapter of his history is entitled "Spiritual Heirs of the Early Anabaptists". In an article outlining the main themes of the book, he wrote: "The

concept of a ‘believers’ church of the early Brethren was a recovery of the ‘Anabaptist Vision’.”<sup>24</sup> This theme has been echoed by many other modern Mennonite Brethren scholars and church leaders.<sup>25</sup>

There is, however, a growing acknowledgement that the story of the origin of the Mennonite Brethren is not quite so simple as the traditional accounts would have us believe. James Urry accuses Friesen of greatly inflating the importance of the Mennonite Brethren in the larger Russian community, when they were actually but one part of a much broader reaction to social and spiritual change in this period. “For a long time,” writes Urry, “Mennonites have seen the emergence of the Brethren as the pivotal event in nineteenth-century Russian-Mennonite history. Before 1860 all was backwardness and darkness; once the Brethren emerged all was progress and light.”<sup>26</sup> In her 1984 introduction to the MB Church Katie Funk Wiebe wrote that the accusations made by the Brethren against the established church may have been too severe and that their goals might have been achieved without a schism if they just exhibited a bit more patience.<sup>27</sup>

In 1996 historian Paul Toews attempted to create a more balanced picture of the Mennonite Brethren with the admission that the early MB Church had a number of different influences. He also acknowledged that people had joined the Mennonite Brethren for various reasons, including some that were more secular than spiritual in nature.<sup>28</sup>

The awareness of the need for a Canadian Mennonite Brethren archival program dates back to at least 1950 when MBBC professor Abraham H. Unruh proposed the establishment of one after having difficulty finding material for a conference history. The origins of the present collection can be traced back to the 1960s when MBBC



librarian Herbert Giesbrecht began collecting conference periodicals and personal papers. The first significant collection that he acquired was the personal and official papers of long-time MB leader B. B. Janz.<sup>29</sup> Giesbrecht was officially appointed conference archivist in 1969, the same year that the North American General Conference established a Historical Commission to provide leadership in coordinating historical research and the promotion of archival collection and preservation.

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg was formally established in 1975 as one of three official MB North American archival centres, each of which was given specified responsibilities.<sup>30</sup> The mandate of the Winnipeg Centre was to collect and preserve all official records of the Canadian Conference and its agencies and related institutions; the records of provincial MB Conferences; and the records of individual Mennonite Brethren congregations across Canada. This agreement was accepted by the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches at the 1976 Canadian Conference.

The first location of the archives was a small office in MBBC's library. In 1973 the collection was transferred to a small classroom and in 1979 it moved into its current location in the basement of the college's new multi-purpose building.

In the summer of 1979, the conference hired Ken Reddig, a teacher at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, as its first full-time archivist while Herbert Giesbrecht resumed his position as full-time college librarian. Reddig was instrumental in expanding the archives' visibility in the conference and in seeking cooperation with the Mennonite Heritage Centre. In 1987 the two archival centres merged their two newsletters together to create a single new periodical known as the *Mennonite Historian*.

Reddig resigned in 1990 to take a position at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and in 1991 Abe Dueck, a professor at MBBC, was appointed as the new director.

In 1995 the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies released a “Needs Assessment” report that highlighted its desperate need for new facilities. The chief problem was a basement location that was difficult to find, inaccessible to the physically challenged and susceptible to flooding.<sup>31</sup>

In 2000 the Centre announced that it would move to a new location on the main and second floors of the building after the College vacated the space to move to the site of the new Canadian Mennonite University on Shaftesbury Boulevard in Winnipeg.<sup>32</sup>

The efforts of the Centre to influence the collective memory of the Canadian Conference have been driven by a desire to ensure that a knowledge of the Conference’s historical roots is not lost in the rush to enter the North American evangelical mainstream. Through its promotional and outreach programs, the Centre has encouraged record preservation and historical research as well as an appreciation for the Anabaptist origins of the Conference. It has also sought to meet the challenge of remaining relevant as its constituency becomes more ethnically and culturally diverse.

Before any archival centre can influence the collective memory of its constituency, however, it must first demonstrate that a collective memory is worth preserving. This problem is especially prevalent in evangelical organizations that place a heavy emphasis on missions; when the mandate of a denomination is to prepare souls for the future, it is difficult to convince the members that a portion of their tithes should go towards the preservation of a past that appears to have little relevance for the pressing tasks at hand. This reluctance to dwell on the past can be seen in a 1979 column by

*Herald* columnist John Redekop that responded to a number of highly publicized historical events that had occurred in the previous year. In his column, Redekop cautioned the Conference against becoming a historical society. Its mandate was not to study itself: “True, a denomination that ignores history lacks reference points, but one that dwells unduly on history misses the Christian imperative of urgency, both evangelistic and love-service.”<sup>33</sup> It must be emphasized, however, that Redekop was always one of the strongest supporters of the archival program in the Conference.<sup>34</sup>

When interviewed, both the current and the former archivists at the Centre could not recall any overtly negative criticism about the archival program from Conference leaders. In fact, many of the leaders were solid supporters of the program, probably in some cases because they wanted to preserve a record of events in which they were personally involved.<sup>35</sup> The archivists knew, though, that sentiment against the support of historical and cultural programs was always present. In a 1980 letter archivist Ken Reddig admitted that interest in history in the Conference did not as yet match the size of the budget that the Centre had been entrusted with: “Should a broad spectrum of our constituency realize how much is going into our Historical Committee questions might be raised.”<sup>36</sup> The people who tended to be most critical of archives were recently returned missionaries who were often adamant about not spending money on “nonessentials”. Archivist Abe Dueck acknowledged that one of the main tasks of the Conference archivist was to ensure that people did not see the Centre as simply an ethnic or a cultural institution; they needed to be reminded that archival work was spiritual work that helped provide a strong historical foundation on which the Conference could grow.<sup>37</sup>

The need to demonstrate the spiritual necessity of an archival program is evident throughout the history of the Centre. In a 1979 *Herald* article Ken Reddig, the newly appointed head, attempted to provide a justification for spending money on the preservation of old documents: “There can be no mature personal or group sense of identity that is not rooted in thoughtful reflections upon the past.” The desire of the archives was to pass on to succeeding generations a record of God’s witness through His actions in the lives of men and women. “The purpose of an archives,” said Reddig, “is not simply to keep a record of the past but to create a center where resources become available which can help our congregations and educational institutions provide direction for the future.”<sup>38</sup> In its 1984 Annual Report, Reddig wrote that in the Centre “we regard the collection and recording of our Conference history as a sacred responsibility and task. It is not only a record, but a witness of God’s grace and work among men and women of our denomination.”<sup>39</sup>

In a January 1989 letter to Mennonite Brethren pastors, Ken Reddig described the mandate of the archives as “not only to preserve the documents, bulletins and correspondence that tell the story of each congregation, but to help pass on the truth that a life filled with the spirit of Christ is the answer to each person’s quest for meaning in this earthly life.”<sup>40</sup> The archivists also did not hesitate to use major events as a chance to spread their message. A 1998 fire that destroyed Winnipeg’s North Kildonan MB Church caused Abe Dueck to submit a *Herald* article that discussed the importance of preserving church records. In the article he wrote that while the church is ultimately more than just a building, a building can nevertheless contain many pleasant memories

and its loss can be very painful. Dueck pointed out that records, too, contained many important memories and needed to be preserved.

Important moments in the life of the church are recorded. Some may be regrettable; others have been formative moments in spiritual growth. All can serve to help us remember and learn. A forward-looking people should never fear to look back and gain broader perspectives on God's purposes.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to ascribing a spiritual purpose to the Archives' tasks of collection and preservation, the Centre also attempted to show how individual members could use an interest in history to serve God. In a 1986 *Herald* article about Katie Peters, the donor of an extraordinary collection of genealogical materials to the archives, Ken Reddig asserted that collecting historical documents was indeed a form of Christian service: "Her collection . . . will provide future generations with a resource of their family history and a witness of the dedication to God of thousands of men and women who, through Mennonite congregations, have glorified God in many parts of the world."<sup>42</sup> When interviewed, Abe Dueck noted his efforts to point out the spiritual benefits of historical research. He encouraged individual members to use the archives' resources to compile family histories; these histories, by providing evidence of the work of God in the lives of a family's ancestors, could help to inspire and revitalize its current members and provide them with a renewed sense of spiritual purpose.<sup>43</sup>

On a more down-to-earth level, the Centre has taken on other tasks to justify its existence in more utilitarian terms. In 1989 the Centre accepted the responsibility of compiling statistical data for the Canadian Conference. Although the job was large, it would, as Ken Reddig reported to the Historical Committee, put the Centre in a position to demonstrate its usefulness to the Conference in a concrete manner.<sup>44</sup>

Apart from the need to justify its existence, the Centre has faced other constraints as a consequence of the spiritual nature of its mandate. In 1987 Ken Reddig refused to apply for funding from a particular government assistance program when he learned that it was solely funded by lotteries. In 1993 the Canadian Conference's Historical Committee moved that it not apply for grants which clearly state that the monies are from lotteries. Also in 1993, the Archives turned down a request to allow some of its photos to be used in a documentary about gay and lesbian Mennonites.<sup>45</sup>

If the first step in forging a collective memory is to convince the constituency of its necessity, the second is to encourage both churches and individuals to manage and preserve their records properly. The Centre, in concert with its sister archives in Hillsboro, Kansas and Fresno, California, has organized a series of special events designed to impress upon members the importance of records preservation. One of its most highly visible actions was a five-month trip undertaken by historian John B. Toews in 1978. Accompanied by a cameraman, Toews travelled over ten thousand miles across Canada and the northern United States, collecting and microfilming church records. Funded by a grant from the General Conference's Board of Christian Literature, the trip received extensive coverage in MB periodicals and was instrumental in raising awareness about the Conference's archival program.<sup>46</sup>

In 1994 the Historical Commission of the North American Conference made the decision to sponsor a series of workshops on "Heritage Preservation" at each of the Provincial and U.S. District Conferences within the next two years. Two years later, it reported that it had conducted workshops at all but one of the conferences and, in addition, published *Heritage Preservation: A Resource Book for Congregations*.<sup>47</sup>

The archivists have frequently visited churches across Canada in order to give seminars on keeping congregational records. Abe Dueck has made archival education one of his chief priorities and, as a result, has travelled to most of the individual congregations from Ontario to Alberta. In his travels, he tries to relate primarily to pastors and other leaders, trying to convince them of the necessity of preserving archives.<sup>48</sup>

The Centre has also tried to promote preservation through press releases and other articles in the *Herald*. A 1996 piece in the *Mennonite Historian* described an agreement with the Saskatchewan MB Conference that transferred its congregational records from a basement room at a local Bible institute to the Centre. The article used this opportunity to encourage other congregations to transfer its local records to the Centre, thereby guaranteeing that they would be preserved for future generations. When the North Kildonan Church was destroyed by fire in 1998, the main news story in the *Herald* was accompanied by a sidebar from Abe Dueck that urged churches to take the time to properly store and preserve their records.<sup>49</sup>

The third and most significant step in an archives' effort to influence the collective memory of its constituency is the production and coordination of outreach and promotional activities and the commissioning of historical resources that are designed to heighten appreciation for the past. The Historical Commission of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America has been able, through the utilization of the resources of three different archival centers, to conduct active promotional and publishing programs. Underlying all this activity is the concern that members of the MB Church are increasingly reluctant to embrace their Anabaptist

heritage. Consequently, the Centre, both in concert with the Historical Commission of the North American Conference and on its own, has devoted a significant amount of its promotional budget to ensure that traditional Anabaptist values are not abandoned in the rush to enter the North American evangelical mainstream.

A number of projects have been designed to remind MB members of the achievements of the first Anabaptists. In 1990 the Historical Commission released a video lecture by historian Abraham Friesen entitled *The Birth of Anabaptism*. In this taped lecture Professor Friesen described how the Anabaptists had endured persecution from the established church for their determination to establish a believers' church where membership was by choice and not by order of the state. The video posed a challenge for the present MB Church: Would its members retain a true believers' church or would they be assimilated into North American society?<sup>50</sup>

In April 1994 the Centre hosted the *Mirror of the Martyrs* exhibit at Concord College. Although the exhibit received extensive coverage in the Winnipeg media, the organizers were disappointed that more members of Mennonite churches did not show up. In a memo to the Canadian Conference Historical Committee, Abe Dueck wrote that "the idea of a martyr exhibit evidently would not draw large crowds of people. I think that the connection with 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptism is one which most MB's don't value particularly."<sup>51</sup> In 1996, on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Menno Simons' birth, Abe Dueck gave an interview with Mennonite Brethren Communications and the Centre hosted a lecture series on early Anabaptism by Abraham Friesen.

The majority of the Centre's promotional and outreach activities, however, have focussed on the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church itself. Many of the seminars



and symposiums that the Centre has sponsored, both by itself and in conjunction with the Historical Commission, have explicitly dealt with MB themes. The topics covered include: “Influences Upon Mennonite Brethren Theology” (1980); “Dynamics of Faith and Culture in MB History” (1986); “Faith and Ethnicity Among the Brethren (1987); and “North American Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Century” (1993).

Perhaps the most successful project ever undertaken by the Historical Commission was a three-part film series entitled *The Mennonite Brethren: A Missionary Movement*. Released in 1988, it consisted of three filmed lectures by J. B. Toews that told the story of the growth and development of the Mennonite Brethren Church around the world. This project had been proposed back in 1984 by Ken Reddig.<sup>52</sup> In a 1985 letter to John Redekop, he wrote:

I am certainly hoping and praying that this will become a positive film to stimulate a greater interest in our brotherhood and help continue our long-standing missions emphasis. Within the last few years, as a result of my working in the Archives, I have come to appreciate, respect and find essential to any denomination's life and vitality, a strong missions emphasis. It need not always be the traditional view of missions, but some concerted effort in communicating the Good News is essential if the church is to grow.<sup>53</sup>

By the time the series was completed and released in the summer of 1988 it was already heavily booked. It was shown at many missions conferences and festivals that fall. At the beginning of 1989, the minutes of the Historical Committee recorded that the series was still in high demand and would shortly be out on video. Archivist Alf Redekop would later estimate that about 75% of the Canadian MB congregations had seen at least part of the series.<sup>54</sup>

The Centre has also commissioned a number of book projects, including a history of the MB Church in Manitoba that was published in 1989 and a 1994 autobiography of

MB theologian and college professor David Ewert. In 1997 the Historical Commission published a pamphlet entitled "Basic Mennonite Library for Mennonite Brethren Congregations". This annotated bibliography, designed to assist church and school librarians in purchasing Anabaptist and MB historical materials, was mailed to all MB congregations in North America.<sup>55</sup>

Also in 1997, the Commission initiated another successful project with the release of the first of a series of pamphlets entitled "Profiles of Mennonite Faith". These pamphlets, containing short stories about the lives of important Mennonite leaders, were mailed to all MB congregations for distribution. The subjects of the profiles ranged from early Anabaptist hero Dirk Willems, who had rescued a pursuer from drowning in an ice-covered pond and was later burned at the stake, to MB historian P. M. Friesen, who was portrayed in his pamphlet as a champion of social justice who had once publicly protested anti-Semitism in the southern Russian port city of Sevastopol. The series even managed to capitalize on the craze surrounding the movie *Titanic* with a pamphlet about Annie Funk, an early MB missionary to India who died in the disaster and reportedly gave her seat in a lifeboat to a mother with children. All of the pamphlets contained an explicit inspirational or moral lesson, emphasizing such Anabaptist themes as loving one's enemies, discipleship and support for the poor and oppressed. Reportedly well received, the series has proved to be an effective means of communicating the message that the study of history can bring spiritual benefits.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to its involvement in publishing and audio-visual media, the Centre has sought to maintain a presence at national and provincial Conferences through displays, seminars and special presentations during the main inspirational sessions. At

the 1986 Conference an excerpt from the Toews missionary series was shown just before the closing communion service. The excerpt, which recounted the story of the founding of the Mennonite Brethren church in Zaire at the cost of the lives of many of the first missionaries, was followed by a time of silence to remember those who had passed away in the past year. At the 1988 celebration of the centennial of the founding of the first MB church in Manitoba, Ken Reddig presented interviews with Anna Redekop, who had attended thirty national conventions, and MB pastor and musician Rudy Boschman, who related a personal musical history of the Conference.<sup>57</sup>

The Centre's promotion of historical research has been hampered by its poor location and by the failure of MBBC/Concord College to offer courses that would have encouraged use of the archives. MB archivists have, however, done their best to facilitate and promote MB historical research. In 1992 the Historical Commission of the Mennonite Brethren Church announced the creation of the P. M. Friesen History Essay Contest, designed to encourage original historical research and writing and the utilization of the resources of MB archival collections.

From its inception, the Centre has applied for government grants to cover the costs of microfilming and indexing early Conference periodicals. As a result, many people, including numerous students, have been employed by the Centre on a short-term basis in order to work on grant-funded projects. This involvement of the wider community in the archival process is one of the crucial but often over-looked means by which an archives can work towards the reinforcement of collective memory in the larger constituency. At the Centre, for example, Hildi Janzen, a short-term employee who worked on the indexing of a German periodical, reported that the project had been very

meaningful and had given her a better historical understanding of Canadian Mennonites.<sup>58</sup>

A final challenge that the Centre for MB Studies has had to face is the changing ethnic and cultural make-up of its constituency. The Centre has had to confront the dilemma of forging a collective memory that does not alienate non-ethnic Mennonites while at the same time ensuring that Anabaptist principles are not sacrificed on the altar of expediency. As an increasing number of new members lack historical ties to the Conference, it is vital that the Centre continue to be viewed as primarily a religious and not simply an ethnic institution.

The Centre has, nevertheless, supported a number of projects that are primarily ethnic in nature. In the 1980s it supported music professor Doreen Klassen in a project that involved travelling across Canada to collect traditional and contemporary Mennonite songs. Ken Reddig worked together with the Mennonite Heritage Centre staff to prepare a tour guide to Mennonite historical sites in Manitoba for the 1990 World Conference. The Centre also contributed funds towards the writing of the *Mennonites in Canada* historical series.

The Centre, however, has been much more reluctant to become heavily involved in promoting the study of Mennonite ethnicity. Conscious of its position in a heavily evangelical conference with a diverse membership, it has sought to incorporate the stories of the various groups in the conference into one inclusive narrative. In 1993 Abe Dueck wrote about his dream to use the Centre's resources to create a new vision for the future of the Mennonite Brethren in Canada:

Are we Anabaptist, Mennonite or Evangelical? Or are we some other peculiar mix of traditions? How does our ethnic and cultural past relate to

the new realities of being a people of many different backgrounds not only in various countries around the world but within Canada itself? How can our past illuminate the future as we seek to be a faithful church? These are challenging issues and it would be tremendously gratifying for the Centre to serve as a positive force in bringing our denomination together in a common cause.<sup>59</sup>

The Centre has been assisted in this endeavour by the North American Conference's Historical Commission which has actively sought to encourage historical consciousness and archival preservation in the global church. In 1995 the Commission announced its desire to nurture the historical identities of the world-wide Mennonite Brethren community of faith. It reported that it had funded the attendance of one Zairan and one Indian leader at an international consultation on the development of a postcolonial mission historiography.<sup>60</sup> In 1997 the Commission declared that the next biennium would be marked by an effort to draw in new groups that were joining the Conference: "Many of these people bring interesting stories that flavour their understanding of Christian faith and that can give us broader conceptions of what it means to be the people of God."<sup>61</sup>

The Winnipeg Centre has shown a particular interest in ensuring that the fledgling, largely francophone MB church in Quebec is adequately represented in the archives. In 1987 Ken Reddig went on a summer trip to Quebec to take a records inventory, copy church records and give advice on preservation. In the course of the trip he photocopied the records of both the regional Conference and the individual churches. In his report he noted that the Quebec congregations were excellent record keepers and that it was necessary to consider helping them write their own history: "A history would not only inform them of their own pilgrimage but I believe a good history would help them to clarify their theological and cultural inheritance."<sup>62</sup> Reddig also contributed an

article on the Quebec church for a special expanded edition of the *Mennonite Historian* that was published in conjunction with the 1990 World Conference.<sup>63</sup>

Abe Dueck, the current head of the Centre, has expressed his desire to ensure that all members of the conference believe that they have a stake in the archives. When asked in an interview what his response would be to a member from a non-Mennonite background who challenged the relevance of the archives, Dueck replied that he would emphasize the relevance of individual stories to the larger story of the Conference as a whole: “We have a fundamental commitment to the growth of the church beyond ethnic boundaries . . . . We’ve seen all the suffering in our own ethnically-defined communities in Russia, for example, but many of those people also have their own history of suffering . . . . That is also our history and will become increasingly our history. . . .”<sup>64</sup>

This approach is illustrated by Dueck’s reply to a letter that he received in 1993 from the pastor of a church in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. In the letter, the pastor asked that the church’s subscription to the *Mennonite Historian* be cancelled since it was never read: “We don’t have many Mennonite people in our church and those that we do have, are not interested in the *Historian*.”<sup>65</sup> Dueck, in his response, challenged the pastor to rethink his comment about not having many Mennonite people:

I understand what you mean, although I would hope that everyone in your church considers himself a Mennonite in the true sense of what the Mennonite faith should stand for. The *Mennonite Historian* would like to serve people of various ethnic backgrounds – indeed it is most important to understand how our faith interacts with our culture, whatever kind that may be. Meadow Lake has its own experience, and it is important for the church and others to understand how it has come to be what it is.<sup>66</sup>

Dueck concluded his letter by encouraging the church to submit a history to the Centre and offering to provide assistance if the church wished to celebrate an anniversary in the future.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> These figures were taken from the web site of the Mennonite World Conference on June 28, 2000. The URL is [www.mwc-cmm.org/Directory/namerica.html](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/Directory/namerica.html).

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno, Cal.: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of M.B. Churches, 1975), pp. 361-379; Guenther, "Living with the Virus," pp. 229-230.

<sup>3</sup> J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale, Penn. and Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1975), pp. 301-307.

<sup>4</sup> *MBH*, 15 January 1982, pp. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Toews, *History*, pp. 30-31; Urry, *None But Saints*, pp. 179-182.

<sup>6</sup> Toews, *History*, pp. 44-47.

<sup>7</sup> Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*. p. 297.

<sup>8</sup> Toews, *History*, pp. 161, 207.

<sup>9</sup> Although Delbert Plett would vehemently disagree, some MB leaders still take pride in their church's gift of a saving faith to the *Kanadier* Mennonites. See, for instance, the account of David Ewert's 1988 Centennial address in *MBH*, 1 April 1988, pp. 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> In 1991 MBBC lost its status as the Conference's national college and became a regional school primarily serving Manitoba. Its name was changed to Concord College.

<sup>12</sup> Noll, "Canadian Evangelicalism," pp. 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> *MBH*, 28 June 1991, pp. 13-16.

<sup>14</sup> *MBH*, 12 October 1990, pp. 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Katie Funk Wiebe, *Who Are the Mennonite Brethren?* (Winnipeg and Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1984), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> John H. Redekop, "Summarizing the book," in *MBH*, 15 May 1987, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *MBH*, 3 October 1986, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, *MBH*, 20 March 1987, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *MBH*, 19 February 1988, pp. 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> *MBH*, 10 March 1972, pp. 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> *MBH*, 5 March 1993, pp. 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Toews, *History*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham Friesen, "Introduction," in Abraham Friesen, ed., *P. M. Friesen & his History: Understanding Mennonite Brethren Beginnings* (Fresno, Cal.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), p. vii.

<sup>24</sup> *MBH*, 14 April 1975, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Walter Unger, "Spiritual Renewal: a Mennonite heritage and prospect," in *MBH*, 14 January 1983, pp. 2-5; and the comments of Frank C. Peters as recorded in *MBH*, 14 October 1977, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Urry, *None But Saints*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Wiebe, *Who Are*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Toews, "Where did We Come From? A New Look at the Origins of the Mennonite Brethren Church" in *MBH*, 12 January 1996, pp. 4-6.

<sup>29</sup> *MH* 15:2 (June 1989), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> The other two are located in Hillsboro, Kansas and Fresno, California.

<sup>31</sup> *MH* 20:1 (March 1995), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> *MH* 26:1 (March 2000), p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> *MBH*, 5 January 1979, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Ken Reddig, 1 May 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Reddig, 1 May 2000; interview with Abe Dueck, 7 February 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Reddig to Wesley Prieb, 26 February 1980, B244-30, Archivists' Correspondence 1980, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS).

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Reddig, 1 May 2000; interview with Dueck, 7 February 2000.

<sup>38</sup> *MBH*, 21 December 1979, pp. 28-29.

<sup>39</sup> *MBH*, 8 June 1984, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Reddig to MB pastors, January 1989, B244-39, Archivists' Correspondence 1989, CMBS.

<sup>41</sup> *MBH*, 11 June 1993, pp. 22-23.

<sup>42</sup> *MBH*, 4 April 1986, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Dueck, 7 February 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Report to Historical Commission of the General Conference of MB Churches, 11 May 1990, B244-17, Centre for MB Studies Minutes & Reports 1990, CMBS.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes of Historical Committee 13 April 1987, B244-1; Minutes of Historical Committee 20 January 1993, B244-1; Archivist's Report 22 September 1993, B244-18, Centre for MB Studies Minutes & Reports 1993, CMBS; Interview with Dueck, 7 February 2000.



- <sup>46</sup> *MBH*, 27 October 1978, p. 16.
- <sup>47</sup> *MH* 22:1 (March 1995), p. 5; *MBH*, 18 April 1997, pp. 22-24.
- <sup>48</sup> Interview with Dueck, 7 February 2000.
- <sup>49</sup> *MH* 22:3 (September 1996), p. 7; *MBH* 1 May 1998, p. 14.
- <sup>50</sup> For a review, see *MBH*, 9 May 1990, p. 30.
- <sup>51</sup> Memo to Members of the Historical Committee, 9 May 1994, B244-2, Chairman's Correspondence 1977-1994, CMBS.
- <sup>52</sup> Minutes of Historical Committee, 17 January 1984, B244-11, Centre for MB Studies Minutes & Reports 1984, CMBS.
- <sup>53</sup> Reddig to John H. Redekop, 28 May 1985, B244-35, Archivists' Correspondence 1985, CMBS.
- <sup>54</sup> Minutes of Historical Committee 16 January 1989, B244-16, Centre for MB Studies & Reports 1989, CMBS; *MH* 14:3 (September 1988), p. 5; Interview with Alf Redekopp, 13 March 2000.
- <sup>55</sup> *MBH*, 18 April 1997, pp. 22-24.
- <sup>56</sup> *MH* 24:2 (June 1998), p. 7; The pamphlets discussed are No. 1 (Fall 1997), No. 3 (Spring 1998) and in the "Profiles of Mennonite Faith" series.
- <sup>57</sup> *MBH*, 25 July 1986, p.3; *MBH*, 29 July 1988, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>58</sup> Undated report, B244-10, Centre for MB Studies Minutes & Reports 1983, CMBS.
- <sup>59</sup> Abe Dueck, "Dreams and Realities: A Big Task Ahead," in *MH* 17:2 (June 1991), p. 5.
- <sup>60</sup> *MBH*, 5 May 1995, p. 19.
- <sup>61</sup> *MBH*, 18 April 1997, pp. 22-24.
- <sup>62</sup> Archivist's Report on First Stage of Collecting Congregational Records of the Quebec MB Congregations, 1987, in B244-14, Centre for MB Studies Minutes & Reports 1987, CMBS.
- <sup>63</sup> Ken Reddig, "Mennonites in Canada: The New Fact," in *MH* 16:2 (June 1990), p. 5.
- <sup>64</sup> Interview with Dueck, 7 February 2000.
- <sup>65</sup> Bob Cappelle to MB Centre, 26 January 1993, B244-85, Director's Correspondence 1991-1993, CMBS.
- <sup>66</sup> Abe Dueck to Cappelle, 10 February 1993, B244-85, CMBS.

## **Chapter Four: The Mennonite Heritage Centre and Collective Memory as Community Balance**

The Mennonite Heritage Centre, located on the grounds of the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, serves as the official repository for the records of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada as well as a number of other Mennonite denominations and organizations.

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada currently consists of 228 congregations with approximately 36, 800 members.<sup>1</sup> It was, until recently, one of six districts in the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America. With a mixture of Swiss and Dutch roots and a strong ecumenical emphasis, the CMC can be a difficult denomination to classify. Unlike the Mennonite Brethren, which dramatically broke away from the larger Mennonite church in Russia in 1860, the General Conference has grown peacefully through a series of mergers and unification agreements. Designed to promote co-operation and the sharing of resources among Mennonites, the Conference is characterized by lack of centralized control and tolerance of a wide range of theologies and worship styles. As sociologist Calvin Redekop has written, any Mennonite can find a congregation within the Conference that suits his or her personal preference.<sup>2</sup> The Conference actively works for greater unity among Mennonites but also struggles to reconcile the diverse backgrounds and experiences of its various component groups. A mission statement adopted at its 1990 national convention reads:

The Conference of Mennonites is a united and uniting body of Mennonite congregations which works in partnership with provincial/regional conferences in the mission and ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. It provides, facilitates and coordinates national and other programs that support the ministry of its congregations and partner conferences.<sup>3</sup>

The General Conference is often the target of attacks from more conservative Mennonite groups who regard it as too liberal and too tolerant of immoral behaviour. Comparative studies of North American Mennonite denominations appear to provide some substantive evidence for these perceptions of difference, if not necessarily their moralistic overtones. In their comparative study of five denominations that was published in 1975, Kauffman and Harder reported that the General Conference was the most secularized, ranking last on seven out of eleven faith variables. According to a follow-up 1989 study, General Conference Mennonites were less likely to take strict positions on such moral issues as drinking, gambling and dancing. These studies also demonstrated, however, that the General Conference showed a stronger commitment than the other denominations to Anabaptist theology and social issues such as pacifism, social justice and interracial justice.<sup>4</sup>

The General Conference traces its origins to a meeting in West Branch, Iowa in 1860. Progressive Swiss Mennonites, many of them recent immigrants, agreed to form a “General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America” with the ultimate goal of uniting all Mennonites under one organizational umbrella. The broader “Conference” structure would allow individual congregations to work together to accomplish larger tasks while still permitting a fair amount of local freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the *Kanadier* Mennonites who emigrated to western Canada in the 1870s formed their own conferences or *Gemeinde*. A more progressive group, known as the Bergthaler was formed in 1892 and soon sought assistance from American General Conference educators and missionaries. In 1903, representatives from the Bergthaler and the Rosenorter *Gemeinde* in Saskatchewan met in Hochstadt in southern Manitoba to

establish the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada. In his 1987 Conference Message, moderator Walter Franz said: “The formation of a new conference was seen as the will of God for its purpose was to unite congregations in doing his will.”<sup>6</sup> At its 1904 Conference sessions, the delegates established a constitution that, with minor modifications, would remain in place for more than fifty years. The stated goals of the Conference were to provide fellowship, permit the pooling of resources and assist in the strengthening of the participating churches.<sup>7</sup>

The Canadian Conference remained primarily a Manitoba-Saskatchewan entity until the coming of the *Russlaender* in the 1920s. In many of the new settlements, Mennonite Brethren and members of the *Kirchliche* (or larger Mennonite church) worked and worshipped together amicably but most of the *Kirchliche* eventually formed their own congregations, put off by the MB Church’s aggressive proselytization and insistence on immersion baptism. Many of these immigrant churches affiliated with the General Conference, attracted by a common interest in education and missions and by an organizational structure that allowed individual congregations to join, even if their larger *Gemeinde* did not. Historian John Friesen writes: “The principle of allowing considerable diversity in worship and custom seemed to suit the various Russian and Prussian Mennonite groups since they were not from one region and thus represented different faith traditions.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1932 the Conference changed its name to General Conference of Mennonites in Canada. The 1930s and 1940s were also marked by the growth of provincial conferences that organized and administered local home missions, summer camps and youth

ministries. As the provincial conferences took on more and more responsibilities, the national Conference remained in an advisory capacity.<sup>9</sup>

Canadian Mennonite Bible College was founded in Winnipeg in 1947 in the hope that it would serve to bring the various congregations together and aid in the promotion of co-operation and unity. Although it has served as one of the few visible co-operative ventures of the Conference, CMBC has also sparked many controversies over its perceived reluctance to truly embrace evangelical theology.

During the 1950s and 1960s congregations became increasingly independent. The traditional lay leaders of the old *Gemeinde* were replaced by professional pastors and by the 1960s the transition from German to English was largely complete. Canada's first all-English Mennonite periodical, the *Canadian Mennonite* appeared in 1953. Although technically independent, it was partially subsidized by the Conference which used it as a national publicity outlet. When the *Canadian Mennonite* folded in 1971, the CMC reached an agreement with its successor, the *Mennonite Reporter*.

In 1959, after a major reorganization, the Conference was renamed the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC). Five national Conference Boards were created and a national office was established on the CMBC campus. The reorganization caused the CMC to greatly expand its national activities although a series of ambitious projects and mushrooming expenses eventually resulted in a financial crunch that caused delegates at the 1970 Conference sessions to order a reduction of the budget.<sup>10</sup>

In 1978 the Conference of Mennonites in Canada marked its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary by dedicating a cairn at the site of the 1903 sessions in Hochstadt.

In the last ten years, the CMC and the General Conference as a whole have gone through a number of major changes that appear to be in harmony with their stated goal of bringing Mennonites together. Talk about a merger with another large Mennonite denomination, the Swiss-dominated Mennonite Church, began as far back as 1983 at a joint delegate conference where an Integration Exploration Committee was established. In 1995, at a joint convention in Wichita, a vision statement was approved and a new Confession of Faith and a recommendation regarding integration were adopted. In 1997 the new denomination was named the "Mennonite Church". Although the merger was initially regarded with excitement, problems were quick to develop as the two large groups, dissimilar in many respects, tried to establish a working relationship.

In 1998 the Conference's delegates voted to support the formation of a new Mennonite university that would unite CMBC, Concord College (the former Mennonite Brethren Bible College) and Menno Simons College. This co-operative venture with the MB Conference was significant as another step forward towards full reconciliation between two groups whose differences go back to the 1860 split in Russia.

The CMC does not appear to share the struggle over identity that has continually beset the Mennonite Brethren over the years. As a rule, the CMC has been much more confident of its Anabaptist heritage and theology which are regarded more as assets than as liabilities to outreach. This does not mean, however, that conflict does not exist. The CMC also contains with its congregations a wide variety of doctrinal positions. The conference's loose organizational structure has been both a help and a hindrance in dealing with the problem. The large amount of latitude that is given to individual churches permits tensions to exist without tearing the conference apart. The lack of a

strong central authority also, unfortunately, often prevents the CMC from having a significant impact on the larger society. The CMC has maintained observer status with both the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the mainline Canadian Council of Churches but has not become a full member of either organization, knowing that such a move would generate too much controversy. The CMC seems to be acknowledging that the theological polarities represented by these two groups are also present within the denomination itself.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of a central authority also worries some observers who fear that the current structure is not strong enough to provide the CMC with a reason to stay together. As the regional conferences grow in size and take on more responsibilities, what justifies the continued existence of the national conference? As the individual congregations have become more independent, there has been less and less identification with the national body. The historian of the Manitoba conference, Anna Ens, describes the subtle shift from the notion that “we are the conference” to the idea that “we, the congregation” are separate from “it, the Conference”.<sup>12</sup>

In a 1992 “Proposal for New Structures” the national leaders of the CMC asserted: “CMC is not first of all an *organization*, but a *church*, a Canada-wide *body of Christ* that has covenanted together for fellowship and to do some tasks on behalf of all.”<sup>13</sup> Despite its efforts, however, the presence of the National Conference at the local level still appears to be lacking: A 1998 survey of General Conference and Mennonite Churches showed that 54% of their members were either unaware of the proposed integration between the two groups or did not know the reasons for it.<sup>14</sup>

The archival program of the CMC officially dates to 1933 when Bernhard J. Schellenberg was appointed as the Conference's first archivist. The current Heritage Centre collection had its origins in the historical library and archives that CMBC professor Gerhard Lohrenz began assembling in the 1950s. In 1966 the conference created two committees to oversee the historical and archival programs; the Historical Committee was to be responsible for the collection of archival materials while the CMBC faculty was to be in charge of their organization and classification. In 1973 the two committees were replaced by a single History-Archives Committee that was to administer the archival collection as a separate conference program. The move to expand the archival program seems to have been one of the many historical and heritage projects that were initiated in the Canadian Mennonite community during the celebration of the 1974 centennial.<sup>15</sup>

An important aspect of this expansion was the hiring of a full-time archivist. In 1973 Lawrence Klippenstein was engaged on a contract basis and in 1974 he accepted a full-time position as the conference's historian/archivist. Klippenstein served in this position until his retirement in 1997.

One of the first tasks for the new archivist and the History-Archives Committee was to clarify the mandate of the program. Discussions were held with the Conference's other archival institution at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario. It was eventually decided that responsibilities would be drawn along geographical and institutional lines: Material from the Canadian Conference and western Canada would be collected in Manitoba while the archives at Conrad Grebel would handle inter-Mennonite records. This agreement fulfilled the dream of the CMBC archives to become the official



repository of the National Conference. A committee member articulated this view in a letter to Frank Epp at Conrad Grebel:

The Conference Archives is not simply a CMBC archives. It is the archives for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. I believe that it should retain that national character. The others may be regional or topical but the Conference Archives should represent all the regions and the whole of the fields of interest of the people related to the Conference.<sup>16</sup>

In September 1975 the archives released the first issue of the *Mennonite Historian*, a publication designed, in the words of the editors, to serve as a forum where researchers could present their findings and as a vehicle of communication between groups and individuals interested in the Mennonite experience. Over the years the *Historian's* editors have maintained the original mandate to appeal to a popular audience.<sup>17</sup>

Plans were also underway in the 1970s to construct a new permanent home for the collection that would replace the two rooms in the College that served as archival offices at the time. The need for a new archival facility had been raised by Gerhard Lohrenz at the 1972 Conference. A Winkler businessman, P. W. Enns, saw this as a worthy project to support and offered to fund the construction of an archival centre through his family's charitable foundation. Enns described his proposal in a 1977 letter to the Conference: "This complex would be for the use of all Mennonites. The prime intent of such a center would be an expression of gratitude for God's guidance and our Canadian heritage, allowing future generations the opportunity to study and understand the Mennonite people as servants of God."<sup>18</sup>

At the 1977 Conference, delegates debated whether or not to accept this gift. A number of issues were raised. One delegate questioned the wisdom of centralizing everything in Manitoba while another wondered if the proposed centre would duplicate

the efforts of the Steinbach Museum. The most pressing issue, though, was the unprecedented nature of the financial arrangements. Never before had the Conference received a major gift for charitable purposes. Some expressed concern that this was evidence that the conference was becoming too wealthy while others wondered if a large donation from a private corporation was really “clean” money. After much discussion, the delegates voted 94% in favour of accepting the gift from the Enns Family Foundation.<sup>19</sup>

In defence of the Enns family’s actions, Gerhard Lohrenz wrote in the *Mennonite Reporter* that it was noble for wealthier members to support such projects: “Some folks have the idea that an archives is a place in which old mouldy papers are being kept . . . It is true that documents and papers are to be preserved here but they are kept and are being used to give us a better understanding and a clearer insight for today and the day after.”<sup>20</sup> The move to the new facility was complete by the fall of 1978 and the Mennonite Heritage Centre officially opened in 1979.

The construction of the Heritage Centre was part of a larger plan to transform the archives into a genuine inter-Mennonite institution. As early as 1974 Mennonite historian Ted Regehr, who had also been an archivist at the Public Archives of Canada, had suggested that provisions might be made to allow other provincial conferences to temporarily deposit their records at CMBC while their own archival programs were being developed. At another 1974 meeting it was decided that the CMBC archives served a purpose beyond just facilitating the work of the Conference; smaller Mennonite denominations, such as the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference were to be invited to deposit their records at the Centre.

In 1979 the EMMC did accept the Centre's offer and began using the MHC as its official archival depository. In later years, the Conference's History-Archives Committee would attempt to meet with representatives from all of the smaller Mennonite groups in western Canada; despite their efforts, no other conference has as yet made an official agreement with the Centre.<sup>21</sup>

The MHC has also tried to expand beyond denominational boundaries in its quest for records. In 1977 it was chosen as the permanent repository for the papers of MCC (Canada). History-Archives Committee member John Friesen had previously written MCC (Canada) head Dan Zehr that his group had "defined the scope of our archival holdings as including all materials which reflect the life of the Mennonite 'people'":

We see our task as much larger than just a place to keep denominational records. Our aim is to reflect the history of Mennonites in Canada from the earliest days in Manitoba, the migrations to Mexico and Paraguay, and the documents reflecting the background of our people in Russia.<sup>22</sup>

The Mennonite Heritage Centre celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CMC's archival program in 1983 and the 60<sup>th</sup> in 1993.

Recent events of some importance have included the acquisition of copies of material from archives in the former Soviet Union. Many Mennonite archival records that were thought to have been lost or destroyed in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution are now being uncovered as research institutions in Russia and the Ukraine open up to Western scholars. One of the discoveries that generated the most excitement was the Molotschna Mennonite Archive, a collection that been assembled by Russian Mennonite school teacher Peter Braun. It was uncovered in the Odessa State Archives after having disappeared for sixty years. The MHC has been actively involved in

copying this and other Russian collections for the benefit of North American researchers.<sup>23</sup>

As the Conference continues to expand, there is a growing realization that the MHC's centrality cannot be maintained forever. The provincial conferences will inevitably become more possessive of their records and develop their own regional archival programs. When interviewed, Lawrence Klippenstein expressed his hope that the various archival centres would be able to cooperate together and that a common purpose could still be achieved.<sup>24</sup>

While the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies has focussed almost exclusively on the spiritual needs of its own Conference, the Mennonite Heritage Centre has presented itself as an institution dedicated to serving the larger Canadian and international Mennonite communities as well as researchers and historians from around the world. This broader outlook can be explained in part by the ecumenical and tolerant nature of its parent Conference. In contrast to the Centre for MB Studies, which has concentrated on promoting the spiritual benefits provided by archives, the Heritage Centre has been much more confident in its advocacy of research into the ethnic and cultural aspects of the Mennonite experience. In its view, archives can provide a critical sense of balance to a community that is often unable to decide whether it is primarily a religious sect or an ethnic group.

Even the physical plant of the Heritage Centre seems to demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity. Unlike the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, which has suffered as a result of its poor location, the Mennonite Heritage Centre is able to maintain a much more visible presence on the local and national Mennonite scenes. A large part

of the reason for this success is the building which was specifically designed to serve as more than just an archival repository. Realizing that such a large project would need to have a greater purpose than simply collecting records, the Centre's planners included space for an art gallery and display and meeting areas. It was hoped that a wide variety of activities and exhibits would bring in a broader cross-section of the public beyond the narrow circle of academic researchers and genealogists.<sup>25</sup>

The architecturally distinct building has also raised the profile of the Centre. It is highly visible and easily accessible and is usually featured prominently in CMBC's promotional literature. Casual visitors, many of them with no Mennonite connections, have dropped in "just to look around" after reading about the Centre in the Manitoba Tourist Guide. The spacious setting allows the Heritage Centre's staff to display more concrete reminders of the Mennonite past, such as a pair of memorial stones that were given to the Centre after being recovered from a former family cemetery plot in Russia.<sup>26</sup>

The prominent role of the Art Gallery is another indication of the Centre's willingness to reach out to a broader audience. Originally open to any artist willing to amount an exhibition, the Gallery took on a new life in 1998 when prominent local artist Ray Dirks was hired as its first curator. Dirks announced that he wanted the Gallery to serve as a professional home within the church to artists who might otherwise feel the need to leave in order to pursue their art.<sup>27</sup>

Since then, the Gallery has mounted a new exhibition every two months, drawing on local and international artists from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. A number of shows, including a recent quilt exhibit, have proven to be quite successful. Since the opening of an exhibit can draw up to 60 to 70 people, the Gallery serves a valuable means

by which to create awareness of the archival program in the larger community. It also demonstrates the relationship between historical research and visual art as two different but interrelated means of memory preservation.

In 1999 the Heritage Centre initiated a new program that involved the loaning out of selected art pieces to congregations for use as worship aids. One travelling exhibit, entitled "Faces of Christ", raised some controversy as a result of suspicions that the paintings involved were actual icons that had been objects of worship. On the whole, however, the program has proven to be quite popular. The archival staff acknowledges that events such as these are effective ways of putting the Centre on the map.<sup>28</sup>

As stated in the previous chapter, if a religious archives wishes to play a role in influencing the collective memory of its constituency, it must first convince the constituency that it has a vested interest in supporting an archival program. Although the Centre has occasionally sought to convince the Conference of the spiritual value of archives, it has not been afraid to also emphasize the importance of ethnic and cultural studies.

MHC archivists, when interviewed, could not recall any serious opposition to archives within the Conference. The biggest challenge, especially in the early years, was to make do with a limited budget that was largely the result of stiff competition among the various Conference programs for the available funds. Lawrence Klippenstein, however, made it a point of his tenure at MHC to develop an activist approach to archives with the local congregations in mind. In a 1975 progress report, he wrote that a rationale for the existence of a historical-archival program had to include the resource value that it

provided for the church: "It is not enough to see some sort of mystical good in history-writing, or in manuscripts gathered in rows of boxes on shelves."<sup>29</sup>

The members of the Historical-Archives Committee have occasionally felt moved to promote the spiritual value of archival records and their study. In one of the committee's first reports in 1975, John Friesen wrote: "From scripture we can learn that to know where we are going and want to go, we need to know where we have come from. This means that to know how to face ethical issues in the present as one example, it may be helpful to learn from our forefathers who faced similar issues."<sup>30</sup> In 1979, on the occasion of the opening of the Centre, Gerhard Lohrenz attempted to convince doubters in the Conference that the expense had been worth it: "This centre is not only a place where old records are to be studied. Here also the trends and the needs of our brotherhood of today are to be scrutinized." Lohrenz concluded: "We expect the Centre to be one of the fountains from which new and invigorating life will flow into our congregations."<sup>31</sup>

Lawrence Klippenstein has forcefully articulated the need for the Centre to maintain a balance between the spiritual and the secular. In 1982, on the eve of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CMC's archival program, he warned against viewing the Centre as strictly an ethnic or cultural facility: "The tendency could arise to see the past as depicting only the cultural or ethnic dimension of Mennonite identity and feel that the roots of Mennonite religious reality must be sought in a different area, namely in religious experience and in conversion." Klippenstein declared that such a dichotomy would be unfortunate: "Hopefully the history archives program can help to integrate

present personal experience with communal history. The ethnic and the religious ought not to be felt or perceived as contrasts, but rather as integrated Christian reality.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite all their efforts, the archivists at the Centre have had to concede that archives will never be a high priority in the minds of most church members. Klippenstein always worked with the assumption that at least a handful of members in each church were active supporters of the program but this handful was usually all that there was. This lack of support was, for the most part, not the result of opposition but simply of the belief that the Conference had other, more pressing, needs to meet. Consequently, the Heritage Centre staff, accepting the fact that the archives would always remain one of the smaller programs in the Conference, has worked to ensure that it retains its current level of support. Efforts are made to keep the Heritage Centre visible at conference and delegate sessions and the staff actively seeks out new sources of fundraising to demonstrate that the Centre is not completely dependent on the Conference for support.<sup>33</sup>

The second step in the effort to shape a collective memory, as described in the previous chapter, is to ensure that the records of the conference and its individual congregations are properly collected and preserved. The Heritage Centre has been active in promoting archival collection and preservation since its inception; promotional efforts in this area are especially evident in the 1970s when the archival program was still in its developmental stage. Like many Mennonite historical and cultural groups, the CMC archival program took advantage of the unprecedented media attention given to Mennonite history during the 1974 Centennial celebrations. A *Mennonite Reporter* article that appeared in 1974 stated: “Congregations may wish to collect materials of historical value like pictures and letters and preserve them in safe, fireproof locations.



The Conference is prepared to receive such materials for preservation and study in the Conference archives in Winnipeg.”<sup>34</sup> In that same year, the then little known James Urry had an article published in the *Reporter* that urged its readers to help fill in the gaps in the Conference collection by sending copies of early Mennonite periodicals to the archives.<sup>35</sup>

At the 1974 CMC Conference sessions, it was decided that each congregation should appoint a person who would be responsible for the collection and preservation of records and serve as a liaison with the archives. In order to assist these new appointees, the archives put out a brief guide on “Caring for Church Records”. In the guide, local archivists were made aware of the spiritual significance of their new role: “This task may well be seen as a sacred trust. Just as the people of God felt led by God to preserve the story of His work among them, so we may see it as His charge to do the same today.”<sup>36</sup>

Since that initial flurry of activity, the Heritage Centre has continued to encourage its constituent congregations to place their materials in the archives. In a 1976 article in the *Historian*, Lawrence Klippenstein wrote that church records told the story of the development of the Conference’s programs and ministries: “We need this information to understand what is happening in our midst, to evaluate past experiences, and to see what is still to be done.”<sup>37</sup>

The willingness of the Centre to promote itself as a resource for ethnic and cultural studies as well as church history has also permitted it to achieve success in promoting historical research. Aided by a superior facility and a more supportive educational institution, the archival program has been able to encourage the study of the Conference’s history among a wide variety of potential users. When interviewed, Klippenstein spoke of the History-Archives Committee’s concern that history was too

often neglected in Mennonite churches and schools. The archives, in response, had tried to create an atmosphere where historical work within a church setting could be undertaken without apology.<sup>38</sup>

The Heritage Centre has made a particular effort to cater to its most loyal users, the genealogists. The number of genealogists has grown dramatically in the years since the founding of the Centre and the archival staff believes that an interest in genealogy, if encouraged, can lead to wider historical study. Consequently, the promotion of genealogical research has become a key form of outreach for the Centre. The *Mennonite Historian* publishes a regular genealogical column that lists newly published family history books and prints the queries of genealogists asking for information on certain ancestors. The Centre has also recently set up a computer in the reading room that allows researchers to access genealogical databases on CD-ROM as well as web-based resources.<sup>39</sup>

Another important client group is the students and faculty of CMBC. In contrast to MBBC/Concord College, the faculty and archival staff have worked closely together to encourage student use of the archives. As early as 1974 it was suggested at a History-Archives Committee meeting that each member submit a list of four to six research topics to the archivist which would be suitable for students looking for subjects for term papers. The best term papers would then be integrated back into the archives to serve as leads for further research. Students enrolled in CMBC's Mennonite Studies Course have, for many years, been required to complete a major project involving original research on some aspect of the Mennonite experience; copies of all the papers are kept in the archives.<sup>40</sup>

The Heritage Centre has also organized outreach activities aimed at instilling an interest in historical research among the general public. These have included both off-site events, such as seminars and workshops on various historical topics, and on-site activities that take advantage of the Centre's facilities. For a number of years, the Centre celebrated Archives Week with a series of special programs, including draws, book sales and displays. Another feature was the Archives in the Attic program that encouraged the general public to bring in and display their own materials. Participants were encouraged to submit copies of their items for deposit at the Centre and were given advice on how to better preserve family and personal records.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, it is impossible to ignore the many volunteers who have worked on various projects for the Centre. Like their counterparts at the Centre for MB Studies, volunteers have been given hands-on experience with archival materials that sometimes provide them with a personal connection to the past. In 1999, for example, the Heritage Centre reported the experiences of one volunteer who had translated a portion of a diary for a client whose father had disappeared during the Stalinist purges. After reading it, the volunteer visited the Heritage Centre director to tell him in tears how this diary had helped her to come to terms with the death of her own father.<sup>42</sup>

According to Lawrence Klippenstein, the encouragement of historical research and writing and the experiences of the volunteers have led to the development of a slightly growing core of patrons who provide the archives with its strongest support within the Conference.<sup>43</sup>

In the previous chapter, a fair amount of space was spent describing the efforts of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies to promote a distinctive Anabaptist identity

for the MB Conference that combined the best parts of both modern evangelicalism and classical Anabaptism. Guided by a North American Historical Commission and working in cooperation with two sister archival institutions in the United States, the Winnipeg Centre has devoted the bulk of its outreach activities towards the promotion of the study of MB History.

In contrast, the Mennonite Heritage Centre has only recently begun to focus more closely on the history of its own denomination. Several factors may have contributed to this state of affairs. First, the CMC and its parent North American Conference lack any sort of overarching historical organization to coordinate large-scale projects. Second, the loose structural nature of the Conference and the lack of a shared heritage similar to that possessed by the MBs creates a difficulty in finding common themes and experiences around which to construct a compelling history. Finally, in keeping with its goal of providing archival services to the larger Mennonite community, the Centre has tended to concentrate on projects whose appeal transcends the Conference. Many of the promotional events and materials that the Centre's staff has produced appear to be designed to both acquaint ethnic Mennonites with their own heritage and introduce this heritage to a wider Canadian audience. The Centre has, for instance, sponsored events such as the 1991 conference that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Conscientious Objector program in which many Mennonite men had served during World War II. It also cooperated with the MB Centre in hosting the 1993 *Mirror of the Martyrs* exhibit, which focussed on the experiences of the first Anabaptists. The History-Archives Committee's minutes of 1980 record a proposal to provide assistance in setting up displays at the Mennonite Folklorama Pavilion.<sup>44</sup>

The Centre has made good use of its physical facilities in mounting many general-interest displays. In 1982 one display space was outfitted as a vintage private school classroom, courtesy of the Steinbach Museum. In 1999 a display that told the story of the Mennonites was installed; it featured biographical sketches of early Anabaptist leaders and a life-size model of a dungeon.<sup>45</sup>

Heritage Centre staff have been active in producing scholarly and popular literature on general Mennonite themes. A Directory of Mennonite Archives and Historical Libraries was first published in 1981; in 1990 the third edition, including listings of archival facilities outside of North America, was released to coincide with the Mennonite World Conference. Lawrence Klippenstein was particularly active in producing materials that could be incorporated into school multicultural programs. In 1982 his booklet *David Klassen and the Mennonites* was published as part of a grade school multicultural series entitled *We Built Canada*. Although the booklet appeared to present the Mennonites as just one of many self-contained ethnic groups in the Canadian mosaic, it did draw attention to the faith vs. culture debate in Mennonite circles.<sup>46</sup>

The Heritage Centre recently began offering evening classes designed to familiarize participants with certain aspects of Mennonite history and culture. In 1998, the selections included a course on Russian Mennonite history taught by Lawrence Klippenstein and a class offering instruction in conversational Low German.<sup>47</sup>

Archivists who have worked at both Centres agree that although the CMC is more comfortable with its Anabaptist identity, its archives program's accomplishments in the area of Conference history have not matched those of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission.<sup>48</sup> One of the few examples of a product specifically geared towards a

Conference audience is the commemorative booklet that was put together for the 1978 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations. More of an impressionistic portrait than a straightforward narrative, the booklet subtly reminded Conference members that the Anabaptist heritage that had once embarrassed many was now being embraced by the wider society: “Just when we were becoming sick of the Mennonite name as the Mennonite Brethren before us, the Canadian society on the whole, as well as universities, publishers, and the mass media, seemed to think that Mennonite was great.”<sup>49</sup>

Despite the lack of large projects dealing with Conference history, the Heritage Centre has been active in promoting the past in smaller ways at both the congregational and conference levels. For a number of years in the 1980s, the Committee worked on a project designed to introduce children to Mennonite history. Plans were drawn up to create a portable multi-media centre with photographs, books, games and audio-visual presentations that was called, at various times, a “Children’s Corner” and a “Mini Heritage Centre”. The project was eventually scaled back and the Centre began to concentrate more on printed material. In 1988 it began distributing a new Mennonite Heritage teaching kit to all CMC Sunday schools.<sup>50</sup>

At the conference level, the Heritage Centre has employed a variety of methods designed to heighten its national visibility and create a larger awareness of the Conference’s spiritual heritage. One of its first major projects was the planning and organization of the celebrations surrounding the commemoration of the CMC’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In addition to the souvenir booklet, a special ceremony was held at the original site of the first conference where a cairn was unveiled.

At the 1983 Conference sessions in Winnipeg, numerous special events, including several tours, were held to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CMC archives program. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations at the 1993 Conference included a ceremonial presentation of a microfilmed copy of the Peter J. Braun archives, the recently re-discovered archival collection from Russia that was believed to have been destroyed. A pre-conference report stated: "As the founding of the conference archives in 1933 was intended to replace the Mennonite archives begun in the USSR in 1917, presumably lost in the 1920's and now rediscovered in Odessa, the joint celebration seems most fitting."<sup>51</sup>

The Heritage Centre and the History-Archives Committee have taken steps in the last ten years to fill the void left by an absence of solid historical material on the Conference. In 1988 the Centre issued a call for personal papers of Conference leaders whose materials would be needed if a Conference history were to be written. In 1995 the Conference General Board passed a motion to provide a funding base for the project. In the summer of 1999 CMBC professor Adolf Ens began researching and writing the history with a release date scheduled for early in the next century. Also in 1999, former CMC General Secretary Helmut Harder accepted the challenge of writing the biography of David Toews, generally regarded as the most significant leader in Conference history.<sup>52</sup>

Although the Heritage Centre has exhibited a greater willingness to promote the study of Mennonite ethnic and cultural history, it has also been conscious of the growing diversity of the conference membership. Like its Mennonite Brethren counterpart, the Heritage Centre has tried to ensure that it remains relevant as the Conference moves beyond its ethnic origins to embrace people from many different backgrounds.

When interviewed, Heritage Centre archivists affirmed their commitment to the development of an archival collection that would properly reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the CMC. They also emphasized the importance of familiarizing new members with the historical traditions of the denomination. Alf Redekopp, who served as acting head of the Centre from 1999 to 2000, advocated a cooperative model which would encourage sharing and preserving the stories of the various ethnic groups within the Conference for the benefit of all members.<sup>53</sup>

Lawrence Klippenstein, when asked how he would defend the relevance of the Centre to a new member of a non-Mennonite background, tried to strike a balance between the preservation of tradition and the accomodation of diversity. He envisioned the Heritage Centre as a facility where the Mennonite heritage of the denomination would be proudly upheld and preserved so that all members could learn about the traditions of the denomination that they were joining. At the same time, newer members from minority groups would be encouraged to share their histories with the larger group in order to facilitate communication and increase cross-cultural understanding. Even if newer members were not immediately interested in CMC or Mennonite history, the Centre would continue to preserve and document this history in preparation for the day when an individual or group felt the need to discover and understand it.<sup>54</sup>

Klippenstein described the efforts of the Centre to preserve material created by non-ethnic Mennonites. Some of the groups from whom records had been received included the Chinese, Vietnamese and Aboriginal Mennonite churches. At this point, however, much promotional and educational work needed to be done to convince new groups of the importance of bringing in their historical materials. Since most of these



communities were still relatively new to the Mennonite fold, it was doubtful that much material would be received for another generation or two. According to Klippenstein, it was once thought that Mennonites had brought very little with them when they emigrated from Russia to North America. Conventional wisdom had been proved wrong, however, when the second generation began bringing in the heirlooms that they had inherited. Klippenstein suspected that the day might very well come when the children of the first generation of Asian and Latin American Mennonite Christians would decide that they wanted family heirlooms and records to be preserved; hopefully, they would then be able to turn to the Centre for assistance.<sup>55</sup>

For the time being, the Heritage Centre may have an advantage over the Centre for MB Studies in this aspect of its mandate as a result of its superior physical facilities. In addition to introducing visitors to a wider variety of memory sources, the art gallery and display areas have permitted the Centre to demonstrate its commitment to diversity in a highly visible and accessible manner. When hired as curator of the Gallery in 1998, Ray Dirks expressed his desire to include artists from refugee backgrounds: “We wish to link that ethnic past to the multi-ethnic now and tomorrow through shared faith and ideals.”<sup>56</sup>

The first show in the revamped Gallery was a November 1998 exhibition of art by Dirks and a Christian artist from Nigeria who was currently studying in Winnipeg. Opening night, which attracted a large crowd, featured a program with drumming and dancing by a local Nigerian Christian congregation. In September 1999 the Gallery played host to an exhibit of Cuban art that was designed to coincide with the Pan Am Games.<sup>57</sup>

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> These figures were taken from the web site of the Mennonite World Conference on June 28, 2000. The URL is [www.mwc-cmm.org/Directory/namerica.html](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/Directory/namerica.html).
- <sup>2</sup> Redekop, *Mennonite Society*, p. 41.
- <sup>3</sup> Reprinted in *CMC Yearbook* 1994.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists: Four Centuries Later* (Scottsdale, Penn. and Kitchener, Ont.: Herald Press, 1975), pp. 36, 301-307; Kauffman and Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic*, p. 193.
- <sup>5</sup> Although dated, the standard text for the history of the General Conference in North America is still Samuel Floyd Pannabacker, *Open Doors: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1975). A more concise description of the Conference's origins is John Friesen, "The GC/MC Merger Proposal: Some Historical Considerations," *MH* 15:2 (June 1989), pp. 1-2.
- <sup>6</sup> Walter Franz, "Conference Message," *CMC Yearbook* 1987, p. 71.
- <sup>7</sup> H. J. Gerbrandt, "The Conference of Mennonites in Canada," in Henry Poettcker and Rudy A. Regehr, eds., *Call to Faithfulness: Essays in Canadian Mennonite Studies* (Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 1972), p. 85.
- <sup>8</sup> Friesen, "GC/MC Merger Proposal," p. 2; see Ens, *In Search of Unity*, pp. 43-44.
- <sup>9</sup> Ens, *In Search of Unity*, p. 57.
- <sup>10</sup> Gerbrandt, "Conference," p. 87.
- <sup>11</sup> *MR*, 30 July 1990, p. 6
- <sup>12</sup> Ens, *In Search of Unity*, pp. 206-207.
- <sup>13</sup> *CMC Report* 28 (1992), pp. 4-5. The italics are in the original quotation.
- <sup>14</sup> *Canadian Mennonite*, 25 May 1998, p. 18.
- <sup>15</sup> *CMC Report* 30 (May 1994), p. 10; "History-Archives Report," in *CMC Yearbook* 1975, p. 99; "History-Archives Committee Report," in *CMC Yearbook* 1974, p. 92.
- <sup>16</sup> David Schroeder to Frank Epp, 15 May 1974, File 3857-6, Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC).
- <sup>17</sup> *MH* 1:1 (September 1975), p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> *MH* 3:1 (March 1977), p. 2; see also *MR* 5 September 1977, p. 13; and interview with Lawrence Kippenstein, 3 April 2000.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with Klippenstein, 3 April 2000; *MR* 8 August 1977, p. 1; *MR* 5 September 1977, p. 13.
- <sup>20</sup> *MR* 5 September 1977, p. 13.

- <sup>21</sup> History-Archives Committee (HAC) Minutes, 26 June 1974, 2 October 1974, 30 September 1986, File 3856-1, MHC Collection; John Friesen, Report to HAC re General Board Meetings, 17 May 1985, File 3857-1, MHC Collection.
- <sup>22</sup> John Friesen to Dan Zehr, 12 September 1974, File 3857-6, MHC Collection.
- <sup>23</sup> *CMC Report 29* (May 1993), p. 10; *MH* 17:1 (March 1991), p. 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Interview with Lawrence Klippenstein, 10 April 2000.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with Klippenstein, 3 April 2000.
- <sup>26</sup> HAC Report, June-July 1980, File 3856-3, MHC Collection; *MH* 14:3 (September 1998), p. 8.
- <sup>27</sup> *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, p. 11.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Alf Redekopp, 13 March 2000; *Canadian Mennonite*, 31 August 1998, p. 30.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Klippenstein, 3 April 2000; Progress Report, 5 September 1975, File 3856-3, MHC.
- <sup>30</sup> HAC Report, *CMC Yearbook* 1975, p. 100.
- <sup>31</sup> "Why a Heritage Centre," *MH* 5:1 (March 1979), p. 1.
- <sup>32</sup> *MR*, 17 May 1982, p. 9.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with Klippenstein, 3 April 2000.
- <sup>34</sup> *MR*, 7 January 1974, p. 7.
- <sup>35</sup> *MR*, 8 July 1974, p. 4.
- <sup>36</sup> HAC Information Brief 1975, Appendix E, File 3856-3, HAC Reports (1975-1980), MHC.
- <sup>37</sup> "Church Records: Handle with Care," *MH* 2:4 (December 1976), pp. 1-2.
- <sup>38</sup> Interview with Klippenstein, 3 April 2000.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> HAC Minutes, 26 June 1974, File 3856-1, MHC Collection; *CMC Report* 1992, p. 8.
- <sup>41</sup> HAC Report, October-December 1981, File 3857-1, MHC Collection; *MR* 17 May 1982, p. 9.
- <sup>42</sup> *GC/MC Workbook: St. Louis '99*, p. 74.
- <sup>43</sup> Interview with Klippenstein, 3 April 2000.
- <sup>44</sup> HAC Minutes, 4 March 1980, File 3856-1, MHC Collection.
- <sup>45</sup> *MH*, 25:2 (June 1999), p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Directory of Mennonite Archives and Historical Libraries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1990); Lawrence Klippenstein, *David Klassen and the Mennonites* (Agincourt, Ont: The Book Society of Canada Ltd., 1982).

<sup>47</sup> *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Alf Redekopp, 13 March 2000.

<sup>49</sup> *Just when we were . . . : The Story of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada* (Winnipeg: History-Archives Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1978), unpaginated.

<sup>50</sup> *MH*, 8:4 (December 1982), p. 4; History-Archives Committee Working Committee Minutes, 19 October 1987 and 24 November 1988, File 3856-2, MHC Collection; *MH*, 14:4 (December 1988), p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Acting Archivist's Report, 31 December 1992, File 815-1, MHC Collection.

<sup>52</sup> *CMC Bulletin* 24 (May 1988), p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Redekopp, 13 March 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Klippenstein, 10 April 2000.

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

<sup>56</sup> *Canadian Mennonite*, 26 October 1998, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> *MH*, 21:4 (December 1998), p. 4; *MH*, 25:2 (June 1999), p.4.

## Conclusion

It is obvious that archival institutions do play an important role in the formation and preservation of collective memory. While the ultimate impact of their efforts may be impossible to measure, it also cannot be ignored, especially in smaller constituencies, where the archives may be the only institution devoted to the preservation and interpretation of the past.

As the preceding study of two Mennonite archives demonstrates, archives contribute to the formation of collective memory in a number of ways:

- 1) They collect, preserve and describe records that form the basis for historical research and writing.

- 2) They provide advice and resources for other organizations and individuals who are interested in preserving historical records.

- 3) They encourage the study and writing of history through the publishing of archival guides and the organization of lecture series, classes, symposia and scholarly conferences.

- 4) They provide the general public with the opportunity to participate in the preservation of history through volunteer programs and summer employment opportunities.

- 5) They produce and commission historical and commemorative products and events such as books, audio-visual presentations, musical compositions, artifact displays and tours of historic sites.

As this list indicates, archives and archivists have ventured far beyond the original mandate to act as a passive receptacle for the historical records of a particular entity. In

an age when cultural institutions must vigorously compete for the support offered by a dwindling number of public and private sources, an active program of promotional and outreach activities is needed to maintain visibility and prove that the institution in question can have a beneficial impact on the larger society. Despite the warnings of certain archival thinkers, this trend can only increase as archives seek to position themselves at the cutting edge of the continuing information revolution; the stereotypical image of dusty tomes gathering dust in a vault possesses little appeal in an age of instant retrieval and multimedia CD-ROMs.

Religious archives and evangelical and fundamentalist Christian archives in particular face an additional set of challenges. They must convince their constituencies of the need to spend precious resources on what to many must seem like an irrelevant, if not counterproductive, task. When the stated reason for a denomination's existence is the preparation of souls for the future, the preservation of the past will always rank low on the list of priorities. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, archival institutions serving denominations with a heavy evangelical influence, such as the Mennonite Brethren, spend considerable effort to convince their constituency that the archival profession can be a means of spiritual service and that the preservation and study of history can be a spiritual activity.

The fact that their constituencies are Mennonite religious denominations creates further problems for the subjects of this study. Although arising out of a group that possesses many of the attributes used to define ethnicity, the Mennonite faith has been adopted by people around the globe representing a wide variety of racial and cultural groups. In North America, where the term "Mennonite" is often associated with rural

simplicity, there is a strong reluctance among many Mennonites to celebrate their past; the fear exists that an emphasis on ethnicity will hinder efforts to attract new converts from other cultural backgrounds. As the various denominations, which still serve as the focal point for most aspects of Mennonite life, become more and more diverse, the pressure increases to jettison the past and become submerged in the North American evangelical Christian mainstream. Mennonite archives, which inevitably must preserve a great deal of material of an ethnic nature, are thus forced to demonstrate that they are still religious institutions that possess a relevance for all members of the constituency and not simply those who happen to have descended from the original founders.

This pressure, of course, varies in intensity from denomination to denomination, depending on a number of theological and historical factors. In our study, it is evident that the Mennonite Brethren have been particularly susceptible to the lure of North American evangelical theology, resulting in a prolonged struggle in the Conference over what aspects of the Mennonite identity to retain. As a result, the Historical Commission of the North American Conference, which oversees three different archives, has been particularly active in producing materials and organizing events that focus specifically on topics of interest to the Mennonite Brethren. The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg has cooperated with its sister institutions in promoting the Anabaptist heritage of the Conference in a manner that does not alienate newcomers from other backgrounds. One of the major reasons for this particular focus is undoubtedly the concern that Anabaptist distinctives are being lost in the rush to transcend traditional boundaries.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre, in contrast, has been fortunate to serve as the archival repository for a Conference that is much more comfortable with its Anabaptist heritage. It has also had the privilege of being located within an educational institution that has promoted the study of Anabaptist theology and Mennonite history. Consequently, the Centre has been much more willing to focus on Mennonite ethnicity and culture in its outreach and promotional activities. It is extremely unlikely, for instance, that the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies would even consider offering a course in conversational Low German; as recently as 1998, however, the Heritage Centre was doing exactly that. The Centre obviously regards its mandate as being more than simply serving as an information resource for the Conference office. In keeping with the ecumenical nature of the CMC and its parent General Conference, the Heritage Centre attempts to provide archival services to a broad cross-section of the Canadian Mennonite community. It appears to possess a more positive view of ethnic and cultural distinctives, regarding them as a necessary balance against the pull of mainstream North American evangelicalism. In order to achieve this balance between religion and ethnicity, the Heritage Centre has unashamedly championed historical research as being beneficial in its own right. It has also tried to introduce Mennonite culture and history to a wider Canadian audience through popular literature and displays. The Heritage Centre's physical facility and advantageous location have allowed it to introduce the Mennonite community to a wider variety of commemorative activities.

This focus on balance, however, has also prevented the Heritage Centre from matching the Mennonite Brethren in the development of popular audio-visual and print resources on Conference history. The Heritage Centre has been handicapped in this area



by the lack of an over-arching archival and/or historical program at the national and the North American levels. Efforts are finally underway to write a comprehensive history of the CMC as it nears its centennial. The recent series of mergers and the inevitable identity crisis that follows may at least partially account reason for this recent focus on the Conference's past.

In the first chapter of this thesis, a number of different theoretical collective memory models were discussed. The majority of scholars in this field have developed some sort of conflict model where collective memory is either a tool of oppression used by the ruling classes to keep the lower classes in submission or a battlefield where various warring factions clash for the right to define the identity of the larger group. The only significant dissenter appears to be Barry Schwartz who sees collective memory as a potentially positive force that can bring an otherwise disparate society together and serve as an inspirational force in times of crisis.

Which of these models best defines the roles of the two archives currently under discussion? Are they simply tools of the governing bodies or are they the voices of the rank and file? Is their presence divisive or do they make a positive contribution to the unity and well-being of their respective conferences?

Although these archival institutions are answerable to the governing bodies of their conferences, it is evident that they are not simply part of some larger hierarchical system. In both conferences, ultimate authority lies with the local congregations and the national offices are essentially limited to serving as advisory and resource centres and co-ordinating a few large programs such as missions and education. The archives themselves, especially in the case of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, have

served as a counterbalance to the desires of some leaders to totally eliminate all vestiges of their conferences' ethnic origins and completely embrace conservative North American evangelicalism.

It is also obvious that the archives are not the voice of an oppressed "proletariat". Their role is too specialized and is of little interest to the general public apart from a small band of genealogists and amateur and professional historians. Both institutions have been diligent in producing material aimed at a popular audience but with the aim of creating rather than meeting any demands for such material.

As noted in the second chapter, Mennonites are torn between a desire to take pride in their ethnic heritage and a fear that an undue emphasis on ethnicity will hinder evangelistic efforts. This conflict, in both its personal and collective manifestations, lies at the heart of the struggle to define Mennonite identity.

Archival centres can, of course, influence the debate in both negative and positive ways. Historical research and writing can accentuate tensions as well as create new ones, especially in an already fractured community where the past is often exploited to demonstrate the purported religious or cultural superiority of one group over another. History can also uncover and emphasize similarities that could serve as potential unifying forces in the Mennonite community. Indeed, the two archives in Winnipeg are notable for being at the forefront of MB-CMC cooperation in Canada.

In the case of the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, it appears that the Schwartz model best describes the intentions of the institutions if not necessarily the results. Both institutions strive to draw upon the primary memory framework that underlies the global Mennonite community. At the

center of the framework is, of course, the New Testament account of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the subsequent transforming power that He gives to all those who believe in Him. For Mennonites, the second most important component is the account of the first Anabaptists and the suffering that they endured in the effort to establish an independent church of adult believers. Whatever their current theological persuasion, all Mennonites can find inspiration in the courage of these ecclesiastical pioneers. Ministers from both the right and the left continually invoke their example.

The two archives differ slightly in their ultimate goals. Although the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies would no doubt pledge its goodwill towards the larger Mennonite Community, it has largely focussed on its own conference. Within the Conference, it is able to broaden the primary framework to include the sufferings of the first Mennonite Brethren members who broke away from the larger church in Russia in 1860. Since the CMC lacks any dramatic unifying event such as the 1860 secession, the Heritage Centre has created a larger mandate for itself as an institution that can both connect Mennonites with their past and unite them under the banner of Anabaptist theology. Both archives are making concentrated efforts to reflect the increased diversity of their respective conferences in the hope that a new collective identity can be found in the new, global, multicultural Mennonite church that is united by a common purpose rather than a common past.

This thesis will hopefully provide the basis for further study of the role that archival institutions of all kinds play in the formation of collective memory. It would be especially interesting to see how the efforts of other religious archives compare with those of the two institutions that have been the focus of this paper. Does the theological

orientation of the parent denomination or institution have a significant bearing on its archives' promotional and outreach activities? How do the archives of religious groups associated with a particular geographical region or ethnic group determine whether their chief purpose is cultural or spiritual? If a denomination based in North America succeeds in establishing missionary churches in other cultures, what steps, if any, are taken by the archival program to reflect this new diversity?

In addition, it would be interesting to discover the nature of the roles played by archival institutions in the collective memory wars. To borrow the vocabulary of John Bodnar, do they reflect the ideology of the "official" or the "vernacular" interests? Or do they occupy a third reconciliatory position somewhere between the two opposing camps? Archives preserve and describe much of the raw material that goes into the creation of collective memory. As this thesis demonstrates, they also play a significant role in the shaping of this raw material into finished products for popular consumption. Students of collective memory who make use of archival records should be encouraged to spend some additional time examining the institutions that house them.

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