

**RELATIVES AND STRANGERS:
THE IDENTITY OF POST WORLD WAR II ETHNIC GERMAN IMMIGRANTS**

By

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Abstract

The years after the end of World War II were characterized by the constant arrival of new Canadians. Between 1946 and 1960, Canada opened its doors to over two million immigrants and approximately 13 per cent of them were German. The first ten years of German immigration to Canada were dominated by the arrival of ethnic Germans. Ethnic Germans, or *Volksdeutsche*, were German speaking immigrants who were born in countries other than the Germany of 1939. This thesis explores the identity of these ethnic German immigrants.

It has frequently been noted that German immigrants to Canada were inordinately quick to adapt to their new society. As a result, studies of German immigrants in Canada have tended to focus on the degree and speed with which they adopted the social framework of the dominant society. The present work seeks to place the ethnic German experience in the context of rapidly changing Canadian social and economic realities. Ethnic Germans have a history that had subjected them to rapid changes in political, family, and economic reality. They came to a Canadian society that was increasingly urbanized, with a growing consumer orientation and accompanied by changes in self-perception.

Using archival sources and a variety of personal stories in the form of memoirs, personal interviews, letters to newspapers and published materials, the thesis explores the processes of ethnic German identification. Conceptually the argument follows Frederic Barth's suggestions that culture should be thought of as a process. Ethnic identity should not be thought of as static but rather as a constant process of social construction. The coherence

of features of ethnic identity is constantly in flux, and it is these processes that should engage the student of culture.

The processes of labelling, memory, socialization and the social construction of family, work, and associations provide the structure for the chapters that follow. For ethnic Germans, each of these processes became arenas where identities were formed and coherence was enhanced or discarded in favour of new social realities.

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Introduction

In the period 1946 to 1960 two million immigrants came to Canada. These immigrants were added to the 1946 population of just over twelve million, increasing the percentage of foreign-born residents in Canada for the first time since 1921 and marking the beginning of a significant change in Canada's population and self-perception. Most of the arriving immigrants were European and 269,000 (13.4%) of them were German--exceeded in number only by British and Italian immigrants.¹ 'German' immigration was dominated in the first decade after the war by the arrival of *Volksdeutsche* as opposed to *Reichsdeutsche*, or 'ethnic Germans' as opposed to German nationals. This thesis asks a series of questions about the ethnic identity of these *Volksdeutsche* immigrants.

The study of ethnic identity has drawn increasing interest in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The development of ethnically-based violence in Eastern Europe following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia has only added to this interest. Much of this renewed scholarly attention has challenged earlier conceptions of ethnicity.

The study of immigrant groups in North America was dominated for most of the 20th century by a group of sociologists at the University of Chicago led by Robert Park. The emphasis of this analysis was the assimilation of immigrant groups into the dominant society. The argument assumed that differences between immigrant groups gradually disappeared under the influence of the dominant culture and therefore the object of study was the process

¹Warren E. Kalbach, *The Impact of Immigration on Canada's Population*, (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1970), 424-427, 99-101, 157.

of assimilation.² The Chicago school has been criticized for portraying "immigrants as moving in a straight line manner" from the cultures of their old world to wholesale assimilation into the dominant culture of the new world.³ In the 1960s and 70s the emphasis on assimilation declined and the period has been characterized as a time of a "major ethnic revival." Herbert J. Gans goes on to suggest, however, that this seeming rediscovery of ethnicity was "better described as a class-based social movement clad in ethnic clothes."⁴ Others have agreed that much of what has been described as ethnic identity can be better explained by concepts of class. Stephen Steinberg, for instance, argues that

ethnic groups are assumed to be endowed with a given set of cultural values, and no attempt is made to understand these values in terms of their material sources. Thus to demystify ethnicity requires an exploration of how social forces influence the form and content of ethnicity.⁵

Recently theoretical discussions of ethnicity have been pursued most actively in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology and historians have begun to borrow extensively from the conceptions and definitions that have emanated from these discussions. In a review of approaches to ideas of ethnicity, Gary Cohen divides the debate into two camps--those emphasizing the determined, intrinsic, or primordial qualities of ethnic identity and those

²Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), 46-47.

³Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawaska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Fall 1992, 3.

⁴Herbert J. Gans, "Comment: Ethnic Invention and Acculturation, A Bumpy-Line Approach," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Fall 1992, 45.

⁵Steinberg, xiv.

emphasizing its cultural, social or circumstantial nature.⁶ One view maintains that ethnic identity is best described in terms of primordial identification. Ethnic identity is thought to arise from being born into a group and sharing the "psychological and cultural force of intense, comprehensive attachments to certain traditional values and symbols which distinguish a group from the rest of the population."⁷ This view of ethnicity assumes that there are immutable characteristics that constitute ethnic identity.

The other view emphasizes the circumstantial nature of ethnic identity. The circumstantialists consider ethnic "cultural characteristics as the mutable results of individual and group usage which are shaped by the needs and circumstances of each group."⁸ The circumstantial view allows for a more dynamic characterization of ethnic identity. It suggests that people choose and change their identity in response to perceived social exigencies.

Both the circumstantial and primordial constructions of ethnic identity have difficulty accounting for the persistence of ethnic identity among second and third generation North Americans. Eric Hobsbawm suggests that the persistence of ethnic identity has its roots in the insecurity of modern life. He argues that "belonging together, preferably in groupings with visible badges of membership and recognition signs, is more important than ever in societies in which everything combines to destroy what binds human beings together into

⁶Gary B. Cohen, "Ethnic Persistence and Change: Concepts and Models for Historical Research," *Social Science Quarterly*, 65(4) (1984), 1029-1042. While Cohen's theoretical overview is helpful, the present study rejects his larger goal of accounting for ethnic persistence by using quantitative historic research.

⁷Cohen, 1033.

⁸Cohen, 1033.

communities."⁹ The persistence of 'white' ethnicity--the ethnic consciousness of racially invisible groups--particularly illustrates the complexity of ethnic identity. The following study joins others in arguing that ethnicity in North America is more complex than suggested by the primordial or circumstantial frameworks.

Stanley Nadel's study of the German community of New York examines the interplay between class and ethnicity but argues that New York's Germans "showed little inclination to submerge their self-identity in a pure, universalized working-class consciousness." Rather, class and ethnicity provided "competing notions of identity for the same individuals."¹⁰ Nadel's historical study also argues that ethnic identity is sensitive to context. New York's Germans, "selecting from a broad range of historically developed options . . . shaped their ethnicity in accordance with whichever set of rules seemed appropriate for the particular context." While leaning towards the circumstantial qualities of ethnic identity, Nadel acknowledges that some options of identity for New York Germans were rooted in primordial origins, coming from the "misty regions of their consciousness."¹¹

A study of a small group of Mennonite immigrants settling in two areas of North America, one in Manitoba and one in Nebraska, also argues that ethnic identity among North American immigrants cannot be accounted for by a conception of "unilinear cultural assimilation nor by static, unswerving persistence." Royden Loewen's study outlines the

⁹Eric Hobsbawm, "Nationalism: Whose Fault-line is it Anyway?," *New Statesman and Society*, 24 April 1992, 26.

¹⁰Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 160-161.

¹¹Nadel, 7.

strategies used by Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in preserving "social relationships and boundaries, and ascriptive values and perceptions."¹² The strategies used to reproduce the 'Old World' were socially dynamic and in the process of reproducing the old world Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites forged new identities.

As in the above examples and the present study, many recent studies of ethnicity in complex societies are indebted to the work of the anthropologist Frederic Barth. Barth's early contribution to questions of ethnicity was the concept of ethnic boundaries. He argued that in order for a group to maintain itself in complex poly-ethnic societies there must be "criteria for determining membership and ways of signaling membership and exclusion."¹³ More recently Barth has underlined the importance of studying "how cultural knowledge is produced." The focus of cultural research should be on the processes of social construction rather than on the attempt to place into coherent typologies the essence of a culture. In Barth's conception, studies of culture in complex societies must fully recognize the variability and dissonance in these cultures. There is constant change and variation within a culture and also constant movement across the boundaries separating one group from another. In spite of this dissonance and variation Barth maintains that "our object of study is not formless, and it does not follow from the fact that it exhibits disorder and indeterminacy that it could be any old way, and that we cannot model the processes that bring about this particular form and this

¹²Royden K. Loewen, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 262.

¹³Frederic Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1969), 15.

degree of coherence."¹⁴

The story of *Volksdeutsche* immigrants presented here is also influenced by recent trends emanating from literary criticism. These trends have influenced ethnography and feminist scholarship in particular and have revitalized the primordial and psychological aspects of ethnic identity. An article by Michael Fischer in a book devoted to a critique of ethnographic texts returns to the themes of the psychological or primordial nature of ethnicity. Fischer argues that

ethnicity is something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual and that it is often something quite puzzling to the individual, something over which he or she lacks control. Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided. It can be potent even when not consciously taught; it is something that institutionalized teaching easily makes chauvinist, sterile, and superficial, something that emerges in full--often liberating--flower only through struggle.¹⁵

Fischer's enthusiasm for the 'mistiness' of ethnic consciousness may be excessive but it addresses the undying nature of ethnicity in a time of the globalization of economies and increasingly technological societies. In spite of forces thought to result in assimilation, ethnicity persists--sometimes in the face of material and cultural disadvantage. Fischer argues that the ethnic "search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from that past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the

¹⁴Frederic Barth, *Balinese Worlds*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁵Michael M.J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 195.

future."¹⁶ In this sense ethnic identity is formed by memory and is deeply embedded in the psyche of individuals. Among other things, ethnic groups share a common history that often transcends other structures of identity. This common history is sustained by a collective memory. The reliance on memory as a significant variable of ethnic identity is particularly applicable to *Volksdeutsche* immigrants.

This study of postwar *Volksdeutsche* immigrants focuses on a series of events, interactions and experiences that had the potential to form ethnic identity among groups of ethnic Germans. These groups had different geographical origins, different political experiences, and came with varying constructions of social life as a German speaking minority. Their differences coexisted with important shared elements such as language and racial origin. The emphasis here on process means that the reader looking for an inventory of cultural characteristics that describe a group of people labeled as *Volksdeutsche* will go away disappointed. This is not an attempt to fashion an ethnic group where none existed before. It must be acknowledged that the act of labeling the subject as *Volksdeutsche* along with the accompanying restrictions of time and place, implies a coherence that may not exist. The following pages will explore the processes that resulted in various levels of 'commonness' while also drawing attention to the inconsistencies of this 'commonness.' Like Barth, this study hopes to acknowledge that "the phenomena we are depicting are neither logically coherent nor essentially contradictory: they could well have been different, probably are different in all those places we have not observed."¹⁷

¹⁶Fischer, 196.

¹⁷Barth, *Balinese Worlds*, 4.

The organization of this study is guided by significant identity forming processes common to *Volksdeutsche* immigrants. *Volksdeutsche* shared the dislocation imposed upon them by various events of the war and postwar period. The resettlement by the Nazi regime, the flight to the west in the wake of German defeats, and the postwar homelessness and subsequent immigration were all accompanied by official labels foisted upon these people by contact with diverse levels of bureaucracy. Their labels served to identify them--labels that they adopted or to which they reacted. *Volksdeutsche* also shared the socialization pressures of exposure to a rapid succession of political cultures. The ethos of these cultures was widely divergent, ranging from Stalin's Communism and Hitler's Nazi regime to western democracies preoccupied with an emerging Cold War. *Volksdeutsche* also shared the experience of family life punctuated by separation--separation due to the removal of most male members by political repression or war, separation due to the confusion of the flight from advancing armies, and separation due to the loss of emotional ties with spouses and other family members. Men and women experienced this separation differently and reconstructed their families and relationships in new ways. *Volksdeutsche* also shared the experiences of dislocation in their economic lives. They had to adjust to a war economy, long periods of idleness in various camps, and the disorientation of finding new work in a new land. Finally ethnic German immigrants shared in the construction of new social realities in Canada. They reshaped existing religious communities and injected new energy into decaying ethnic institutions. They also forged new views of being German and Canadian.

The story in the following pages is informed by a variety of sources. The immigration case files of three of the main organizations involved with immigration: the Canadian

Lutheran World Relief Fund, the Baptist World Alliance and Immigration organization, and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, give glimpses of early adjustment to life in Canada. These collections also contain the minutes and correspondence of the immigration societies and document their official functions, their impressions of immigrants and their synthesis of immigrant difficulties. Glimpses into the life of immigrants found in these case files are augmented by stories of immigrants of the period. These stories are drawn from interviews, memoirs and historical novels written and told by immigrants and others. Ethnic newspapers in the postwar period also included memoirs and letters from immigrants and reports by the immigration agencies to their constituents. Denominational, church histories and several regional histories in areas where the numbers of immigrants were significant, also paint a picture of processes influencing ethnic identity.

While the voice of *Volksdeutsche* immigrants is heard through the sources mentioned above, what follows is also intimately entwined with the identity of the author. As a Canadian born son of *Volksdeutsche* parents I experienced first hand Saturday German School and growing up in a German ethnic church. I knew the embarrassment of parents with poor English language skills, the reality of separated families, and--most of all--the burden of memory. The questions addressed here reflect this personal history.

Chapter One:

'Official' Identity and the Politics of Migration

The immigration of ethnic Germans, or *Volksdeutsche*, to Canada in the period after World War II occurred in the context of international postwar refugee politics. The identity of *Volksdeutsche* immigrants was, in part, an imposed political classification. At various times governments and international political bodies considered *Volksdeutsche* a part of a Nazi fifth column, quislings and traitors, or an unwelcome ethnic group. They were hailed as the vanguard of the German conquest of eastern lands and their lesser peoples, or poor cousins taking up valuable space and resources. They were potential immigrants of a desirable race and a valuable pool of human materiel, or disoriented and demoralized victims with no hope. Although largely imposed, the commonness of their political labels became a part of their collective identity.

The immigration of ethnic Germans to Canada was the culmination of many earlier migrations, of the rising nationalism of the late 19th century, and of the defeat of Germany in the two World Wars. The '*Volksdeutsche*' label itself assumed a new and sharper political and racial meaning becoming an important feature of Nazi political discourse. The postwar political identity of *Volksdeutsche* immigrants to Canada was largely determined by the policies of the Nazi regime, in particular the policies that enthusiastically adopted the German speaking settlers who had migrated to the East over the centuries. The subsequent defeat of Nazi Germany and the realignment of Eastern European political boundaries that resulted, made the designation of *Volksdeutsche* a political identity for both the purposes of postwar refugee policy and the immigration policies of countries destined to absorb the

largest numbers of these refugees.

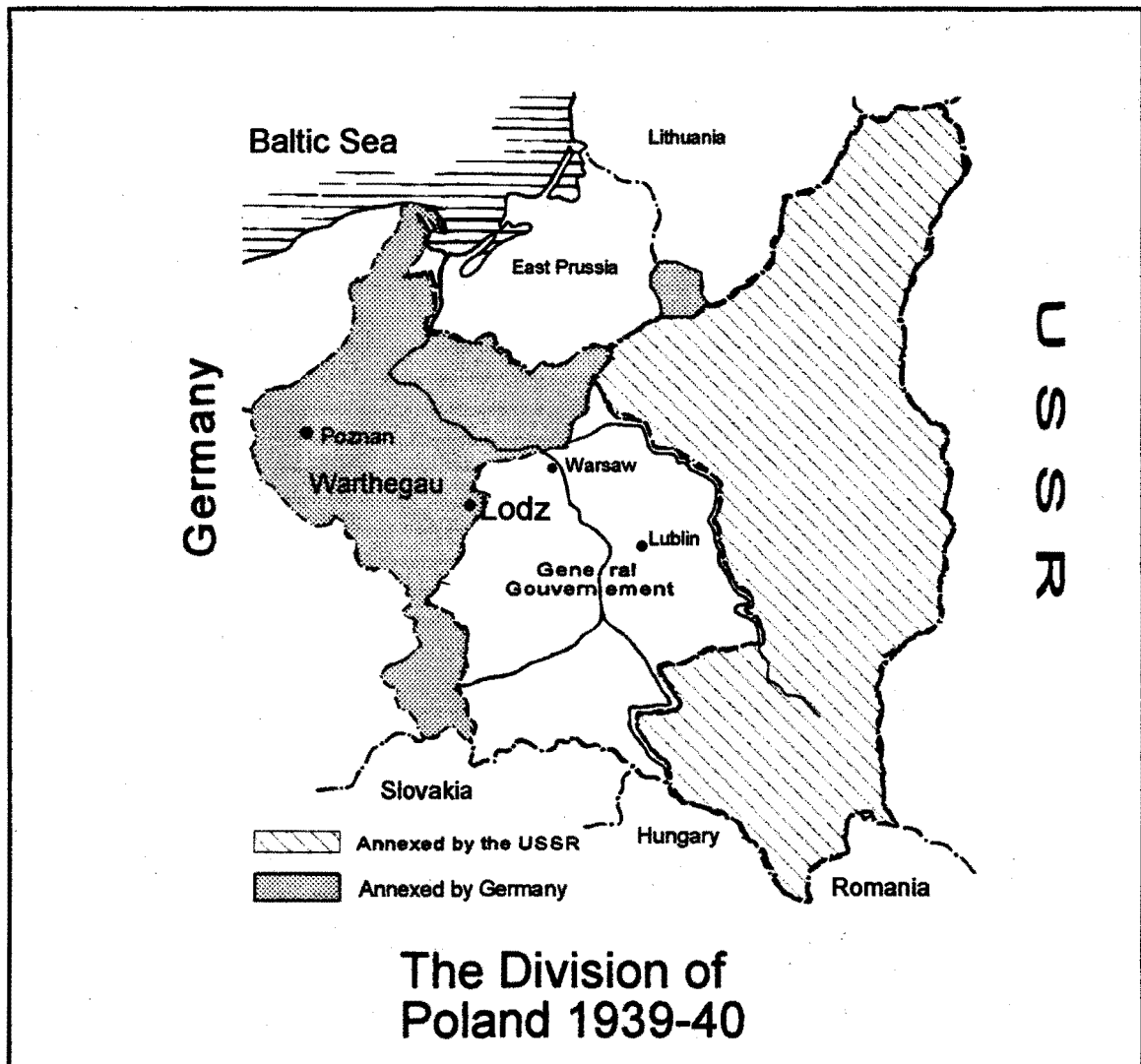
German migrations to the east occurred in two large waves, the first from the 11th to the 14th centuries and the second from the 16th to the 19th centuries. These waves of eastward movement of Germans established German enclaves in the Baltic, large parts of present day Poland, Russia, Hungary, Romania, the former Yugoslavia, and Ukraine.¹⁸ After the First World War the Treaties of Versailles and St. Germain transferred large areas from Germany to Poland and added over nine million German-speaking people to the group of "ethnic Germans" in the East that already included over one million Germans in Russia.¹⁹ The racial policies of the Nazi regime actively catered to these ethnic Germans and Hitler used their perceived lack of political self-determination as a major thrust of his foreign policy. For many Germans who had settled in Eastern areas well before the unification of the German states in the 1870s, the political state of Germany fashioned by Bismarck was unfamiliar and foreign.

During the Second World War, ethnic Germans were resettled in occupied and annexed parts of Poland as part of a plan to Germanize these areas. In Hitler's view the "great mistake of former times was to imagine that Germans could take land with alien peoples upon it, have them till it, and "Germanize" them." In contrast, the new Nazi policy called for the complete removal of all Polish people and the resettlement of German peasants on these

¹⁸J.B. Schechtman, *European Population Transfers, 1939-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 27.

¹⁹Schechtman, 29.

lands.²⁰ Hitler's Nazi regime annexed a part of the conquered Polish lands and on October 8, 1939 created the province of Posen which was later renamed Warthegau. The Warthegau,



Map1.

along with the province of Danzig-West Prussia, was to be the home for resettled Germans while Poles and Jews would be evicted from these provinces--the Jews to their death in

²⁰Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy 1939-1945*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 2.

concentration camps while Poles were to be settled in the remaining part of conquered Poland.²¹ By January 1943 approximately one million Jews and one million Poles had been removed from the Warthegau and Danzig-West Prussia and 400,000 ethnic Germans and another 500,000 Reich Germans had taken their place.²² The defeats of the German army would swell this number until the Warthegau and Danzi-West Prussia had a *Volksdeutsche* population of 1,340,000 by the summer of 1944. Other eastern concentrations of *Volksdeutsche* in 1944 were in Bohemia and Moravia (2,726,000), Romania (470,000), Yugoslavia (40,000), and Hungary (430,000).²³

The earliest resettlement efforts involved the Germans in the Baltic and parts of the former Poland. Since Germany and the Soviet Union had carved up Poland and the Baltic states, negotiations began immediately to transfer the German populations in these areas to the new provinces of Germany. In the fall of 1939 these efforts began with the removal of three quarters of the Baltic German population.²⁴ Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans, whose homeland had become part of the Soviet Union, were resettled in September to November of 1940. The declining fortunes of the Nazi armies forced a further evacuation of 350,000 Black Sea Germans to Polish areas in late 1943 and 1944. Other areas that were part of resettlement efforts included approximately 135,000 Germans from Polish Volhynia and

²¹Schechtman, 263.

²²Koehl, 190.

²³Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees, 1939-52: A Study in Forced Population Movement*, (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1956), 370. The 1.3 million ethnic Germans in the two provinces includes approximately 590,000 indigenous to Poland.

²⁴Schechtman, 94.

Galicia who were transferred from these now Soviet held areas by March 1940.²⁵

While Nazi plans to settle the transferred German populations suffered many setbacks, not the least of which was the deteriorating situation on the Eastern front, the "German" newcomers were granted citizenship and many of them received Polish farms as compensation for property they had forfeited in their former homelands. The German settlers enjoyed many of the privileges of German citizenship and participated in all of its obligations. They were drafted into the German army, the women worked in the armaments industries, and those who received farms produced food for the German military and domestic economy. Their settlement would, however, be short lived. With the continuing decline in Germany's war fortunes the Germans in the Warthegau and Danzig-West Prussia soon became part of a confused migration to the west. The attack by the Russians along the entire eastern front in January 1945 sent millions of German people into motion towards the west under the most harrowing circumstances.

The movement of people precipitated by the collapse of Nazi Germany was unprecedented in modern history.²⁶ Among the thirty million people moving around Europe there were approximately twelve million ethnic Germans who had fled or were expelled from

²⁵Schechtman, 150, and Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe 1933-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 164.

²⁶For recent overviews of the migrations resulting from World War II, see Heinz Fassman and Rainer Münz, "European East-West Migration, 1945-1992," *International Migration Review*, 28(3) (1994), 520-538 and Dariusz Stola "Forced Migrations in Central European History," *International Migration Review*, 26(2) (1992), 324-341.

the now Soviet occupied areas of the East.²⁷ The millions of displaced people milling around the bombed out cities of Germany became wards of the occupying powers. These powers created refugee organizations that had the mandate to house, feed, repatriate and resettle them in new homelands.

One of the agreements between allied powers affected some *Volksdeutsche* dramatically. At the Yalta conference, the U.S. , Britain, and the Soviet Union signed an agreement that "provided for the immediate repatriation of civilians and prisoners of war of both nationalities after their liberation."²⁸ German citizenship acquired in the Warthegau by those *Volksdeutsche* who had come from the Soviet Union was no protection against repatriation to the Soviet Union from which they had been evacuated recently by the German armies. While, on the one hand, ethnic Germans were being expelled from Poland, Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries as undesirable ethnic populations, the Soviet Union was demanding that all of its citizens and former citizens be returned to it. It was not a glorious homecoming for the estimated five million Soviet citizens who were repatriated in the postwar years. Only 15-20 per cent ever got back to their homes--most were either executed or sent directly to the Gulags of the frozen north.²⁹ For ethnic Germans the prospect of return to Russia was the cause of even greater fear and panic due to their compromised allegiance. They had no doubt that their cooperation with the Germans would

²⁷Fassman, 521.

²⁸Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations, Its History and Work, 1946-1952*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 179.

²⁹Stola, 336.

guarantee their punishment at the hands of the Soviet secret police. Even when the United States and Britain finally changed their policy of cooperating with the forced repatriation and turned their attention to solving the refugee problem in Europe, *Volksdeutsche* from the Soviet Union continued to live in constant fear of the nearby Soviets.

The International Refugee Organization (I.R.O.) was the United Nations agency created to solve the refugee problem. The I.R.O. operated as a Preparatory Commission from July 1947 to July 1948 and from then to March 1952 as a specialized agency of the United Nations. A total of almost two million people fell under its care during this time.³⁰ The I.R.O.'s mandate, however, explicitly excluded ethnic Germans. Although the Soviet Union never joined the I.R.O., it had insisted in early discussions that ethnic Germans be excluded from the organization's mandate. This principle survived and was included in the subsequent constitution which stated clearly that "persons of German ethnic origin "would "not be the concern of the organization."³¹

While the language of the I.R.O.'s mandate appeared to specifically exclude *Volksdeutsche* refugees in Europe, in practice there were notable exceptions. North American Mennonite organizations worked hard to secure I.R.O. status for their co-religionists who

³⁰Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Problem: Indifference or Opportunism*, (Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1977), 120.

³¹"IRO Constitution," in Holborn, 586. See also University of Winnipeg Archives (hereafter UOW), *Willi Wanka Collection*, file "Correspondence 1947," photocopies, "I.R.O. Definitions and General Principles: (Texts adopted by United Nations General Assembly 13 December 1946)," Part II, sec. 4, and Angelika Sauer, "A Matter of Domestic Policy? Canadian Immigration Policy and the Admission of Germans, 1945-50," *Canadian Historical Review*, 74(2) (1993), 237-238.

formed a small part of the masses of ethnic German refugees in Germany.³² Mennonites had emigrated to Russia from Prussia in the 18th century along with other German colonists at the invitation of Catherine the Great. Like other *Volksdeutsche* they were German speaking and had been resettled to the Warthegau in 1943 and 1944 as part of the 350,000 Black Sea ethnic Germans. The Mennonite organizations petitioned the Preparatory Commission of the I.R.O. for status as displaced persons based on Dutch origins that predated their settlement in Prussia and Russia. The writings of prominent Mennonite historians were liberally quoted in the lengthy brief presented to the I.R.O.. Besides their claim to Dutch ancestry Mennonite leaders argued that they were more like Jews and really had no "nationality."³³ The I.R.O. considered the Mennonites' submission favorably and classified them as Displaced Persons. The change is noted in the official history of the I.R.O. as part of a "more liberal assessment of eligibility" caused by the "increased knowledge of the background and motives of various national groups." The change in eligibility not only benefited Mennonites, but also applied to the *Volksdeutsche* of the Baltic countries.³⁴

The official status of 'Displaced Person' won by the Mennonites was not to last. In 1949 the I.R.O. reversed its ruling on eligibility and on June 23, 1949 the processing of

³²The Mennonite aspect of *Volksdeutsche* experience is dealt with in Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution*, (Altona, Mb.: D.W. Friesen, 1962). See also George K. Epp, "Mennonite Immigration to Canada after World War II," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 5 (1987), 108-119. According to the latter approximately 12,000 Mennonites escaped to the Western zones of Germany, (p. 114).

³³F.H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus...*, 375-376.

³⁴Holborn, 210.

Mennonites for immigration to Canada came to an abrupt halt. The earlier decision to consider Mennonites as displaced persons had been based on a determination that their naturalization in the Warthegau during the war had occurred under duress. The I.R.O. now determined--largely on the strength of a report by U.S. zone officials--that information received from the Berlin Documents Center indicated that Mennonites were granted citizenship as early as 1942 and that Nazi officials had not forced anyone to become a citizen. Furthermore an investigation by the U.S. zone officials found that 30-40 per cent of Mennonite men had served in the German military. After a month of negotiating, bolstered by the full support and help of Canadian immigration officials, the I.R.O. again granted Mennonites I.R.O. status excepting those who had served in the German military.³⁵ The 'official' identity as Displaced Persons made a few thousand *Volksdeutsche* eligible for I.R.O. assistance. This assistance included subsidized travel and access to countries committed to receiving refugees--primarily Canada, Australia and the United States. Most ethnic Germans, however, did not qualify and had no practical way to emigrate from an overcrowded Germany.³⁶

In contrast to a virtual closed door policy in the 1930s, the question of immigration rose to the forefront in countries like Canada and Australia in the post war years. In Canada the attitudes that immigration "posed a threat to a nation struggling to survive an uncertain

³⁵T.D. Regehr, "Of Dutch or German Ancestry? Mennonite Refuges, MCC and the International Refugee Organization," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 13 (1995), 15-16 and F.H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus....*, 405-408.

³⁶Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 344.

future," and outright opposition to increased immigration in Quebec were tempered by a buoyant economy and attendant labour shortages. In Australia the emphasis was on the requirements of a sparsely populated country to increase its population to better defend itself. The result was that both countries embarked on expanded immigration policies in the post war period.³⁷ In the United States, however, the situation was different. Although President Harry Truman issued a directive on December 22, 1945 that was to speed the processing of displaced persons for entry into the United States, the immigration was to be kept within the Quota Law of 1924 that restricted the number of immigrants that could enter each year from any overseas area. The passage of the Displaced Persons Act in 1948 only alleviated this situation slightly in that it allowed for the 'mortgaging' of quotas into the future.³⁸

While Canada, Australia and the United States were all large recipients of Displaced Persons, the situation of ethnic German immigration was not bright in any of them. In the United States the restrictions of the Quota Law and the fact that the Truman Directive of 1945 did not apply to *Volksdeutsche* made that country unavailable to ethnic Germans.³⁹ In Australia no provisions for German immigration were made until 1950 when all Germans

³⁷J. Atchison, "Immigration in Two Federations: Canada and Australia," *International Migration*, 26(1) (1988), 10-11. See also his "Patterns of Australian and Canadian Immigration 1900-1983," *International Migration*, 22(1) (1984), 4-32 and Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared*, (Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1989).

³⁸Amy Zahl Gottlieb, "Refugee Immigration: The Truman Directive," *Prologue*, 13(1), 5. The U.S. position on ethnic German immigration is also discussed in Gerhard Bassler, "Canadian Postwar Immigration Policy and the Admission of German Enemy Aliens, 1945-50," *Yearbook of German-American Studies*, 22 (1987), 185.

³⁹Gottlieb, 13.

were allowed entry.⁴⁰

In Canada, Prime Minister Mackenzie King enunciated in a speech in May 1947 what became immigration policy for the next decade. King announced a policy of immigration that reflected his party's desire not "to make a fundamental alteration in the character" of Canada's population and would allow entry at a rate that people could be "absorbed into various industries and occupations." Due to limitations on transport, the priority would be to allow immigration of close relatives of people living in Canada and refugees and displaced persons from Europe.⁴¹ The response from Canada's German-Canadian population was immediate and by mid 1947 the government was inundated with 15-20,000 applications for immigration of ethnic German relatives from overseas. Except for groups who received official identity as Displaced Persons, there was no agency to process these applications.⁴² Though there was no organization to facilitate the immigration of ethnic Germans, Canada was unique in that there was nothing in its policies or regulations that specifically prevented their entry. With the option of changing the mandate of the I.R.O. not feasible in light of the opposition of its major financial contributor, the United States, the government approached the Inter-Governmental Committee of Refugees (IGCR) for assistance in processing ethnic German

⁴⁰Johannes H. Voigt, *Australia-Germany: 200 Years of Contacts, Relations and Connections*, (Bonn: Internationes, 1987), 123.

⁴¹Dirks, 145.

⁴²Mennonite Heritage Center Archives (hereafter MHC), *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Collection*, vol 1330, file 9889, "Canadian Christian Council for Resettlement of Refugees (Outside of the Mandate of the I.R.O.): A Brief History," 1.

refugees.⁴³ For a while it seemed that an informal arrangement that allowed *Volksdeutsche* to be considered by their country of citizenship would be a solution. However, the IGCR soon backed out of this arrangement. The option of establishing an entity to process the applications was finally pursued by officials in the various government departments.⁴⁴ A confidential memorandum to H.C.P. Cresswell, a Canadian representative of the colonization department of the C.P.R., from his European counterpart, suggests that officials from the IGCR had contacted him about looking after the processing of fifteen hundred to two thousand ethnic Germans who had already been approved by Ottawa. The official was concerned that "unless some organization will endeavour to assist in their movement the responsibility for so doing may fall upon the Canadian Government. In that event an early movement is unlikely."⁴⁵

The problem of ethnic German immigration also involved the Sudeten German community that had emigrated to Canada after the Munich Crisis of 1938. After the war, its leader Willi Wanka went to Europe to seek a way for refugee Sudeten Germans to come to Canada. Franz Rehwald, a fellow Sudeten German and editor of the German paper *Der Nordwesten*, wrote him in Europe raising an issue that would colour the immigration process for the next decade. Sudeten German immigrants of the immediate prewar period were anti-

⁴³The IGCR was a refugee organization established by a 32 nation conference in 1938. It operated until the I.R.O. began operations in 1947, F.H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus...*, 365 and 387.

⁴⁴Sauer, 241.

⁴⁵National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), *Canadian Lutheran World Relief Collection*, MG 28 V120, vol. 29, file 1, Gordon Glennie to H.C.P. Cresswell, "German Minorities (*Volksdeutsche*)."

Nazi and socialist. Rehwald pointed out in his letter to Wanka that the Sudeten Germans would never accomplish anything alone because they were politically unimportant and their influence on policy would, if anything, be negative. Rehwald attributed this to the fact that the "panic and fear about Communism and Socialism in the United States" was also being felt in Canada and no "leftist elements" would be welcome here.⁴⁶

Discussions with the railways drew T.O.F. Herzer, the General Manager of another railway affiliate, the Canada Colonization Association, into the ethnic German immigration question. Herzer was trained as a Lutheran pastor and was not only involved with the railways but was also a leader of the recently formed Canadian Lutheran World Relief organization (CLWR), an organization involved in European relief.⁴⁷ Using his wide contacts among leaders in the German ethnic community, Herzer began discussions about establishing the organization needed by the government to process *Volksdeutsche*. The meeting establishing the new organization was held in Ottawa in June 1947. The outcome was an organization dedicated to ethnic German immigration which had representation from the Lutheran, Mennonite, Catholic and Baptist Churches and the Sudeten ethnic organization. The name chosen for the organization was the Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees (Outside of the mandate of the I.R.O.) (CCCRR).⁴⁸

⁴⁶UOW, *Willi Wanka Collection*, file 'Correspondence 1947', Letter Rehwald to Wanka, April 15, 1947, in German. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

⁴⁷For a general description of the CLWR see Art Grenke, "Canadian Lutheran World Relief," *Archivist*, 15(6), 12-14.

⁴⁸MHC, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Collection, vol 1329, file 988, "Report of Meeting Held in Ottawa, Monday, June 23rd, 1947."

Although in the discussions with government and in its internal documents the new organization left no doubt that it was dedicated to bringing the relatives of ethnic Germans to Canada, the naming of the organization required some political delicacy to address the contradictions between 'official' identity and reality. The committee struck to come up with a name chose to emphasize the religious component of its membership and not its purpose as an ethnic German organization. Undoubtedly the Mennonites were the most interested in not being identified as participants in an ethnic German organization because of their desire to maintain I.R.O. status as Displaced Persons of Dutch origin. The membership of the Sudeten community that had an ethnic and possibly political identity, but was certainly not a religious group, was also not reflected in the organization's name. The membership of the ethnic Sudeten Germans eventually became a problem in the minds of the other CCCRR members. As early as 1948 Rehwald reported to Wanka that he was experiencing pressure from Herzer to withdraw the membership of the Sudeten Germans because other ethnic groups would also want membership.⁴⁹ The February 1949 meeting of the CCCRR officially requested the Sudeten resignation, "thereby doing away with an embarrassing situation with respect to other racial groups who applied for membership."⁵⁰ The ethnic groups clamouring for membership in the CCCRR were never identified and it seems more likely that Herzer was preparing the way for a campaign to broaden the immigration categories to include those immigrants closely identified with the Nazi cause. The lobbying effort to open the

⁴⁹UOW, *Willi Wanka Collection*, file 'Correspondence 1948', Rehwald to Wanka, November 8, 1948.

⁵⁰MHC, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Collection*, vol 1329, file 988, "Minutes of the Meeting of the CCCRR held on Friday, February 4th, 1949."

doors to these politically opposite immigrants may have caused Herzer to advocate removal of the Sudeten Germans. In any event, the following months witnessed an intense campaign to expand the immigration of Germans beyond the limits of *Volksdeutsche*. The head of the CCCRR, T.O.F. Herzer, was forced to admit that up to 90 percent of the immigrants brought over by the organization had been naturalized Germans. This revelation was "an unpleasant surprise to the authorities."⁵¹

The successive broadening of categories of permissible immigrants continued under the political pressure of the CCCRR. The March 1950 orders-in-council allowed entry of German nationals who were prepared to work on farms. They also removed the automatic rejection for those who had served in the German military and those who had been nominal members of the Nazi Party. By September 1950 German nationals could apply in the same way as did prospective immigrants from any other country. In 1951 membership in the Nazi Waffen-SS formations was removed as a reason for rejection, provided it could be shown that the applicant had not volunteered. By 1954 restrictions applied only to high ranking members of the various Nazi political organizations.⁵²

The Cold War political atmosphere that preoccupied western democracies in the post war period was an important element in the public's tolerance of ethnic German immigration. The preoccupation with Communism enabled the contradictory 'official identities' of ethnic

⁵¹Sauer, 256-257.

⁵²Alvin Finkel, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Cold War, 1945-1980," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21(3) 1986, 62-63. The Waffen-SS (Schutz Stafel) was originally the fanatic bodyguard for Hitler. By the end of the war it included conscripts and fought like other military units.

Germans to recede into the background thus permitting their immigration without public reaction. The earlier warnings given by Franz Rehwald to his fellow socialist, Willi Wanka, proved to be accurate. The Cold War panic that increasingly focused the attention of authorities on the Communist threat enhanced the desirability of ethnic Germans as immigrants. While the various bureaucracies struggled with the official identity of *Volksdeutsche* immigrants, their anticommunist orientation was a real asset in the view of Canadian officials. The danger from the far-right receded into the distance while the threat of Communism began to occupy centre stage.⁵³

The arrival of fifty refugees under the auspices of the CCCRR at Christmas in 1947 and the arrival of an additional group of 542 Mennonites during the same year, marked the beginning of the immigration of *Volksdeutsche*. By 1950, the year German nationals were allowed entry, the movement totaled almost 21,000.⁵⁴ The annual levels of ethnic German immigration are shown in Table 1 below. The discrepancies in the totals illustrate the ambiguity of ethnic German identity. While the CCCRR registered 20836 ethnic Germans, only 19560 indicated their German ethnicity when asked by immigration officials. Mennonites may have declared themselves as Dutch and other ethnic Germans may have

⁵³This aspect of the politics of postwar immigration has been subject to considerable investigation and debate. See for instance: Finkel, "Canadian Immigration Policy," Reg Whitaker, *Double Standard: The Secret History of Canadian Immigration*, (Toronto: Lester Orpen Dennys, 1987), Sauer, "A Matter of Domestic Policy?", and the letters of Sauer and Whitaker in *The Canadian Historical Review*, 74(4) (Dec 1994), 575-577.

⁵⁴MHC, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Association Collection*, vol 1330, file 990, "General Survey CCCRR Bremen-Germany," 1.

indicated their country of origin as their ethnic identity.

Table 1. Ethnic German Immigration to 1950.

	CCCR	Mennonites	Total	Total 'Official' German
1947	51	542	593	
1948	3842	3828	7670	
1949	6285	1635	7920	
1950	4438	491	4929	
Sub-Total	14616	6496	21112	
less Mennonites	-276		-276	
Total			20836	19560

After 1950 the number of *Volksdeutsche* among the total numbers of German immigrants continued to be high for some years.⁵⁵ While the exact number of *Volksdeutsche* cannot be determined conclusively, a summary of ethnic German immigration after 1950 found in Table 2, suggests that another 26331 came to Canada in the 1951 to 1955 period bringing the total to a minimum of 47000 in the years 1947 to 1955 period.

⁵⁵A survey conducted by the author of 231 of the Baptist World Alliance Immigration Case files, all of whom emigrated after 1950, indicated that over half (132) the files had one adult member who was born outside of the borders of Germany as at September 1, 1939.

Table 2. Ethnic German Immigration 1951 to 1955.⁵⁶

	CCCR	Mennonite	Total	Total 'Official' German
1951	7075	1004	8079	
1952	3884	496	4380	
1953	5781	275	6056	
1954	6128	104	6232	
1955	2039	46	2085	
Sub-Total	24907	1925	26832	
less Mennonites	-501		-501	
Total			26331	149513

T.O.F. Herzer in an article in the *Lutheran Witness* in 1952 claimed that "the total postwar German ethnic migration to Canada is not fewer than 65,000 of whom almost half came through the CCCRR."⁵⁷

The complex history of ethnic Germans and their multiple official identities complicated their immigration to Canada. The victorious allied powers--Canada among

⁵⁶ Taken from: F. H. Epp, *Menonite Exodus...*, 408, 416, 421; MHC, *Canadian Menonite Board of Colonization Collection*, vol. 1348, file 1109, untitled statistical summary, December 31, 1951 and vol. 1330, file 990, "General Survey CCCRR Bremen-Germany," July 26, 1955; the 'official' numbers are from Anthony Richmond., *Post-War Immigrants in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 5.

⁵⁷NAC, *Canadian Lutheran World Relief Collection*, MG 28 V120, vol. 31, file 1 and T.O.F. Herzer, "DP's Make Impact on Lutheranism in Canada", *The Lutheran Witness*, July 8, 1952, 10.

them--did not want to assist those who, while they were displaced by the war, had been supporters of the Nazi regime. Official definitions of identity embodied in such terms as *Volksdeutsche*, German national, ethnic German and Displaced Person were seemingly inadequate for a diverse range of personal circumstances. Individual immigrants and organizations such as the CCCRR and the Mennonites used this ambiguity to help their constituents bring fellow ethnic Germans to Canada. The politics of the immigration of *Volksdeutsche* illustrates the difficulties of matching 'official' bureaucratic labels to the myriad of identities people assume in complex societies.

Chapter Two:

The Burden of Memory

The *Volksdeutsche* immigrants arriving in Canada in the late 1940s and 1950s each had a unique story to tell about their lives during and after the war. Although each person's experience was different the stories had common themes of separation from family, the refugee circumstance, the encounter with Naziism, and the war itself. In this chapter the stories of two people are told in their own words.

The experiences of Adelgunde Hellman and Wilhelm Maretzki are not necessarily typical. More dramatic examples of suffering could have been chosen. Other individuals' stories would be framed more strikingly with a sense of adventure and drama. Men and women had different experiences as did the old and the young. The experiences of the two subjects chosen here serve as examples of the commonness and diversity of *Volksdeutsche* memories.⁵⁸

Adelgunde Hellman was interviewed in her home in Winnipeg.⁵⁹ Mrs. Hellman had consented to the interview at a coffee hour in the church basement after a seniors get-together. She was slightly nervous about the project and the fact that the interviewer was male and from the academic world seemed to restrain her.

⁵⁸Both interviews were conducted in German in the subjects' homes. They were translated and transposed by the author.

⁵⁹Adelgunde Hellman, *Interview*, March 28, 1995.

AH: I was born in Kutry Zalesie⁶⁰ in the district of Rovno in Volhynia--in the Polish Ukraine-- on the 16th of January 1927. My parents had a small farm in Volhynia and we also had a German school; we learned German and Polish in school. We had a German teacher whose name was Ewald Himmelt and he came from Litzmanstadt. At that time he was still single and later he died as a soldier in the war. We all liked him very much. At the time of our resettlement he was also a part of the commission⁶¹ that registered the people; so we got to see him in our village one more time.

HW: What was it like at the time of the war, the war against Poland?

AH: Well in our area we did not see any of the war, but it was very unsettled. The Poles hated the Germans and the Germans hated the Poles. We were told that they would come at night and murder us, and so on. We often could not sleep at night and the men would stand outside armed with various tools while we were inside sleeping. I was twelve years old.

The attack by Germany on Poland and the almost simultaneous advance by the Russians resulted in the occupation of Adelgunde's village by Russians. Although the occupation by Soviet troops was unsettling at first,

AH: ...things really did not change that much and when the war was over it settled down. When the commission came to see if we wanted to emigrate then we--all the Germans--were united and so we all went *Heim ins Reich*. There were a number of men who came to our village, to the *Gemeinde Amt*,⁶² and everybody went there, all those who wanted to emigrate. ... We were all children at that time and we were all agreed. Papa told us how everything would be better in Germany and so we were all agreed. ...

⁶⁰The names of villages mentioned in the interviews are often difficult to verify. Many Polish and Czechoslovakian villages were renamed by the Germans and are difficult to trace. Where names could not be verified on maps they have been written phonetically.

⁶¹The word "*Kommission*" is rendered here as "commission." The Germans set up a task force of personnel from the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* to organize the emigration. Mrs. Hellman is referring to this task force.

⁶²It was not clear to me if this referred to an office of the church or whether the commission came to the village's administrative office.

HW: So how did the emigration proceed?

AH: We left in January--the exact date I don't remember, but we emigrated in January. The men stayed behind, they were going to follow with the horses and wagons, and the women and children were taken to the train station. We were taken to the train station at Kustopol and we travelled on a freight train to Zgierz, near Litzmanstadt⁶³ and there we came to a kind of camp. Later the men also came but our father also came on a train. He was not allowed to come with the wagon because he had purchased another horse--after the war--and he was not allowed to take it with him. He didn't want to travel with only one horse so he left everything there and followed by train. He joined us in the camp and we were moved to the Sudetenland, to Kumatow to a large camp. We were there a few months and then we moved on to Schlukenau, also in the Sudetenland. From Schlukenau we went to Kostrine, where we also lived in a camp. We were there a few months--I don't know exactly how long. From Kostrine we came to an estate, it was called *Rotes Luch*, near Müncheberg. I guess the camp life got to be too much for our father and he reported voluntarily for the war as a soldier. He became a soldier and they sent the rest of us to a farmer. We worked for the farmer at Ortweg near Wrietzen. ...We worked for the farmer for a while but mother wanted to go to the Warthegau where her family, relatives and friends were. She travelled to the Warthegau and arranged everything and when she came back we packed all our things and moved to the Warthegau and also became settlers--but this was already in 1942.

When asked why her family had not been settled with their fellow Volhynian villagers

Adelgunde explained that

they classified the people, they did not send all of them directly from the camps to the Warthegau for resettlement. There was an 'O' card and an 'A' card--*Altreich* and *Ost*, and we had an 'A' card and so we stayed in the 'Old' Reich. Those classified as *Ost*--the 'O's'--were settled.⁶⁴

The arrangements worked out by Adelgunde's mother meant that the family now

⁶³Litzmanstadt was the German name for the city of Łódź. Litzmanstadt was the main administrative centre for resettlement efforts in the Warthegau.

⁶⁴The reasons for the classification are examined in more detail in Chapter Three.

qualified for resettlement in the Warthegau. Like other resettled Volhynia villagers, the family received Polish farms as part of the Nazi plan to 'Germanize' the soil of the annexed province of Warthegau. .

AH: We got a number of Polish farms. The Poles also had small farms--a few *morgens*⁶⁵ of land--and we got three, three Polish farms. The farmer who had been the owner of one of these farms stayed with us as a servant and his daughters also worked for us--because we had no men.

HW: So who was the 'boss' of the farm?

AH: My mother.

HW: Did she find that hard?

AH: Well she had grown up on a farm and she was quite capable, she immediately had the old shed torn down and had a large storage building built. She gave them a little butter and a little bacon--that could get you everything in those days. But we did not live there a long time before we had to flee.

HW: And the Poles that lived there--those that were at home there--were they your servants?

AH: Well no...Yes the one Pole who had lived in the house where we were living, he was our servant. We had two houses, one was bigger and one was smaller. The servant lived in the smaller house and we lived in the bigger house. It had actually been his house. He worked for us and we got along quite well--it worked quite well.

Although the family was now settled among their Volhynian neighbours in the

⁶⁵The *morgen* was an old area measurement equalling approximately one-half hectare.

Warthegau the family was separated from their father and husband. Questioning Adelgunde about her father evoked memories of the time when he was absent. The absence of the male 'head' of the house was felt most keenly after the Russians resumed their offensive in January 1945. The January offensive of the Soviet armies coincided with particularly cold weather and the settlers were uprooted again without the benefit of the order and bureaucracy that characterized the earlier planned resettlement.

HW: Did your father come home in between?

AH: We fled with our mother, in January of 1945. When the Russians advanced into Wielun, a man who had been in a neighbouring village came running home and said that the Russians were in Wielun and we had to leave. We quickly packed, put everything on the wagon, and left as quickly as possible. The servant came along with us. Mother was always afraid that he would take the horse and we would be left somewhere without transportation. She sent him away and said, "Josef, go home to your family and we will go ahead alone." So mother drove on from there and we sent the servant home. We were not very far away, we left in the afternoon and had stayed over for one night. We had only driven a few hours and the Poles wanted to stay with us thinking that we would go back when the Russians.... But we always managed to get away from the Russians. We came to Berlin, north, into the Spree forest. I don't remember the village. We were supposed to stay there but so many soldiers came that they told the refugees that they had to leave. They gave us an address in Thuringia and we stayed there on a farm. We got a place to live there.

HW: What about your father?

AH: Father...after the war...it was already one year later...1945 the war ended, 1946 he...he had been a prisoner of war with the British or the Americans...the Americans, I believe. He was released earlier because he was older. He was already 45 or 46 years old--he was born in 1900. He knew nothing about us. He was in the West and we were in the East. We were in the East Zone and he was in the West. I guess he started to look for us. He began looking and in speaking with people he finally met a nephew of my aunt, my mother's sister. He said he knew the whereabouts of my aunt and

knew that we lived in the same neighbourhood. He gave father the address of my aunt and he came to her place. They sent my cousin to our house with the news that someone was coming. Then they came marching down the road, it was only two kilometres from our house, my aunt and uncle and Papa...he came home.

The relatively short stay in the Warthegau seems to give an unreal quality to any feelings of permanence that Adelgunde's family felt. The shortages of labour meant that the separation of the *Volksdeutsche* and the Slavic Poles did not happen--at least not physically. The news of German defeats soon clouded the sense of having found a new home.

HW: How did the Volhynian Germans feel in the Warthegau?

AH: In the Warthegau we were quite comfortable because all the people settled there were from home. But as the Russians got closer we didn't feel at home after all because we were on Polish farms and we knew when the Russians would come we would have to go back to being workers or...

HW: How was your German?

AH: We always spoke German. When we were in Poland, in Volhynia, we always spoke German at home and we could speak very little Polish because we were a German colony. In the Warthegau I learned Polish, but I forgot that again later. ... We learned it from the Polish workers, you worked with Poles and so you learned some Polish. Later when we came to Germany we forgot this again because we only spoke German at home.

The flight to what became East Germany and the return of her father forced further readjustments to family life. The Hellman family tried again to establish a permanent home, this time in the Soviet occupied zone.

AH: We stayed on a farm and also worked there. The farmer and his wife were an old couple whose sons had died in the war and they were very happy to have us. But then they divided up the land and we were again settled and

took a farm from the divided estates. We started building; we built a house which was almost completed when father returned.

HW: How was it when father returned, after all mother had farmed alone for two, three or four years.

AH: When my father was gone my cousin helped us. We took one of my cousins to our place and he worked on the fields. He was only young at the time, 16 or 17 years old. My brother was...he was born in 1936...he was also young but he was good with the horses and he knew everything so he also helped mother a lot. When father came home? Well, the cousin went back home and we worked with our father.

The adjustment to life in post war Germany was difficult. Like many other *Volksdeutsche*, the Hellman family never felt quite at home.

AH: We were always not quite satisfied, father wanted to go to Canada. He had a sister here and a number of acquaintances that had emigrated in 1927 and 1928. I guess they did not feel that comfortable in Germany because they were always strangers and refugees. Father wrote to his sister in Beausejour to see if they could help someone come over here. I was the first one to emigrate. We secretly crossed over to the West Zone and came to the camp at Bremen.⁶⁶ I came over here and did not know where to turn regarding immigration. I had heard about Pastor Heiman and I looked him up in the telephone book. When I found him he suggested I pay him a visit. I visited him and told him the whole story and how I wanted to bring over my parents but didn't know how to go about it because I didn't have very much money. He sent me to [J. G.]Keil, to the Lutheran World Relief. We filed application forms and my parents came and later my other brothers and sisters. In two years we were all here. I came over as a farm worker--a farmer had signed for me, an acquaintance of my uncle. They did not really want me; they did not need me; he only signed so that I could immigrate.

Adelgunde came to Canada in 1950, sailing on the *Beaverbrae* and arriving in Quebec City. She took the train to Winnipeg and proceeded to her relatives in Beausejour.

AH: I stayed at my uncle's; it was just before Christmas and I started to work

⁶⁶The reference is quite likely to the CCCRR processing camp at Bremen-Lesum.

as a domestic for a Jew, a lawyer in Beausejour. He did not pay very well, only thirty dollars a month, and I thought I would have to work a long time before I could bring over my parents. I went to Pine Falls where I worked in the kitchen at a construction site where they were building the power house-- in a bush camp. I was homesick and at Easter time I went back to Beausejour to visit my uncle. There were people there from Winnipeg, acquaintances of ours, who suggested I go to Winnipeg. I came to Winnipeg and worked as a domestic for three years until my parents came.

HW: What about your parents' work?

AH: My mother worked in the hospital, she was in the laundry and my father did a variety of things. He loaded coal, worked in a factory, on construction; most of the time he worked in a factory that made fibreboard.

Adelgunde was single when she emigrated to Canada and she met her future husband in the context of fellow *Volkdeutsche* family and friends. Adelgunde's account of how she met her husband arose in her answer about attending church.

HW: How did you meet your husband?

AH: Oh, well, I also met him through some acquaintances. He came over with some people--also on the Beaverbrae--and these people were friends of my parents. He came to visit these people--his friends who were also our friends, and we met there.

HW: Here in Winnipeg? Did you attend church here in Winnipeg?

AH: At first--well when I worked as a domestic I did not have a lot of opportunity to attend church. In the evenings I often went to the Baptist church. In our church there was nothing in the evenings.

HW: Which Baptist Church?

AH: The Baptist Mission. We also had friends of ours who attended there and had come from Germany like we had. I often went to church with these people on Sunday evenings when I was not working. But then when we wanted to marry we went to Pastor Lenz and at the same time became members there.

HW: That was at the St. Peter's Lutheran Church?

AH: Yes, St. Peter's

HW: Was it hard to get a start in Canada?

AH: Well it was not difficult for me. The work--working in a home--was not difficult. We were used to working hard and in a home the work was not very hard. But at first I was very homesick.

Adelgunde's father faced the adjustment of factory work, although he had always been a farmer. Moreover, his memories of the war remained with him.

HW: Did your father talk about his war experiences?

AH: Very often--very, very often. He told many stories about the war. And now when he was old he told the same stories over and over--they were always about the war. He was a soldier in Berlin and they had so many bombing raids there. He was always willing to talk about the war.

Wilhelm Maretzki also consented to an interview⁶⁷ at the same church seniors meeting where I met Adelgunde Hellman. Mr. Maretzki was much more gregarious and he enjoyed telling me about his experiences. He found my German to be strained and after visiting with him I was sure that he would have been entirely comfortable talking to me in English. Wilhelm Maretzki was born January 1, 1925, in a small village near the present city

⁶⁷The interviews with Wilhelm Maretzki took place on March 28 and 30, 1995.

of Torun in Poland. This area had changed hands many times over a few centuries. In the years before the first World War, the German settlements of the area were divided. A part of the area was German while across the River Drweca their relatives were part of the empire of the Russian Czars. After World War I the area was given to Poland and people were given the choice to become Polish citizens. The Marezki family, like their neighbours, were peasants.

WM: My parents had a small farm; in our area farms were small at that time. They had ten Polish *morgen*. A Polish *morgen* is approximately one-half hectare. It wasn't much; in our family there were ten of us children, so whatever grew was just enough to feed the whole family. We had a few cows, a few pigs, some chickens, but during my youth, as I remember it, I was very content. People were reasonably content. The Polish government did not oppress the Germans, not until the tensions that accompanied Hitler's rise. Then the issue of the Germans' presence was raised; the Germans should leave. There was an oft repeated saying :... [Polish]⁶⁸ ...that is "The Germans to Berlin--the Jews to Palestine." Poland should be pure like a glass of water. This was the objective of the Poles. But we were not oppressed to any extent. Most of the people of the area became Polish citizens when the Poles took over; they had made promises; many of our relatives, however, did not become Polish citizens. They stayed German. ... Whoever opted for Poland was to receive all the rights of Polish citizenship and many did this because they were afraid that they would be oppressed if they did not. Others did not, they kept their German citizenship but could stay in Poland. But, if anything happened they had a way out....

HW: So what was it like when the war broke out in 1939?

WM: Just before the war, in 1939--already in 1938 there was quite a lot of hatred towards Germans, you could not speak German in public. If someone heard you speaking German you were accused of 'eating Polish bread but speaking German;' you had to be careful. Then in 1938 it became somewhat friendlier because Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia and gave the Poles some of it--the Olga region. They thought relations were improving but then it

⁶⁸Marezki gave me the saying in Polish and then translated it into German.

reversed again. After that there was constant talk of a possible war. ...

A week before the war people who had radios had them confiscated. Groups, called the *Miliz*, a Polish militia, went around with an armband. Germans could not stand in groups, not more than two people could talk in public. We didn't know if the war had started but we knew that it must be close to war.

In spite of their discomfort and isolated instances of tensions with the Poles, when the war actually came everything happened so quickly that there was little opportunity for serious conflict. In a short period of time the Germans occupied their region and the relationship with their Polish neighbours underwent an immediate transformation.

WM: We were very happy. For us the liberation by the Hitler army--the German army, was a tremendous relief. There was a desire to get revenge on the Poles, but I must say the Germans behaved reasonably well--with individual exceptions in cases where people knew that Poles had been guilty of certain actions, but otherwise there was little. The army only passed through the area, otherwise they did not do anything. The war went on for another week and then it was over. But, German systems and methods were implemented immediately. ...

Politically Germans also came immediately. The recruitment for the S.S. and S.A. and the various other political groups began immediately. The boys started an S.S. group thinking it was a political organization only to find out later that it was the Waffen S.S. The boys who were 18 and 19 thought it was good to join such a political group and in no time they were gone. The first boys were already drafted into the German army in 1939. I should say they volunteered, they were not drafted, the S.S. was voluntary. They [the Germans] also immediately began working with citizenship. ... Many people had Polish names, my name is also Polish-sounding, and during the citizenship process these people could change their names if they wanted to--and many did this. Our name could also be changed and there were those that wanted to change it. The Marezki family is a large family, there are many Marezki's in that area. They decided not to change it because our name had been there for 150 years; the same name. We had been German and could stay German with such a name. So our name was not changed. I don't know exactly, I don't have my documents, but they made *Volks* lists. There was

Volkliste II, Volkliste III, Volkliste IV. Volkliste I were those who had never given up their German citizenship--those were Germans who had only lived in Poland. *Volkliste II* were all of those like us who were *Volksdeutsche*, were German but had Polish citizenship. They were immediately given citizenship. Then there was *Volkliste III, Volkliste III* were those who had been Polonized. Those who had a German name but their language was Polish. ... There were those that were married, the husband was German and he had married a Pole. The children were considered Polish, but because they had a German name, they... When the lists were made, those in categories I and II immediately became German citizens, those classified as list III had a waiting period. Those listed as IV, these were actually Poles, but they had some German in their background. People always said those with list IV were cannon fodder...they were really Poles. ...

Like most young German men, Marezki was soon drafted into the German military machine and life at home was a memory reinforced only by the odd letter from home. Going back was inevitably a shock in the later years. Marezki returned home briefly in 1944 and found his family and neighbours hard at work.

WM: They were digging ditches, defensive trenches... the Russian troops were already at the Polish border. At that time...I don't know about Warsaw...I think the Warsaw Uprising had already happened. It was in September...yes it was during the potato harvest. They [the Russians] were not on the German border but it did not look very hopeful. Myself, I never thought that we would lose, when you are young.... they have told you about new weapons and everything so....I also never believed; I was in the West when the war ended and when the great refugee flight came with everything that happened there; when everybody had to leave and the Poles took their revenge on the Germans that did not leave. Many paid the price with their lives; they thought they had to stay there and believed that since they had not done anything to the Poles nothing would be done to them. That was a big mistake, most did not live to tell of it. I wanted to go back there, I thought that no one would have left. Why should they leave? They were farmers; it had been their land for centuries. It didn't matter if it was Poles, or Germans, or Russians they would only do their work and now the Poles would come and things would be as they had been before.

For young men like Wilhelm Marezki the war held the promise of adventure.

Although too short for the S.S., Marezki was soon old enough to be drafted into the Nazi German military.

WM: I reported to the *Luftwaffe* and you had to volunteer for the *Luftwaffe*. The *Luftwaffe* only took volunteers--not for the *Luftwaffe* forces, like army, navy, air force. You could be drafted to the *Luftwaffe*, but if you wanted to fly you had to volunteer just like the *Waffen SS*. This was also true of the navy. I took glider training, that was a good preliminary training.

HW: This was in Poland before the war?

WM: No, no. That was in Germany when I went to the *Oberschule*. It was organized by the NSFK, the National Socialist Flying Korps, they supervised it. The school gave me permission to take the course. I thought I would... The German *Luftwaffe* had a lot of recruits. There was no shortage of volunteers. You had to pass some tests and after that I was called up and I was accepted. I wanted to fly, to be a fighter pilot, that is what everybody wanted to do. We all wanted to get the Knight's Cross and that type of thing. Young boys' heads were filled with such things.

Marezki was not able to realize his dream of becoming a fighter pilot because he was too short. Like the S.S., the *Luftwaffe* had height requirements for pilots and so he chose to train as a radio operator. He never really experienced combat although it was not for lack of trying. Although he volunteered for front-line service, a bout with illness and other serendipitous events always kept him away from combat situations. At the end of the war he was captured by the Americans and like thousands of others spent time in POW camps.

WM: We were on a field, a large field. I don't know how many people were there. It was a grain field. They had put up posts with machine guns all around--no fence. You knew if you went out of that circle they would shoot you. They kept shooting all the time anyway. You were left to your own resources. We dug a hole and with our tenting equipment we made a tent. You found an acquaintance and did it together. We had a few rations so we had something to eat, but nothing to drink. ...

The temporary facilities gave way to more permanent camps in Schleswig-Holstein and the months of captivity dragged on. Finally the day of release came.

WM: I was released in September of 1947.

HW: How did you get back to the family?

WM: I did not go back to my family although I did find them. In Germany, whatever one might say about the Germans, they had good organization right up to the end. There were a few breakdowns, but they always managed something. In the same way the Red Cross organized the system of searching for relatives. It proceeded very quickly; you have to wonder at how quickly many people found each other. I mean some disappeared and were only found years later. Particularly children who were lost on the flight. Children that were 2 or 3 years old and were taken by the Poles or the Russians and knew nothing...maybe knew that their parents had been German but otherwise they were lost. Even some of these were found later. But otherwise, there were search lists all over. Everybody submitted their names and these were placed on search lists. The lists were posted at certain places and you could go there and read them. Everybody who was a refugee had their name entered on these lists. So in every region of Germany people could check these lists--long lists, at the mayor's office or other places. ...At the end of 1945 there was a list posted in a nearby village. ... I found the name of people who were from our village. ... I wrote to them and they wrote me back telling me that my mother was in Schleswig-Holstein, but she didn't know exactly where. She gave me another address to write to and these people knew their [his mother's] address. I wrote to them and it didn't take long to receive an answer, and I had found my parents. ... She had six children, my father was still not there, and that is why when I was released I did not go there. [At this point Marezki indicated that his mother's room was not much larger than the moderately sized living room of his house] That is where they lived, cooked, slept, everything. In one corner she had a bed for six people, a bunk bed with room for three to sleep side by side on the bottom and top. For herself she had a folding bed which she unfolded in the room for her to sleep. They lived there for sixteen years. That was bad, but they made it. ... We brought them here to Canada later on, they died here. Mother always was homesick, she wanted to... The children had all come to Canada so they also came but her roots were....

The war disrupted normal patterns of courtship and in the aftermath men and women

resumed the age-old rituals of courtship and marriage. Marezki met his wife when she was sent to help out at the farm where he worked after the war. Along with other young people they took up socializing with energy.

WM: There was the dance in the village on the weekend and in other villages. At first there were no cars and then we walked. It didn't matter how far it was--there was a whole group, walking along the highway. It didn't matter if it took an hour or longer, it made no difference. A person also looked for a home, for companionship. Our generation, was in the war, in the camps and everything--never family, you looked for your family--you wanted an attachment. The boys who were eighteen and nineteen were a lot older at that time compared to today; they had aged--due to the war. They were looking for something. The girls had stayed at home--there were so many girls-- they wanted to marry.

Family and the circumstances in postwar Germany were the biggest reasons for considering a new start in Canada. The mythical images of what Canada would be like were invariably challenged by harsh reality upon arrival.

HW: Were you the first one to come?

WM: No, my sister and brother were here, they had come in the fall of 1953. They were supposed to find out how things were over here. My brother got me into trouble my whole life. My brother said I should come here; things were really good in Canada and I was so dumb and came. A few days ago I found a letter that I wrote to her [his wife]. I wrote to her... I didn't think I had said all those things--she stayed over there. I was so disappointed when I came. I mean we were fortunate, we had a place to live in Germany. The worst problem in West Germany was finding a place to live. There were so many refugees and they all needed a place to live. Then the reconstruction took place, but only after the currency reform of 1948. The cities--we lived in Essen--and Essen was ninety per cent destroyed except for the outlying suburbs. But the city centre was nothing but rubble. Ruins were all that remained. People got a start, sometimes out of a pile of rubble a smokestack poked out because the basement was not ruined. It was really bad. ...

It was such a disappointment. ... I was alone, she [indicating his wife] did not

want to come so I said: 'You stay here, I will send enough money, I can work' but the stupid thing was that I had no particular skills. I had gone to school, then to the army, was released, and then to have enough to eat I went to a farmer to work. Until 1948 things were bad it was not easy to get enough to eat. So I told her that I would send her money and everything would work out. When we were on the ship--there were a lot of single men on the ship--we spun tales of how we would earn money, get rich here in Canada. We arrived in Quebec City after going down the St. Lawrence all day with nothing to see and everything taking so long. We looked left and right and all we saw was the odd church steeple, it was mostly just forest. It did not look promising but we concluded that there must be a highway along the shore with cars travelling along it. When we docked we had to stay on the ship for the night and we concluded that we just had to find out how much the dock workers earned. We found out that they only spoke French. I knew a little English, from school. There was one in our group that knew French and we told him to go and ask. He came back and said that the workers said it was very bad. We had heard about wages of four dollars an hour and at that time you could get about four or four-thirty marks for one dollar, the dollar was high. When we figured this out at four dollars an hour, with an eight hour day--you were rich in no time. When he came back we asked him how much they were making. He said a dollar twenty, a dollar twenty-five. ... Our enthusiasm went down. Next we came to the train. At that time there was a Colonist class, it shook so badly and it was so hot. We arrived when it was very hot. You could not stand it and in our car the heater was still on, for some reason the car was still heating. Then we opened the window and because we were not far from the locomotive we got all the soot in our faces. It was terrible. We looked outside and there was nothing. Just a kind of bush, stones, nothing but rocks and lakes. When night came we went to sleep and in the morning when we looked outside--no change!

After looking for work at a variety of places. Marezki finally landed a job in the mines at Bissett. His employment opportunity came after travelling the streetcar and applying at every possible place on the way. A chance trip to the Unemployment Office opened the door for a job.

WM: "You want to work in the mine?"... I said, "I don't care as long as I get a job." "You go see this man, he speaks all languages." I started to speak to the man in German but it didn't help anything, he didn't speak German. He said "Are you willing to work in the mine?" "Ja," I said, "I will work at any

job I can get.” “Okay, the job pays one dollar five an hour, you have to pay two dollars board and room. You can think about it if you want to. You go to the St. Regis Hotel tomorrow at 9:00 o’clock if you want to, but you can think about it, just let us know.” “No,” I said, “I don’t want to think about it. You put me down for it.” “Okay, if you want to go you report at 9:00 o’clock at the St Regis Hotel.” I was so happy that I had found work. Here in the city I had been offered forty-five cents, fifty cents, or sixty-five cents an hour and here I could get a dollar.

Adelgunde Hellman and Wilhelm Marezki both were able to establish an economic and social life in Canada. Wilhelm Marezki commented that if he had known how difficult the move to Canada would be, he would probably never have done it. For both Wilhelm Marezki and Adelgunde Hellman the complete immersion in Canadian life of their children preclude thoughts of what it might be like if they had not come. Their memories, however, provide a powerful connection to a German past and the experiences of the war and its aftermath are part of their identity.

Chapter Three:

Reconstructed Identity: The Politics of Socialization

Ethnic German identities were not only shaped by the labels given them by others, but they were also the subject of socialization pressures that conspired to remake their identity. For the Canadian population, the results of this socialization were viewed with some misgiving. A 1964 article in Maclean's magazine mentioned Canada's French 'problem,' the English 'problem,' outlined the 'problem' of other immigrant groups and then proclaimed that the "German problem should have been the biggest and ugliest immigration problem of them all." The author expresses his surprise at how "major facts about German Canadians of 1964 mock almost every logical guess of 1945." He maintains that German Canadians are "almost painfully unassertive," do not enter politics and cause no trouble. In the magazine's estimate there were several anticipated characteristics of Germans that had not materialized. One of these was that German immigrants would create "a boisterous and belligerent colony of the master race."⁶⁹ Instead, a caption under a photograph boldly asserts that "no unreconstructed Nazi has slipped into Canada."⁷⁰

Ralph Allen, the writer of the Maclean's article was a prominent Canadian journalist who, shortly thereafter became the managing editor of Canada's largest newspaper of the day, the *Toronto Daily Star*. Allen had served in Europe as war correspondent where he had a

⁶⁹Ralph Allen, "The Untroublesome Canadians," *Maclean's*, 74(5) (March 7, 1964), 21.

⁷⁰Allen, 20.

residual
affitude
from WWII

reputation for "keeping close to the action and close to the common soldier."⁷¹ Although somewhat bombastic, the article reflects the apogee of the 20th century belief that people's cultural identity could be reconstructed. Nowhere in the world was this more apparent than in the policies of the Nazi regime towards German speaking minorities. This chapter will examine various processes whose aim or effect was the reconstruction of *Volksdeutsche* identities. While Nazi policies towards German minorities in the East were part of deliberate processes of socialization, the *Volksdeutsche* were also part of new social realities in an overcrowded postwar Germany that was handicapped by a ruined economy, poor housing, rampant unemployment, and a new domestic political order dominated by occupying armies. Their cultural identity was destined to be remade again upon arrival in their newly chosen homeland with its own changing social and economic reality. In Canada they were a part of a large number of recent immigrants looking for a place in a rapidly expanding economy. They were immediately thrust into the dynamics of internal population movements, changing social and cultural perspectives and changing patterns of consumption.

The prewar German communities in Eastern Europe were diverse in their material, cultural and political texture. Their diversity was due to the influence of their Germanic origins, the historical trajectory of their political existence as minorities among Slavic neighbours, and their class consciousness. To detail these differences within the various groups and between groups would exceed the limitations of time and space available to us here; however, a few examples may serve to illustrate some specifics of this diversity.

⁷¹Christina McCall Newman, *The Best of Ralph Allen*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 1-2, 26.

Volhynia is a region in the north west tip of the Ukraine. Before World War I it was part of Czarist Russia but the Treaty of Riga, signed by the Soviet Union and Poland in 1921, divided the region between the two countries.⁷² The 1939 agreement between Hitler and Stalin ceded the remaining parts of Volhynia to the Soviet Union. The western, formerly Polish part of Volhynia was home to approximately 48,000 Germans who became the object of Nazi resettlement plans--plans that began a process that would lead to their ultimate emigration to Canada.⁷³

Volhynian Germans were primarily peasants and the region where they lived was agricultural. Adelgunde Hellman remembers that there were some large peasant farmers, but most were small. Her family lived on a farm with a land base that was too small to provide for the family. In the winter her father cut wood in the nearby forests to supplement production from the land and help feed his large family. They spoke German at home and were taught in German at school by their teacher from the Polish city of Łódź who was also an ethnic German. The people in their village were Lutheran, and church, like school and home, was in German.⁷⁴ In many ways they exemplified the Nazi ideal of the peasant in whom the German soul ran deep, uncorrupted by modernity and a source for the rejuvenation of the German race. A Nazi official, reporting on the caravan of Volhynian peasants traveling to the Warthegau for resettlement, described in glowing romantic terms these "German farmers that are driving the wagons, solid robust faces, beards covered with hoarfrost, eyes

⁷²Lumans, 128.

⁷³Lumans, 94.

⁷⁴Adelgunde Hellman, *Interview*, March 28, 1995.

ice-encrusted, huge hats and coats white with snow."⁷⁵

The Germans from the Black Sea areas of the Soviet Union were very different. The Black Sea German communities were created in the 18th century by German settlers responding to the invitation of Catherine the Great to settle her newly acquired territories in New Russia.⁷⁶ Mennonites from Prussia and Catholics and Protestants from many German lands responded to Catherine's invitation and emigrated to Russia settling in closed German settlements.⁷⁷

By the early 20th century the Black Sea German colonies were wealthy and well-ordered islands in a sea of Slavic peasant poverty. In some colonies peasant agriculture was giving way to industrialization and along with their Slavic neighbours many Germans were becoming part of a growing proletariat while others were wealthy land and factory owners. The events of World War I, the Russian Revolution and the collectivization of agriculture changed German communities drastically. Besides the complete restructuring of the

⁷⁵Adam Giesinger, trans., "The Trek of the Ethnic Germans from Volhynia, Galicia, and the Narew River Region, The official account of the repatriation of these Germans to the Reich in the fall and winter of 1939-40. Published by the *Volk und Reich Verlag*, Berlin in 1941," *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*, 1(1) Spring 1978, 17.

⁷⁶Catherine called the territories she acquired from the Turks 'New Russia;' they are part of present day Ukraine.

⁷⁷There are numerous studies of the German colonies in Russia, particularly about the Mennonites. For general studies of the Germans in Russia see Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans*, (Winnipeg: Author, 1974) and Ingeborg Fleischauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich: Zwei Jahrhunderte deutsch-russische Kulturgemeinschaft*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1986). Mennonites are the subject of James Urry's, *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889*, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Hyperion Press, 1989).

economy, Germans also suffered the banishment of most of their church and community leaders, the destruction of religious life and the Stalinization of education and politics.⁷⁸

In contrast to the Nazi official's idealized description of the Volhynians, the German soldiers who came upon the Black Sea Germans in 1941 were shocked at their demoralized condition. A German officer, reporting on a colony near Odessa found them to be "completely impoverished and the majority deteriorated internally and externally through Bolshevism."⁷⁹ In spite of their sorry state Nazi eyes saw in them an opportunity for reconstruction. The German Sergeant concluded, however, that "until a stronger penetration of the philosophy of National Socialism has taken place, our efforts must be based on the memories of the values of the past."⁸⁰

The Black Sea Germans' contact with Nazi Germany came in the form of a liberating army. The feelings of these ethnic Germans upon the army's arrival come out in Ingrid Rimland's historical novel, *The Wanderers*. Katja, a Mennonite grandmother, stands with her neighbours and watches the arriving German soldiers "weeping from feelings so profound that they surpassed all emotions that had lacerated their lives for so many grief-stricken,

⁷⁸Adam Giesinger, "The Black Sea Germans in 1941," *The Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*, 2(2) Fall 1979, 17-20.

⁷⁹Herman Maurer, "A Report sent Home to Germany by a Sergeant in a German Army Unit Stationed in the Kutschurgan Villages 13-28 August 1941," Adam Giesinger, trans., *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*, 7(1) Spring 1984, 2.

⁸⁰Maurer, "A Report....," 3.

blood-soaked, tormented years."⁸¹ While the arrival of the German armies gave *Volksdeutsche* in the Soviet Union an immediate reprieve from Communism, they were not integrated into the German social order until they arrived in occupied Poland later in the war. Due to the failing fortunes of the German armies in 1943 and 1944, 350,000 Black Sea Germans were evacuated in the face of advancing Russian armies to be resettled in the Warthegau of Western Poland.⁸²

Added to the diversity brought to the Warthegau by the Volhynian and Black Sea Germans were the qualities of other groups of *Volksdeutsche*. Baltic Germans were predominantly white collar workers. They also had a strong sense of their elite past as the ruling class not only of the Baltic States but of the entire empire of the Russian Czar. According to one observer they made quite a scene in the Polish villages where they were settled: "wearing as a rule high elk-skin boots and fur caps, they are noisy and arrogant in the streets and public squares."⁸³ Like the Baltic Germans, there were many white collar workers

⁸¹Ingrid Rimland, *The Wanderers*, 113-114. Ingrid Rimland was a young child during the events of World War II. She was of Mennonite background and emigrated to Paraguay. Rimland wrote *The Wanderers* as a novel and its publication sparked considerable controversy in the Mennonite community. See *Der Bote*, 3(18 January 1978), 11; 7(14 February), 12; 9(1 March 1978), 12; 15(12 April 1978), 1; 38(4 October 1978), 12; 47(6 December 1978, 11-12; 8(21 February 1979), 8. The author responds to the question about the extent to which the novel describes reality in Ingrid Rimland, "The Wanderers. What is truth? What is fiction?," *Journal of the American Historical Society for Germans from Russia*, 2(1) 1979, 48-49.

⁸²Schechtman, 209.

⁸³Schechtman, 329-330.

among the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans.⁸⁴ Indigenous Polish Germans included agricultural peasants, owners of large textile industries in cities like Łódź, and the industrial workers of Silesia and Czechoslovakia.

Despite their varied class, political and cultural backgrounds the German minorities in the East were to be part of the German master race. The inclusion of *Volksdeutsche* in the plans of Nazi Germany owes most of its energy to Heinrich Himmler, the head of the Nazi SS and arguably the second most important figure in the Nazi regime. The Nazi orientation towards the *Volksdeutsche* has been characterized as having two approaches that, while compatible, also had their own emphases and proponents. The SS approached the German minorities from the point of race. In keeping with this emphasis the physiognomic characteristics of *Volksdeutsche* were paramount in deciding their value to the Nazi state. In contrast the agency charged with relations with German minorities, the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, tended to be primarily ethnic in nature and emphasized culture, language and tradition as the important indicators of Germanness.⁸⁵ The accomplishment of bringing the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* under SS control was to be one of Himmler's greatest successes in matters affecting German minorities.

Regardless whether they were resettled because of agreements with the Soviet Union as was the case for the Baltic and Volhynian Germans, or due to the vagaries of war as in the experience of the Black Sea Germans, the *Volksdeutsche* were subjected to numerous

⁸⁴Koehl, 99.

⁸⁵Koehl, 100. The usual translation of *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* is 'Liaison Office for Ethnic Germans.'

socialization pressures in their new fatherland. One very important process was that of naturalization. Here the *Volksdeutsche* family came to realize almost immediately that not all *Volksdeutsche* were equal in Nazi eyes. The process of naturalization involved the appearance before numerous bodies of the German immigration commission established in preparation for the resettlement of the Baltic Germans.⁸⁶ The ethnic German family made an appearance at a series of stations involving a variety of examinations and taking three or four hours. The first two stations were manned by the police who examined the family's documents, and compiled their personal information. Photographs were taken at the third station and at the fourth the property aspects of their resettlement were discussed. The fifth station was critical as it was here that the "racial examination" took place. At the sixth station the political status of the family was investigated and the seventh determined the settlers' occupational status.⁸⁷ The results of the appearance before the commission were of great import for the *Volksdeutsche* migrant. If the identification card that was received at the end of the process designated the family as category 'A' (*Altreich*) the family was destined to be sent to the Reich and their German citizenship was deferred pending their reeducation and socialization as a result of the exposure to true German culture. Category 'O' (*Ost*) was the preferred result and it showed that the family was of the highest German quality--destined to part of the privileged vanguard of German settlement in the east. Category 'S' (*Sonderfall*)

⁸⁶Himmler established the EWZ or *Einwanderer Zentral Stelle* to process resettled Germans in preparation for citizenship.

⁸⁷Lumans, 190-191, see also Koehl, 105-107. In the spring of 1941 another classification of Germanness was introduced called the *Deutsche Volkliste* which had four categories of Germanness. See Koehl, 119-120.

was the least desirable and the family faced a future of camp life and ultimately a place with the Polish and Russian workers in the factories of the Reich.⁸⁸

The implications of the various classifications for a family are illustrated by the experience of the Adelgunde Hellman. The Hellman family was designated 'A' and as a result they spent their time moving from one camp in the Reich to another. Their unsuitability for settlement in the East apparently arose from the actions of her father. He had taken it upon himself to discharge her mother from the hospital without official permission. When the only boy in the family was taken to a hospital where many children had already died, Adelgunde's father again intervened without permission and removed the boy from the hospital. Because of these actions by the father, the family was sent to a camp that was set aside for the 'education' of racially desirable but difficult *Volksdeutsche* cases.⁸⁹ It was only after her father volunteered for military service that the family could appeal their classification and gain permission to join the rest of their relatives and fellow Volhynian villagers in the Warthegau.

The processing for naturalization made an indelible impression on the *Volksdeutsche*. The marshaling of a family's historic and racial evidence of Germanness reinforced the connection to their German past and singled out those who, while they may have been accepted at home, had abandoned some of their German identity through intermarriage or the adoption of 'foreign' political ideas. The process also challenged personal standards of propriety. Women, in particular found the appearance before the racial examiners degrading.

⁸⁸Koehl, 106.

⁸⁹Hellman, *Interview*. Adelgunde Hellman did not have negative memories of their stay at the camp called *Rotes Luch*; however, according to Lumans, "a stint at *Rotes Luch* improved the attitudes of troublesome resettlers" (p. 201).

Agnes Dyck, a Mennonite from the Black Sea colonies, mentions how during processing women's blouses were roughly removed, blouses "with which they shamefully covered their nakedness when they appeared in an examination room full of people, while adolescents on the street gawked through the windows and made fun of the ugliness of the emaciated women whose sagging breasts and stomach folds hung down loosely."⁹⁰ Helene Latter also found the process of delousing upon arrival similarly degrading. She says that they "were herded into a hall; we could not undress in any privacy but had to do it in front of a raucous group of doctors and nurses. What sport they had. They laughed and sneered at us as if we were nothing but scum. When the fumigation was over we were all stamped on the hindquarters like swine at a market."⁹¹

Even if a *Volksdeutsche* family passed all the racial and political tests, there were often additional influences brought to bear on them to improve their Germanness and further reconstruct their identities. Wilhelm Marezki's family, which came from an area near the city of Torun, was given the opportunity to change their Polish sounding name to a more authentic German name. Although his family decided to hold on to the name that had been theirs for 150 years, many Marezkis and others chose to identify themselves more clearly as German by changing their name.⁹²

The Germans from the East were also subjected to Nazi propaganda and reeducation

⁹⁰Agnes Dyck, "Wie ich den Zusammenbruch Deutschlands erlebte," *Der Bote*, 27(30-39) 26 July to 27 September 1950.

⁹¹Helene Latter, *I Do Remember*, (Morden, Manitoba: Walter F. Latter, 1988), 73.

⁹²Wilhelm Marezki, *Interview*, March 28 & 30, 1995.

aimed at improving their sense of Germanness. Language education was important because the isolation of *Volksdeutsche* had left them with regional expressions and dialects and allegedly poor German language skills.⁹³ Moreover, the young were the target of concerted Nazi political propaganda efforts. Students joining Nazi youth organizations such as the *Hitler Jugend* or the *Bund Deutscher Mädchen* were exempted from homework assignments which became quite onerous for those not permitted to join such groups.⁹⁴ While older people were allowed to keep their attachments to the church, the young were immersed in Nazi social teaching in the Nazi youth groups. Meetings for the youth seemed always to conflict with church. Jakob Welisch says that "Sunday mornings, when my parents attended church, I had to participate in the activities of the German *Jungvolk* (German Youth)."⁹⁵

The program of resettlement itself was designed to retain some previous attachments while reconstructing the basic outlook of the ethnic Germans. Nazi intentions were to keep individual villages together while creating new associations by dispersing settlers from one region among those of another. One Nazi official suggested that "in choosing the units for settlement, the principle will have to be to make them large enough so that the feeling of common country origin can act as a binding force, but small enough to eliminate particularistic tendencies." The Nazi *Gauleiter* of the Warthegau writing in the *Ostdeutscher Beobachter* indicated that the idea was "to break up all existing associations and links among

⁹³Schechtman, 172.

⁹⁴Hellman. *Interview*.

⁹⁵Jakob Welisch, "Reflections and Reminiscences: A Bukovina German Tells his Story," Sophie A. Welisch, trans., *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*, 12(2) Summer 1989, 29-39.

colonists and prevent the formation of 'sectarian' local groups." While the approach to settlement may have prevented organized resistance to Nazi ambitions, it failed to produce the unified German cultural presence the Nazis wanted. There was considerable friction between various settler groups as well as friction between those who were indigenous to Poland and those who had resettled. The friction extended to the relationship between *Volksdeutsche* and the increasing number of *Reichsdeutsche* who came to the east as economic or political administrators and opportunists. Later in the war the number of *Reichsdeutsche* was augmented by those escaping the rising bombardment.⁹⁶

Identity also had to be reconstructed when it came to attitudes towards those who were not German. The most immediate in terms of proximity and social contact were the Poles. Nazi doctrine envisioned a complete separation between the master race and the so-called 'inferior' Slavic Poles. In practice this quickly became impractical due to the continuing need for Polish labour on the farms of the Warthegau and Danzig-West Prussia. *Volksdeutsche* who had been resettled in the Warthegau were often given Polish farms from which Polish farmers had been evicted only a few hours earlier. Often two or three Polish farms were combined to provide a land base large enough for the new agricultural order envisioned by the Nazis. Many *Volksdeutsche* rose to the occasion by adopting the role of master and lord over their Polish servants and workers. In other instances, however, the occupation of Polish farms aroused feelings of guilt and consternation. Rudolf Henke, a Lutheran pastor in Volhynia, said his parishioners "generally were distressed about this" and

⁹⁶Schechtman, 334-335.

“had no real joy over it, nor a clear conscience.”⁹⁷ Jakob Welisch’s parents “shuddered with horror but could do nothing” when they had to occupy a Polish home where the woman who had owned it “had to scrub the floor in [their] presence” before departing.⁹⁸ Sometimes the former Polish peasant became a servant for the new ethnic German peasant farmer.⁹⁹ While the prohibition against contact with the Polish population was often quietly subverted, the Nazi social order in the Warthegau considerably sharpened the sense of difference between Polish and German identity.

The situation with the Jews is less clear. In Himmler’s mind and in the official view of the organizations under him, there was a sharp division between activities that supported ethnic Germans and the activities directed at the extermination of undesirable populations. These two ‘sides’ of Himmler were on the one hand attentive and on the other ruthless and cruel. It is unclear--as with other Germans--how much *Volksdeutsche* knew about what was happening to the Jews. Like the Poles the Jews constituted an identifiable group in Nazi occupied territories. Jews were identified by the wearing of the star and no one living in a city like Litzmanstadt (Łódź) could have been unaware of the large Jewish ghetto located there. For some, Jews satisfied the need to identify themselves in contrast to visible others--resulting in various degrees of anti-Semitism. Valdis Lumans suggests that although in their homelands “*Volksdeutsche* anti-Semitism was culturally or even economically founded, there

⁹⁷Rudolf Henke, “The Wartime Fate of the Germans in Polish Volhynia,” Adam Giesinger, trans., *The Journal of the American Historical Society for Germans from Russia*, 2(3) Winter 1979, 33.

⁹⁸Welisch, 33.

⁹⁹Hellman, *Interview*.

was little reluctance to accept it in the new racial terms."¹⁰⁰ For some of those who had experienced Communist rule, this Nazi reinforcement of the characterization of Bolshevism as a Jewish plot, added a virulent dimension to their anti-Semitism.¹⁰¹

The remaking of male identity very soon differed from the pattern experienced by their wives, families and sisters. Becoming a part of the German master race implied service to the new fatherland and most often that service ultimately led to involvement on the eastern front. Wilhelm Maretzki suggests that almost immediately after the Germans occupied their area the various Nazi organizations began to recruit the young men.¹⁰² It was only a short time between recruitment and compulsory enlistment. Jakob Welisch, a young Bukovina German boy in 1940 when his family was resettled, says that "within about three months, all the young men were conscripted to fight for their new fatherland."¹⁰³ As the intensity of the war in the east continued to escalate, recruitment for the SS also changed to conscription and an ever widening circle of ethnic German males were drafted into the Waffen SS.¹⁰⁴ As the war situation deteriorated for the Germans, militia units in the Black Sea that had ostensibly been created to protect German settlements from partisans, were absorbed into regular SS

¹⁰⁰Lumans, 29.

¹⁰¹Otto Plonke, *Interview notes*, March 28, 1995.

¹⁰²Maretzki, *Interview*.

¹⁰³Welisch, 32.

¹⁰⁴Lumans, 216.

divisions.¹⁰⁵ By the end of the war even older men were being pressed into service in a desperate attempt to stop the advancing Russians. As time went on, life in the Warthegau was increasingly a society of women, children and very old men. The experience of most males became the intimate bond of comrades-in-arms, the discipline of military orders and a life where family and wife became a poignant but distant memory. In the words of one soldier, "our common misery and our common feeling of being lost and betrayed served as a strong unifying factor. Serving together with men of different background we Mennonites did not feel like outsiders, but as relatives living among friends."¹⁰⁶

While life in the Warthegau preserved many class and local differences of the ethnic Germans who settled there, the advance of Russian armies in early 1945 would prove to be a great equalizer. When the Russians opened their attack to cross the Vistula River in January 1945, the entire German settlement of the east had to be abandoned and everyone, rich and poor, powerful and ordinary, made their way to the west. The great flight to the west would in itself constitute an identity forming process for the *Volksdeutsche*. While every person's experience was different, the collective memory of the flight, the fear, the family separation and the deprivation was shared by all.¹⁰⁷

While the attempt to escape the Russian armies was not successful for all Germans

¹⁰⁵Lumans, 241. See also Gerhard Lohrenz, *The Lost Generation and Other Stories*, (Winnipeg: Author, 1982).

¹⁰⁶Lohrenz, *Lost Generation...*, 70.

¹⁰⁷For a description of the massive flight to the west see Günter Böddecker, *Die Flüchtlinge: Die Vertreibung der Deutschen im Osten*, (München: F.A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980).

from the east, those who arrived in the western zones faced continuing want. According to the agreements made between the victorious powers *Volksdeutsche* were to be cared for by local governments that already faced monumental problems. In addition, the identity of the masses of people streaming through Germany was also confusing. Michael Marrus describes this mass of people as being made up of

every possible kind of individual--Nazi collaborators and resistance sympathizers, hardened criminals and teenage innocents, entire family groups, clusters of political dissidents, shell-shocked wanderers, ex-Storm Troopers on the run, Communists, concentration camp guards, farm laborers, citizens of destroyed countries, and gangs of marauders.¹⁰⁸

Many *Volksdeutsche* did not feel at home in the defeated former Reich. Helene Latter felt that because they were not born in Germany they were second class citizens.¹⁰⁹ Heinrich Wiebe complained that they had fled the Soviet Union to come to a country "that had no spark of love for us in its heart, and could find no warm feelings for us."¹¹⁰ In spite of the direct effort expended to make the *Volksdeutsche* part of the Nazi idea of Germanness during the war, *Volksdeutsche* in postwar Germany developed a sense of self and community that differed from the *Reichsdeutsche* Germans in whose homes and neighbourhoods they now found themselves. A Volhynian who eventually immigrated to Alberta said that in his case "everyone could tell I came from the east, just from the way I spoke. I always spoke German with a Russian pronunciation. Even though my name was more German than Koslowski or

¹⁰⁸Marrus, 299.

¹⁰⁹Latter, 105.

¹¹⁰Heinrich Wiebe, "Ein Notschrei aus Europa, Bamberg 21 June 1946," *Der Bote*, 24(3) 15 January 1947.

some of the other names, I was always the 'Polack.'"¹¹¹ To a large extent it was these feelings of not belonging that contributed to a decision to emigrate from an overcrowded Germany to a new home elsewhere. For the people who concern us here, that new home was Canada.

The 1947 statement by Mackenzie King that opened the doors to immigration suggested that the people of Canada did "not wish to make a fundamental alteration in the character of their population."¹¹² In many ways Canadians themselves were undergoing fundamental changes that were remaking the character of the population. While Mackenzie King's reference was likely reflecting the desire to keep out other racial groups, such as Asians, ethnic German immigrants entered Canada at a time when the identity of many Canadians was rapidly changing. The succeeding chapters will examine specific changes in work and family in more detail; however, an overview of Canadian social pressures is appropriate here. The most noticeable feature of the adjustment of *Volksdeutsche* immigrants to Canadian life was their choice of a place to live. For many, their initial introduction to Canada was on the farm of a relative, in the sugar beet fields of Alberta, or in domestic employment in a Canadian home. Within a short time they invariably moved to the five cities of Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton or Kitchener-Waterloo. The letters to the Canadian religious immigration agencies shortly after an immigrant's arrival in Canada most often opened with a request to change their address to a residence in one of

¹¹¹Yedlin, T., ed., "Mr. Helbrecht from Volhynia," in *Germans from Russia in Alberta: Reminiscences*, (Edmonton: Central and East European Studies Society of Alberta, 1984), 185.

¹¹²as quoted by Dirks, 147.

these cities.¹¹³ Moving to the city was not a trend unique to ethnic German immigrants or to immigrants in general. Canadians moved to the cities in the postwar period in large numbers. Between 1941 and 1961, the proportion of Canada's population living in urban communities increased from 54% to 70% of the total.¹¹⁴ Even the sponsoring relatives of many ethnic German immigrants, who were most often farmers carrying on the rural lives of their pioneer ancestors, were rapidly becoming urbanized. Ted Regehr's analysis of the effects of World War II on Canadian Mennonites concludes that:

Canadian Mennonites did not become urbanized in the 1940s, but the developments of the 1940s positioned them particularly well to move into the cities in the 1950s. This happened to such an extent that by 1960 Canadian Mennonites . . . had ceased to be a predominantly rural people.¹¹⁵

Like other Canadians and immigrants, ethnic Germans gravitated to the cities, but unlike other immigrants such as the Italians, Germans did not settle in immigrant neighbourhoods. Studies of postwar German immigrant residential patterns in Montreal and Vancouver conclude that while in some areas Germans were over-represented, they settled in patterns very much like those established by other Canadians who lived in similar

¹¹³This impression is gained from an examination of immigrant letters in the case files of the Baptist World Alliance and Immigration Association, NAC MG28 V18, the Canadian Lutheran World Relief, NAC MG28 V120, and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, MHC.

¹¹⁴Taken from Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 514-515.

¹¹⁵T.D. Regehr, "The Influence of World War II on Mennonites in Canada," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 5 (1987), 87.

socioeconomic circumstances.¹¹⁶

Urbanization was accompanied and stimulated by Canada's rapidly expanding industrial economy which seemed to have an insatiable appetite for workers. *Volksdeutsche* immigrants with peasant backgrounds came to a Canada where horse powered agriculture was rapidly giving way to the truck and tractor. Besides the lack of land for new pioneers, the land base that a farmer could operate greatly increased with the use of tractors, causing the number of farms to plummet.¹¹⁷ The opportunities to work in industry and construction were, on the other hand, seemingly inexhaustible. The growth in the postwar Canadian economy was led by mining, manufacturing and construction; the share of the GNP of these three sectors rose from 73% in 1951 to 82% in 1961.¹¹⁸ While it was a combination of Canada's labour shortages and the pressure of ethnic organizations that opened the doors to immigration in the postwar period, labour shortages appear to have been the greater influence. Robert Harney suggests that

in the collective memory of the 1950s and 1960s, being able to show an immigration inspector calloused hands and a body ready for hard work is remembered as a more essential rite of passage than questions about ethnicity

¹¹⁶Ruth Gump, *Ethnicity and Assimilation: German Postwar Immigrants in Vancouver, 1945-1970*, M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989 and Alfred Pletsch, "The Germans in Montreal: Aspects of Social and Economic Integration," in F.M. Heilleiner, ed., *Cultural Dimensions of Canada's Geography*, (Peterborough, 1983,) 39-67. Another interesting example is the attempt by Kurt Danziger to find a German sample to compare with the main object of his study, Italians. Unlike Italians, Danziger concludes that in Toronto Germans "are not to be found in high concentrations in any identifiable area of residence." See Kurt Danziger, *The Socialization of Immigrant Children*, (Toronto: Ethnic Research Programme, York University, 1971), 32.

¹¹⁷G. Friesen, 431.

¹¹⁸G. Friesen, 518-519.

or wartime politics.¹¹⁹

Ethnic Germans moved to Canada's cities and threw themselves into their work, becoming a part of a dynamic postwar Canadian consumer society. Gottlieb Leibbrandt in his history of the Germans of Waterloo County, Ontario concludes that:

For a time they only thought of 'getting ahead' while their instinct of self-preservation repressed bad memories. Their ability to forget the past in such a relatively short time accounts for their quick adjustment to a new environment which was so totally different from anything they had encountered before.¹²⁰

This chapter began with the observations of a perplexed magazine writer who could not understand why German Canadians had not turned out to be the 'boisterous and belligerent colony of the master race' that he had expected. Certainly *Volksdeutsche* immigrants had experienced a succession of socialization pressures that challenged their identities and left them less assertive, less confident, more wary in their approach to the wider community than their Nazi past predicted. While the experiences of the war left *Volksdeutsche* less 'belligerent' than Ralph Allen anticipated, these experiences somehow prepared them for adjustment to life in a dynamically changing social and economic structure in Canada.

¹¹⁹Robert F. Harney, "'So great a heritage as ours:' Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Polity," in Chad Gaffield, ed., *Constructing Modern Canada: Readings in Post Confederation History*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994), 529-566.

¹²⁰Gottlieb Leibbrandt, *Little Paradise: The Saga of the German Canadians of Waterloo County, Ontario, 1800-1975*, (Kitchener: Allprint Co., 1980), 283.

Chapter Four:

'Making It': Work and Consumption

The socialization pressures felt by ethnic Germans were not restricted to their European experience. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, dynamic economic and demographic changes were reshaping Canada. In postwar Canada people moved to the cities in great numbers. The move to the cities and the realignment of leading industries in the country's economy was intertwined with fundamental changes in both the nature of work and trends in consumption. Ethnic Germans landed in Canada in the midst of these dynamic changes with few resources. Most of them arrived with no money and the baggage they brought included a few changes of clothing, some personal effects and very little else. The image of German postwar immigrants is that while they may have been silent in the political, cultural and social arenas, they could pride themselves on their hard work, their self-reliance and their rapid achievement of economic independence. This chapter focuses on the interaction between changing notions of work and the ethnic German immigrants' process of adaptation to their new country. Intimately connected with the changing images of work were changing perspectives about consumption. For ethnic Germans, 'Making It' in Canada involved both finding work and acquiring the things they believed were needed to establish their new economic and social lives in Canada.

Patrick Joyce, in his introduction to a collection of essays entitled *The Historical Meanings of Work*, argues that work is a "cultural activity rather than simply an economic

one."¹²¹ Ethnic Germans invested work with important meaning in the context of their adjustment to life in their new country. One important meaning attached to work for ethnic Germans was its link to the chances for gaining entry to Canada. Secondly, work became the symbol of ethnic German 'success' in adapting to Canada. Thirdly, work was attached to the immigrants' mobility and ultimate choice of a place to live. Finally, work was given a meaning in the hierarchy of the value of men and women's work. Many ethnic German women entered paid employment in Canada. Work in most Canadian ethnic German families involved both partners in the marriage and as a result, work was intimately entwined with the role of women and the division of labour in the family.

Inexorably tied to the social meaning of work was the dramatic change in consumption patterns of postwar Canada. The fruits of work made consumption possible and ethnic Germans jumped onto the train of consumerism without reservation. Consumption, like work, was invested with social meaning for ethnic Germans. Work and consumption became the symbols of their successful adaptation to their new Canadian surroundings. The problematic history of ethnic Germans left them largely impotent in the public political arena and turned them to the arena of consumption. The social construction of the arenas of work and consumption was an identity-forming process for ethnic Germans.

For postwar German immigrants, the memory of immigration is intertwined with the question of work. The opportunity to go to Canada most often was attached to the applicant's suitability and desire for work here. For most ethnic Germans the work they did was seldom

¹²¹Patrick Joyce, "The historical meanings of work: an introduction," in Patrick Joyce, ed., *The Historical Meanings of Work*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.

the work they, or their parents, had done before the war. Many ethnic Germans had been farmers before World War II, but very few ethnic German immigrants became farmers in Canada. For most immigrants the meaning of work changed dramatically with their migration to Canada.

Ethnic Germans came to Canada under various immigration schemes and in many of these schemes, securing workers was an explicit objective. The Sugar Beet Scheme, the Farm Worker Scheme, the Lumber Workers Scheme and the Domestic Scheme all addressed perceived labour shortages in Canada. While immigration officials viewed these schemes as fulfilling a desired human resource objective, for immigrants the various schemes provided a way out of Germany to a country thought to have unlimited opportunity. The two perceptions frequently functioned at cross purposes, creating many problems for religious organizations sponsoring the immigration of ethnic Germans. The various labour schemes required some proof of suitability for the intended labour category and a minimum time commitment to the type of work the particular immigration scheme was designed to address. In both areas ethnic Germans tested the limits of the programs' guidelines and objectives to achieve their goal of escaping from Europe.

An example of the divergent meanings that immigrants and Canadian church and government officials attached to work are found in the problems experienced with the Farm Worker scheme. On the surface the farm worker immigration schemes had the appearance of suiting ethnic German concepts of work because of the preponderance of agriculturally oriented people among them. Refugees congregating in West Germany in the 1940s and 1950s were of predominantly agricultural background. Indeed, 40 per cent of them reported

that they had been involved in agriculture in 1939. By 1949 only 29.3% of ethnic Germans were still involved in agriculture.¹²² In spite of the change in their work caused by the dislocation of war and the loss of agricultural lands in the east, the agricultural orientation of ethnic Germans was still significant and many of them wanted to be involved in agriculture in Canada. While some managed to establish themselves as farmers, largely in the Ontario and B.C. fruit growing industries, most immigrants discovered that the capital requirements and the lack of cheap land made this an impossible dream.¹²³ Employment on farms, however, remained an attractive way to enter Canada.

The opportunity did not remain attractive for long and the problem of immigrants not fulfilling their employment contracts remained a constant and persistent problem for immigration officials. It soon became apparent that immigrants used the opportunity to work on a farm as way to get to Canada rather than as a way to an economic livelihood. Immigrants became adept at using the scheme to enter Canada in order to move to other forms of work after they arrived. Often immigrants managed to pass the immigration hurdles by citing experience they did not possess. A frustrated C.L. Monk, the Canadian Executive Director of the Lutheran World Relief, wrote to Europe about an immigrant who was placed with a farmer in Saskatchewan only to reappear in the offices of the organization in Winnipeg five days later. Monk writes: "By no stretch of the imagination can he be called a farm labourer. He apparently is a photographer. In spite of the promises he had made to work on a farm for one year he now wishes to recant such promises." Monk expressed

¹²²Proudfoot, 388.

¹²³Kl. Klassen, "In der Neuen Heimat," *Der Bote*, 25(38) 22 September 1948.

frustration over the Baltic Germans in particular. While they claimed to have farm experience, he suggested that they must have "operated the farms by remote control while someone else actually did the work on their farms."¹²⁴

Many suggestions were made to remedy the problem of ethnic Germans immigrating as farm workers only to migrate to the cities in a short time. One suggestion was to make the obligations inherent in the tasks assigned under the Farm Worker category clearer to the prospective immigrant. An observer of the immigration of single men acknowledged the difficulty of keeping "them in farm work for their first year in Canada," and went on to suggest that the preparation of immigrants in Europe was inadequate. When recalling the European camp director's speech to the immigrants, he maintained that although the director spoke clearly about their responsibilities, "many of the immigrants did not believe him and declared that once they were in Canada they would do as they pleased."¹²⁵ A similar exchange, with similar proposed solutions, occurred between Mennonite immigration leaders. One leader pointed out that "in Alberta this has worked out very badly. A dozen farmers hired Dutch families for their beet fields, instead of filing applications for our people. They were motivated by the fact that our refugees do not stay, placing them in difficult circumstances."¹²⁶

¹²⁴NAC, C.L. Monk to J.G. Keil, 21 July, 1950, *Canadian Lutheran World Relief*, MG 28 V120, vol. 20, file 20.

¹²⁵NAC, D. Wichmar to C.L. Monk, 8 September 1953, *Canadian Lutheran World Relief*, MG 28 V120, vol. 30, file 32.

¹²⁶MHC, J.J. Thiessen to Siegfried Janzen, undated (1950), *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, vol. 1353, file 1135.

Responding to "considerable criticism all over Canada--particularly about the behaviour of German immigrants,"¹²⁷ the government exercised greater control over the selection process. They invited representatives of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to travel to Europe to observe the selection and make a report to the immigration department. The government's tightening of procedures in anticipation of the C.F.A.'s criticisms included taking away individual organizations' quotas and reserving for itself the final selection of immigrants.¹²⁸

Being ill prepared for the required commitment or exploiting the various schemes as a way out of Germany were not the only causes for leaving jobs on the farm. Working conditions and the changing shape of agriculture contributed to immigrant moves away from the work they were obligated to do as a condition of their immigration.

Many immigrants who came to Canada soon realized that they could not achieve economic independence working on the farm. Typically they could only earn income during the summer months and had to exchange the performance of daily chores, feeding livestock and cleaning barns, for food and shelter during the winter. With only a few months to earn money, they soon became discouraged at their prospects. Eduard Haas, a Rumanian German who arrived in 1953, had emigrated as a farm worker. He was pursued by the government for failing to live up to his one year employment contract. Haas, responding in a letter to an

¹²⁷NAC, Memo: T.O.F. Herzer, CCCRR, 4 December 1954, *North American Baptist Immigration and Colonization Society*, MG 28 V18, vol. 5, file 59.

¹²⁸NAC, Memo: C.L. Monk to G.M. Berkefeld: C.F.A. Representatives Studying Immigration of Farm Labourers, 3 May 1954, *Canadian Lutheran World Relief*, MG 28 V120, vol 28, file 24.

official from the National Employment Service about why he could not return to the farm, maintained that "it is impossible that I can return, as my family would starve because it is impossible to earn a living by [sic] Mr. Tom Higa."¹²⁹ There were also many complaints about the inadequacy of the housing and the 'boss' who drank too much, was too demanding or refused to pay the workers at all.¹³⁰

The influx of agricultural workers coincided with structural changes on the farm that militated against lasting employment opportunities. Canadian perceptions of work on the farm were undergoing dramatic revision. An important reason for the changes in perceptions of work on the farm was the postwar increase in the use of mechanized farm equipment. The mechanization of agriculture was seriously undermining demand for agricultural workers just when immigrants were being forced to commit themselves to one year on the farm. In the decade 1941 to 1951 the number of people employed in agriculture on the prairies declined from 420,000 to 336,000, a net loss of 116,000, and in the next ten years the number of agriculture workers on the prairies declined a further 52,000.¹³¹ The move away from agricultural employment was not exclusively an ethnic German phenomenon but rather was a common feature of postwar shifts in the employment structure of Canada. Anthony Richmond suggests that the combination of "low wages, poor housing and working

¹²⁹NAC, Eduard Haas to E. Stauffer, 23 June 1953, *North American Baptist and Immigration Society*, MG 28 V18, vol. 18, file 54.

¹³⁰See for example NAC, *North American Baptist and Immigration Society*, MG 28 V18, vol. 29, files "Samuel Reschke," and "Albertin Riske," and vol. 34, file "Theodor Sues."

¹³¹taken from G. Friesen, 517.

conditions, the seasonal nature of the employment, and the absence of unemployment insurance schemes covering such workers meant that immigrants as well as native-born Canadian workers were under pressure to seek employment in other occupations."¹³²

The perception of work as a way to get to Canada was not restricted to those arriving under the Farm Worker Scheme. Immigrant women who came to Canada as domestics also attached great value to work as a way to get to Canada. Like farm workers, they were also frequently accused of having misrepresented themselves and of not having a commitment to their one year contract. Lilly Lang came to Canada and was placed in an expensive home based on an "impression that she was a bonafide domestic." The placement was, however, unsuccessful because "during the first morning with her new employer she announced that she had not come to Canada to do domestic work, but actually wanted to do factory work."¹³³ The theme of domestic service providing the bridge to Canada dominates the domestic immigration schemes of the postwar years.¹³⁴ British domestic immigrants and the 10,499 displaced persons admitted to Canada as domestics between October 1947 and March 1950, all "left household work for other employment at the first opportunity, thus creating a

¹³²Richmond, 55.

¹³³NAC, C.L. Monk to G.M. Berkefeld, 15 October 1951, *Canadian Lutheran World Relief*, MG 28 V120, vol. 29, file 20.

¹³⁴The notion of domestic service as a stepping stone in the immigration process is also suggested by the stories of the women interviewed by Alexander Freund. See Alexander Freund and Laura Quilici, "Exploring Myths in Women's Narratives: Italian and German Immigrant Women in Vancouver, 1947-1961", *B.C. Studies*, 105-106 (1995), 172.

constant demand for more domestics."¹³⁵

Immigration schemes for domestics differed from the problems in farm work in that the demand for domestic services remained high throughout the postwar period. The fact that many domestics left their places of employment is probably attributable to the fact that domestic employment was the only way to get to Canada and women left as soon as they could secure employment more to their liking. Annaliese Bessler's father was a restaurateur in East Germany after the war and she worked in the post office before her emigration to Canada as a domestic. While her domestic employment was satisfactory, her employment path led to a period of factory work before she was offered a job as a secretary and again worked in an office environment as she had in Germany.¹³⁶

An important component in the construction of the Canadian identity of ethnic Germans was their memory of their work. The collective memory of finding work in Canada and getting on their feet economically is centered in how hard this was. Ironically, the European postwar experience of ethnic German immigrants was not one of hard work. In spite of the fact that they were destitute, living in overcrowded and poor quality housing and virtually starving, they had no work to keep them busy. An early study of the postwar refugees in Germany suggests that almost a third of Germany's unemployed in 1949 were

¹³⁵Marilyn Barber, *Immigrant Domestic Services in Canada*, (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), 20-21.

¹³⁶Annaliese Bessler, *Interview*, 15,22 March 1995.

refugees.¹³⁷ Except for the many Mennonites who had International Refugee Organization status most ethnic Germans did not share the experience of the I.R.O. Displaced Person camps that are important in the memories of their fellow immigrants, the Ukrainians.¹³⁸ Most ethnic Germans lived in the rural areas of what became West Germany after the war, but during immigration processing, they still endured long periods of transit camp life that added to the idleness of unemployment. A submission by the CCCRR to the Minister of Immigration, Walter Harris, in 1951 advised the Minister that in Europe unemployment of ethnic Germans remained high and

Volksdeutsche of farming background cannot find work and placement in this field. Many thousands who are capable of learning new trades cannot because the problem of housing in industrial areas where employment is possible is insurmountable. . . . The much evident aimlessness in the living pattern of the *Volksdeutsche* refugees, the uncertainty of the future--the hopelessness of their future make it necessary to find a new home for them.¹³⁹

Camp officials were diligent in reminding *Volksdeutsche* that their image of Canada should include hard work. The newsletter of the Gronau Mennonite camp printed a testimonial letter from recent immigrants to Canada in an attempt to dispel grand illusions about their future home. Referring to those immigrants in Canada who had thoughts of

¹³⁷Jacques Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-War World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 161.

¹³⁸A recent collection of essays on the Ukrainian DP experience is Wsevolod W. Isajiw, Yury Boshyk and Roman Senkus, eds., *The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons after World War II*, (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992).

¹³⁹MHC, CCCRR to Walter Harris, 16 April 1951, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, vol. 1330, file 988.

returning to Europe, the writers suggest that "they had harboured illusions about this country; they thought they had come to a land where you could stay with wealthy relatives, living a life of leisure like they had in the camp at Fallingbostal or other camps."¹⁴⁰

In the memory of immigrants, the experience of finding work and surviving in Canada was anything but a life of leisure. Like many prospective immigrants, Wilhelm Marezki also had illusions about opportunities in Canada. On the ship, fellow immigrants had speculated how they would make money in Canada and become wealthy quickly. The rumors rampant on the ship that wages in Canada were \$4.00 per hour were quickly dispelled when a fellow immigrant who spoke some French asked the harbor workers in Quebec City and found that they were earning \$1.20 per hour. Upon his arrival in Winnipeg, Marezki spent many days looking for work on foot. Some of the work that was available only paid \$0.45 per hour--very different from the \$4.00 he had envisioned a few weeks earlier.¹⁴¹

Getting an economic foothold in Canada was also difficult for those who came as forestry workers. Hubert Timm and Erwin Strunk claimed that 50 percent of the immigrants who came to the forest camp at 'Mile 55' in the bush of Ontario could not survive there. They claimed that the earnings did not cover the room and board they were required to pay and some workers received cheques of ten and fifteen cents at the end of the month after the deductions were made for living expenses. While acknowledging that not everyone was equally suited to the work, their letter assures the Baptist immigration leader that "*everyone* leaves as soon as they can get some money, and except those who are in debt over their ears

¹⁴⁰Letter from Anna and Heinrich Hamm, *Unser Blatt*, 3(32,33), 1 February 1949.

¹⁴¹Marezki, *Interview*.

they all disappear."¹⁴²

It has been suggested that for German immigrants, work replaced other markers of 'success' in adapting to Canada. Georg Leibbrandt, himself a postwar immigrant, suggests in his history of the Germans of Waterloo County that ethnic Germans suppressed unpleasant memories of their recent history and substituted work and 'getting ahead' for other involvements in Canadian society.¹⁴³ Ethnic German immigrant children in Gisela Forchner's study expressed views about work that pointed to a similar value for work. Many of her informants mentioned the important place of work in their memories of early childhood. Like Leibbrandt, Forchner concludes that ethnic Germans' history as participants in the Third Reich "seems to be the most important reason for their supreme effort to become exemplary Canadians."¹⁴⁴

Work was also part of the reason for ethnic German mobility in postwar Canada. The search for a job often meant taking what was offered and then moving to better conditions when they became available. Otto Plonke was destined for Alberta as a farm worker but was diverted at Quebec City and ended up in Nova Scotia. On the farm in Nova Scotia he was paid 30 dollars per month for work that required him to be up from five in the morning till ten at night each day. His job consisted of milking cows and doing farm work and when he

¹⁴²NAC, Hubert Timm and Erwin Strunk to North American Baptist Colonization and Immigration Society, *North American Baptist Colonization and Immigration Society*, MG 28 V 18, vol. 34, file "Hubert Timm."

¹⁴³Leibbrandt, 283.

¹⁴⁴Gisela Forchner, "Growing up Canadian: Twelve Case Studies of German Immigrant Families in Alberta," PhD. Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1983, 13.

wanted to write letters on Sunday his 'boss' made him pick blueberries. A friend of his in Saskatchewan suggested he come to work for a farmer in the neighbourhood and sent him eighty dollars for the trip. On the Saskatchewan farm his pay was eighty dollars a month for less work. After his one year farm labour contract was over, he followed his friend to Winnipeg but was unable to get a job in spite of scouring the city on foot for a week. On the invitation of a Ukrainian he met in the train station he went back to Regina to work in a body shop for twenty-eight dollars a week. He lived that winter for \$1.77 per day and finally found stable employment as a carpenter when he returned to Winnipeg in the spring.¹⁴⁵

As Otto Plonke's experience illustrates, mobility and flexibility were keys to finally finding stable employment in the postwar period. Most immigrants had to take work on the farm or in the bush, in the mines or in domestic service until they became aware of better opportunities. These opportunities were invariably in the larger cities to which they eventually gravitated. Otto Plonke's experience also illustrates how immigrants had to be flexible in their choice of work. Changing occupations was a reality of postwar immigrant work experience. Anthony Richmond reports "that 57 per cent of the immigrants in the national sample changed their occupational category between their first job in Canada and their job at the time of [his] survey" in 1961.¹⁴⁶

While men had to remain flexible and mobile to fully realize their earning potential, *Volksdeutsche* women, like other immigrant women, had to resist the trend and the incentives

¹⁴⁵Plonke, *Interview*.

¹⁴⁶Richmond, 55.

for women to remain at home.¹⁴⁷ Many ethnic German women worked to establish the family's economic base upon their arrival in Canada. Often women found work more easily than men and in the fruit growing orchards of Ontario and B.C. entire families could work and establish themselves very quickly.¹⁴⁸ While men were forced into seasonal work, women could often find full-time work particularly in light industry or the sewing factories of the cities. Annaliese Bessler, who worked in the Baptist immigration agency offices in Winnipeg, remembers that she could always find work for a woman who was prepared to work in the sewing factories of Winnipeg.¹⁴⁹ One woman went to work in the sewing factory after spending a year in domestic employment where she "was always hungry" because the family where she was working "was concerned about every penny they spent on food." The woman claimed that her 'boss' "would buy one pound of meat to feed six people," and she could eat what the family left over, "but there was never enough." In the sewing factory she could earn thirty-five cents an hour for an eight-hour day. On Saturdays they cleaned houses which earned them four dollars enabling them to save their factory earnings. They "bought milk and bread and vegetables and soup bones."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 215.

¹⁴⁸Kl. Klassen, "In der Neuen Heimat," *Der Bote*, 25(38), 22 September 1948.

¹⁴⁹Bessler, *Interview*. Annaliese Bessler (formerly Annaliese Zahn) was a secretary for the North American Baptist Immigration and Colonization Association and worked in the organization's offices in Winnipeg.

¹⁵⁰Jean Bruce, *After the War*, (Don Mills, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside with Multiculturalism Directorate, Secretary of State and Canadian Government Publications Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 1982), 134.

Ethnic German emphasis on work was accompanied by an attachment to consumption as another symbol of their adaptation to Canadian life. While immigrants found their beginnings very hard, the church organizations that advanced them travel funds and assisted their processing were impressed with how quickly they established themselves economically. Immigrant organizations focussed on repayment of the travel debt and a checklist of immigrant acquisition as measures of their successful adjustment to Canadian life.

J.J. Thiessen's reports to the Mennonite conferences illustrate the progress of adjustment of the Mennonite immigrants coming to Canada under his organization's auspices. In 1949 he reported that immigrants were adjusting to their new circumstances and taking seriously the repayment of their debt. He noted the excellent employment opportunities that enabled many to repay their debt quickly and added that some had already bought their own house.¹⁵¹ By 1951 Thiessen could report the continued excellent prospects for early travel debt retirement and suggested that some immigrants had achieved an economic level higher than the average of their co-religionists who immigrated in the 1920s.¹⁵² Wm. Sturhahn, the Baptist leader reported similar success to his conference in 1952. He reported that "as a whole our people have done exceptionally well," and indicated

¹⁵¹"Bericht der Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization," *Jahrbuch der Konferenz der Mennoniten in Kanada, 1949*, 104-112.

¹⁵²"Bericht der Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and die Konferenz der Mennoniten in Canada zu Leamington, Ont., 2.-4. Juli 1951," *Jahrbuch der Konferenz der Mennoniten in Canada, 1951*, 111.

that "two-thirds of the immigrants succeed to pay back within one year after arrival."¹⁵³

Invariably, however, there were those who could not pay back their travel debts or establish themselves economically very quickly. Because immigrants--particularly in the early years--arrived without any money they were very vulnerable to financial stress if their ability to work was in any way inhibited. Most often illness created an immediate problem for an immigrant family due to the compounding effects of increased expenses arising from the costs of medical care and the reduced income due to the inability to work; even if only one working parent was ill it restricted mobility to find work that could improve the family's economic foundation.

The Georg Obst family's problems illustrate how illness and unemployment combined to begin a cycle of increasing poverty for an immigrant family. The Obst family arrived in Saskatchewan in 1953 and in the fall correspondence from his farmer employer conveyed the difficulties that the family was facing. Georg had been injured and was unable to work--the family needed money. The cheque sent by the Baptist immigration office to the family was eventually returned because they did not know how to cash a cheque. The family's problems were aggravated when, according to their subsequent letters, the farmer only paid them forty dollars for the first month and sixty for the second after assuring them that they would be paid well. Georg complained that he and his wife had worked day and night and when they had asked for a raise, the farmer released them from his employ. The letters that followed were from Nacmine, Alberta where Georg got a job in the coal mines

¹⁵³NAC, "Report of the Baptist World Alliance Immigration Service up to October 31, 1952," and "Some of Our New Canadians," undated, *North American Baptist Immigration and Colonization Society (1953-1975) Collection*, MG 28 V18, vol. 1, file 7.

and things went well for a few weeks until he got fewer and fewer shifts due to declining demand for coal. Four years after the family's arrival in Canada Georg was unemployed due to a strike in the mine and still could not make any payments on his travel debt, although he had acquired a small house. Continued unemployment and another series of hospital visits because of a stomach ailment, ultimately forced the immigration agency to abandon its collection of the travel debt. Correspondence with a third party in 1963 suggested that the Obst family still lived in Nacmine in a shack-like building with income provided by 'relief.' The writer concludes that "they are nursing their bitterness and experience of 10 years ago."¹⁵⁴

While illness and bad employment experiences were a problem for some immigrants, most had sufficient means to embrace the burgeoning consumer society that was becoming commonplace in Canada. The years after World War II were not only boom years for industry; they were also years of dramatic change in Canadian lifestyles and consumption. Electricity, formerly only available in cities, reached the small towns and rural electrification programs even brought the service to farms. Electricity opened a new world of appliances to the one third of Canadian homes that still had no refrigerator in 1951. In 1941 only 61 per cent of Canadian homes had running water; by 1951 the number had risen to 75 per cent and ten years later 89 per cent of Canadian homes had the convenience of at least cold running water. The postwar years also witnessed the dramatic increase in the use of automobiles. By the early 1960s the Trans-Canada highway was completed and cars "soon came to occupy

¹⁵⁴NAC, *North American Baptist Immigration and Colonization Society (1953-1975) Collection*, MG 28 V18, vol. 21, file "Georg Obst."

a central place in the Canadian lifestyle: the convenience absolutely essential to recreation, travel--and commuting."¹⁵⁵ Even in small towns people had a "pervading fascination with any and all new consumer items," ranging from margarine in 1949 to an early microwave oven and the new Edsel car in 1957.¹⁵⁶ Rising in importance during the postwar period was the desire to own a house and the accompanying phenomena of the suburbs. An early student of the suburbs, S.D. Clark, suggested that "it was not the desire to escape the city but a desire to secure a house in which to live that led to the movement of people into suburban areas."¹⁵⁷

Ethnic German immigrants, who came to Canada in the midst of the creation of this new suburban, consuming society, were not immune from its pressures. Buying their own home, and equipping it with modern appliances, and buying a car to commute to the work place from the suburbs were high priorities for immigrants even if it meant going into debt. The little village of Virgil, Ontario, exemplified the adoption of the new consumer society by ethnic Germans. The many ethnic Germans arriving in the area in the 1950s stimulated a property boom and the postmaster of the formerly sleepy little village was said to remark that "many of these Europeans had little money when they arrived, but they are a hardworking, industrious people and they soon acquire a home. Then they want all the

¹⁵⁵Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, *Canada since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 156-157.

¹⁵⁶Royden Loewen, "Rurality, ethnicity, and gender patterns of cultural continuity during the "Great Disjuncture" in the R.M. of Hanover, 1945-1961," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 4 (1993), 164.

¹⁵⁷S.D. Clark, *The Suburban Society*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 48.

conveniences--automobile, TV set, electric refrigerator, stove, and all similar appliances."¹⁵⁸

The advice contained in a booklet for new immigrants was concerned about trends evident in the postmaster's comment and cautioned against excessive spending and taking on too much debt. J.G. Keil, the controller of the Canadian Lutheran World Relief who wrote parts of the booklet, maintained that the high debt load of immigrants was due to the purchase of too many durable goods such as cars, furniture and appliances at once. Although he cautioned immigrants to live within their means and reminded them about the hardship their high debt load would cause if they should fall ill or be unable to keep their employment, he acknowledged that 90 per cent were happy with their chosen lifestyle and their new home. In 1960 when the booklet was printed the writer could inform new immigrants that most of their predecessors had already achieved an average income level.¹⁵⁹

The drive to get houses, cars and appliances was relentless and a great source of consternation for the immigrant organizations who were worried about the repayment of their travel debt. The letters of Rev. Sturhahn of the Baptists and his Mennonite counterpart, J.J. Thiessen, constantly reminded immigrants that the travel debt was their first priority. Although many immigrants took seriously the repayment of their travel debts, the necessity of securing a home, appliances and transportation often took precedence over the payment of travel debts. Many observers felt that immigrants were too quick to immerse themselves

¹⁵⁸ Alfred C. Friesen, *History of the Mennonite Settlement in Niagara on the Lake Ontario, 1934-84*, (Fonthill, Ontario: Niagara Yearbook Services, 1984), 32, 34. Friesen cites Marjorie Freeman Campbell, *Niagara, Hinge of the Golden Arc*, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1958) as the source for the quote.

¹⁵⁹NAC, "CLWR Handbuch: Helfende Hinweisungen für Neueinwanderer," Canadian Lutheran World Relief Collection, MG 28 V120, vol. 30, file "CLWR Handbuch:...."

in the new consumer society. An anonymous writer to the ethnic newspaper, *Der Bote*, lamented the fact that immigrants had no time to reflect on the events they had been a part of, or those things that once had seemed so important. The equating of adaptation with the acquisition of things was illustrated by another writer who commented that when immigrants got together the topics of conversation centered on the purchase of a house, the level of people's wages, future plans and who purchased what and for how many dollars.¹⁶⁰

It is difficult to say whether the changing shape of ethnic German work and consumption during their migration was central in forming their identity or whether these processes were dwarfed by changes in Canadian society and work. Clearly, for ethnic Germans the arrival into a dynamic and changing Canadian society continued a process of change that had begun for them in their homelands and was greatly accelerated by the dislocation brought on by the war. In this sense they found it easy to graft their own changing identity onto a rapidly evolving change in identity that their native born Canadian neighbours were also struggling to assimilate. For them an agricultural orientation was a part of their recent past destroyed by the dislocation of the war. Among them were also significant numbers who had been industrial workers for some time and for whom the adoption of the new consumer society was a small step. The dislocation and disorientation caused by the war forced ethnic German immigrants to shed many of their previous conceptions of work and consumption. 'Making It' in the new Canada required only a small extension of processes that had already been at work in forming and changing their identity.

¹⁶⁰Kl. Klassen, "In der neuen Heimat", *Der Bote*, 25(51), 22 December 1948.

Chapter Five:

Family: *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*¹⁶¹

Rita Huebert was born to Mennonite parents in the village of Liebenau in Ukraine on December 17, 1939. On that day, far away from her home, Soviet forces were engaged in a massive tank assault on the fortifications of the Finnish Mannerheim line and the German warship *Graf Spee* was scuttled and sunk in the Montevideo harbor. In 1943, when she was three, Rita and her parents and siblings were evacuated to the Warthegau with many other Mennonites and Black Sea Germans. While in the Warthegau, Rita became ill and spent an extended time in the hospital. During this time her father was drafted into the German army and when the Soviet push to cross the Vistula began in January 1945 her mother and siblings were caught behind Russian lines and repatriated to Russia. Rita traveled to Germany with other children and ended up in the care of a German family in Berlin. By 1948 a friend of the family, Susie Wall, had located Rita, who was now eight years old, and a protracted process was begun to locate other relatives and determine what to do with her. At some point in the years after the war, contact with her mother was re-established when Mrs Huebert wrote a letter to Susie Wall from the other side of what by then was called the Iron Curtain. Before the fate of eight year old Rita was settled, Susie Wall received permission to emigrate and moved to Canada, settling in British Columbia. In the midst of a stream of correspondence between the overseas and North American branches of the church immigration organization

¹⁶¹Children, Kitchen, Church.

about the fate of Rita, her father resurfaced, having been released from a POW camp in France. While father and daughter were reunited, the mother and siblings remained separated physically, politically and emotionally.¹⁶²

Rita's story illustrates the central theme of separation that dominates the story of ethnic German families. Although Rita's experience of the decade of the 1940s is a specific example of a separated family, most ethnic German families had similar but unique stories of temporary and permanent separation. The separation of family not only gave ethnic Germans a common memory but also challenged fundamentally-held views about the place of family in their identity. Men and women's divergent experiences also reframed earlier perspectives on their respective places within the family. These perspectives would again be challenged in their adaptation to postwar Canada.

Arising out of the wartime separation experienced by all ethnic Germans was an intense desire for stability. The quest for stability was reflected in the recreation of family life in Canada, a process that also recreated their identity. The quest for stability was frequently subverted by the consequences of wartime events. The skewed gender demographics of the postwar period changed the selection of marriage partners and restructured the ethnic identity of partners and their families. In conflict with the desire for stability was the process of adapting to the consumption realities of postwar Canada which also had implications for the view of women's work and its relation to the family. In spite of these contradictions in the quest for stability, the recreated and extended families of ethnic Germans were an important dimension of their identity when they rebuilt their lives in

¹⁶²MHC, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, vol. 1356, file 1190.

Canada.

The removal of all males of fighting age from their families and villages during the war was a general experience of all *Volksdeutsche* families. For the men the experience of military life separated them physically from their families and changed significantly the dynamics of men and women's place in the family unit. War realigned men's social contact and limited it to the realms of military regiments and the intimacy of men who depend on each other for their very lives. The battle situation was so different that a soldier felt uncomfortable when he returned to civilian areas to experience how war affected women and children. Eduard Allert, the fictitious name for the subject of Gerhard Lohrenz's story, *The Lost Generation*, talks about his experience in Vienna during an air attack:

...and when the bombs were unloaded and our shelter seemed to shake I was more afraid than on the front facing the devastating fire of the enemy. The women and children of the German cities had to experience this practically every day. I had seen these American "flying fortresses" quite often and I had known that they carried a deadly load but not until now had I experienced a bombing raid in the midst of women and children.¹⁶³

The men who returned to their wives, mothers and sisters in the 1940s and early 50s, had a strong desire for, but great difficulty in resuming, family life. Men were unable to adjust to life without the war and returned poorly equipped to help women and their families.

Eduard Allert describes the disorientation he felt:

I was twenty-eight years old and had to think about my future. In Russia the Soviets had planned for me. During my three years in the army and the five years captivity again others had decided everything for me. All I had to do was obey orders, and so I was not used to relying on my own initiative. All

¹⁶³Lohrenz, 79.

of a sudden I was lonesome for this guiding hand.¹⁶⁴

Not only men had difficulty adjusting to recreated family life. Often couples had married in the context of an uncertain future. Many couples had known each other only a short time--a brief return home on leave or just before reporting for duty after being drafted into the army. These marriages often could not survive the years of separation brought on by the war. Karl Fast, a prisoner in Russia, quotes a letter a friend received from his wife just before he was due to return home:

I do not want you to return to me; I would like us not to see each other again. You will ask and it is your right to know why this is my wish. I will tell you. When you became a soldier, we had been married for one year. Our young son was still in diapers. Rolf is nine years old today. And me? I have become much, much older. Then I was young and not ready for life. Today I am mature and completely independent. I do everything on my own. I do what I want to do. No one criticizes my inclinations. In short Werner I am free and want to stay free. I am not angry with you. Rather, I do not care about you and you have become a stranger to me. It seems to me that our being together was not real, it seems more like a dream.¹⁶⁵

The emotional separation that the war brought to *Volksdeutsche* threatened the traditional views of the place of men and women in the family. Annemarie Tröger argues, that the almost mythical construction of men as protectors, preservers, and providers for the family remained unshaken for most of the war. With the end of the war, however, "the German masculine mystique fell apart both privately, for individual women, and publicly. This collapse seems to have occurred suddenly and not as a result of a slow erosion caused

¹⁶⁴Lohrenz, 122.

¹⁶⁵Karl Fast, *Gebt der Wahrheit die Ehre, Dritter Teil*, (Winnipeg: Author, 1952), 124-125.

by women's assumption of stronger roles in German society from 1942 on. Significantly, women clung to their protective fantasy men until they could no longer avoid facing reality.

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Ethnic German women certainly faced new challenges during the war and they were forced to take on roles of strength to protect themselves and their children. Women were forced into exchanging all their resources--both physical and emotional--for survival. Sometimes this had lasting consequences for family. Many stories of women fleeing to the west have threads of male involvement in spite of the primarily female composition of many families. Women were forced to attach themselves to certain men for survival and in many cases to secure protection against other men. The men who offered some protection and assistance were often wounded soldiers or men unfit for the regular army due to physical disabilities. Carl Retter, an asthmatic administrator, befriended Helene Latter and her sister.¹⁶⁷ Ingrid Rimland says that the character Karl Heinz in her novel *The Wanderers* was the "fusion of two German soldiers--one who came to rescue us in Russia in 1941, who filled our house with his youth and his laughter, and who was sent to die at Stalingrad. The second one was just a boy--barely seventeen, it seemed, who bled his life into the dirt of an abandoned farm shack."¹⁶⁸ Helena Wiens mentions 'Herr Hahn' who wore a uniform and had

¹⁶⁶Annemarie Tröger, "German Women's Memories of World War II," in Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 294.

¹⁶⁷Latter, 77.

¹⁶⁸Rimland, "...*What is Fiction?* ..," 48.

only one leg, "but was very competent, and he brought us through everything."¹⁶⁹

In many of these accounts of male contact the woman emerges as one acting in her own interests for the survival of herself and her family. Sometimes the price for this protection was very high. Another fellow prisoner of Karl Fast received a pleading letter from his wife who was forced to report that she had borne a son by a man whose help she had needed. She explains that it had been very hard, the children had been cold and hungry and she had not known where to turn. The man had provided money and food for them to recover. Pleading for him to return to her she says; "I did it for our dear children."¹⁷⁰ In other cases women faced the dilemma of yielding to the advances of one man to protect against abuse by many. After Sara, the character representing Ingrid Rimland's mother, submits to the advances of a Russian she has to justify her action to her mother Katya. She points to the stark reality that "seven, eight, ten brutes used me every day. Now it's only one. And we have shelter. And food."¹⁷¹ The stories of rape and the price paid for protection against abuse were memories that could not be told to other members of the family. The pain was too great and these stories were buried in the depths of the psyche and many families would never know the details.

Men could not understand the horrible choices their wives, mothers and sisters had been forced to make to keep the family intact and together. They had preserved an image of

¹⁶⁹Helena Wiens, "Die Erinnerungen eines 17jährigen Mädchens aus dem Jahre 1945," *Der Bote*, 19 April 1989.

¹⁷⁰K. Fast, 126.

¹⁷¹Rimland, *The Wanderers*, 196.

the purity and loyalty of 'their' women--often constructing their participation in the killing as a justified response to the threat to women and family. In the process they forgot their own lapses and "in this respect appropriated all kinds of rights for themselves, which allowed them--as still free and victorious soldiers--to violate the loyalty to their own wives."¹⁷²

An illustration of the complexity and difficulty of wartime liaisons and marriages is the biography of Katja, one of the Mennonite women in Pamela Klassen's *Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women*. Katja met Franz, a school teacher sent to her village in Russia, and on the flight from the Russians Franz and Katja were secretly married and had a son. Franz withheld from Katja the fact that although he had been separated from his wife for fifteen years, he was in fact legally married. "When his wife discovered that he had remarried and had a son, she came looking for his new family. ... Katja had not known Franz was married; she was surprised, hurt and fiercely protective of her son." Katja's marriage was annulled and she left for Canada; when Franz's return to his first wife did not work out she began the process of trying to bring him to Canada--a process that ended when he died in Germany.¹⁷³

The pre-war perceptions of marriage relationships and family were not only challenged by the separation and its attendant emotional divide. As Tröger suggests, ethnic women had to assume much stronger roles from 1942 onwards. Women's place had changed dramatically during the war. After the men were drafted, during the flight from the east, and

¹⁷²K. Fast, 127.

¹⁷³Pamela Klassen, *Going by the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women*, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1994), 51-53.

for many years after the war, women had to take over the roles that in their pre-war society would have been in the realm of men. In the absence of her husband, Adelgunde Hellman's mother was the manager of the Polish farm given them in the Warthegau and was the supervisor of the male and female Polish workers.¹⁷⁴ When the time came to pack up and flee the advancing Russians, her mother sent home the Polish servant because she feared that he would take the horses and leave them. She took the reins herself and drove the wagon to the west. When the family settled in what became East Germany, she again became the manager of the farm given to them as part of the land distribution of early communism in East Germany. As the fortunes of war led to a deterioration of economic and social life in Germany, family life gradually began to centre on survival and, as Eva Kolinsky suggests, "women were catapulted . . . back into pre-industrial times where family and household fulfilled major reproductive tasks in the economy."¹⁷⁵

Women also assumed leadership of the church in the absence of men. Mennonite women were involved in the rejuvenation of Mennonite church practice upon their arrival in the Warthegau. This involvement was not always welcomed by male leaders. Benjamin H. Unruh, a prominent leader of Russian Mennonites, complains in his correspondence to fellow pastors that his efforts to unify various Mennonite groupings were opposed by a group

¹⁷⁴Hellmann, *Interview*.

¹⁷⁵Eva Kolinsky, *Women in West Germany: Life, Work, and Politics*, (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1989), 27.

in which "some women appear to play an important role."¹⁷⁶ While women's leadership in religious matters was perceived as a problem, male church leaders had to acknowledge that, but for women, church life would have disappeared entirely. An itinerant pastor reported that whenever Mennonite refugees paused on their journeys they met for religious worship; "if there was no minister, the laymen led and where they were missing, the women took matters in hand."¹⁷⁷

The expanded role forced upon women during the war and postwar years, came to an abrupt end when life returned to normal. With improved housing in Germany women's place changed again. Annemarie Tröger argues that the interlude in which women experienced "a short period of individual assertiveness and informal social power," was replaced in the early 1950s by "a seemingly sudden reversal of women's emancipation, . . . the traditional familial roles and gender relationships were reestablished and the majority of German women adapted without resistance."¹⁷⁸ Women's wartime roles in family and religious life were not only taken from them but, in some cases, they were forced to acknowledge the error of these ways. Harry Loewen's collection of stories, *No Permanent City*, includes the story of his mother. Loewen relates how in Germany after the war, "the few men who had survived the 1930s and 1940s--some had served in the Soviet, German, or both armies--now took over leadership in the refugee congregations." Loewen goes on to say that

¹⁷⁶Prof. Dr. B. H. Unruh to Herrn Franz Froese, 13 July 1944, MHC, *B.H. Unruh Correspondence, Reports re: Mennonite Refugees from USSR, 1940s*, vol. 3441, file 4.

¹⁷⁷H.H. Janzen, "Die Mennonitischen Flüchtlinge in Deutschland," *Der Bote*, 24(33), 13 August 1947.

¹⁷⁸Tröger, 294.

"women, who had come through difficult times, submitted and followed as they had before. One day my mother had to appear before the congregation and repent for the 'worldly' life she had lived during the war years."¹⁷⁹

The separation of spouses continued to be a feature of ethnic German families in the postwar years. In occupied Germany women outnumbered men by seven million in 1946. As of July 1952 the whereabouts of 1.3 million former German soldiers remained unknown and it took until 1955 for the last German prisoners of war to be released by the Soviet Union. Eva Kolinsky concludes that "if we look at the life story of the average woman between 1939 and the early Fifties, even those whose husbands did return from the war might have spent a decade or more coping on their own."¹⁸⁰ The impact of war and the dislocation it caused among *Volksdeutsche* was similar to the general pattern and was illustrated by a report from the Emigration Transit Centre in Fallingbostal, West Germany. The report describes the demographic profile of 1594 Mennonite persons in the camp in 1948. The writer reports that 40.6% of families had no father and 9.3% of families had no mother.¹⁸¹ The leader of the Mennonite immigration organization reported to a conference that the profile of immigrants coming to Canada was similarly dominated by women whose husbands were missing. From 1947 to 1952, 1,077 women whose husbands were either dead or missing had immigrated

¹⁷⁹Harry Loewen, *No Permanent City: Stories from Mennonite History and Life*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1993), 204-205. For a review of the place of women in Canadian Mennonite history see Marlene Epp, "Women in Canadian Mennonite History: Uncovering the "Underside", *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 5 (1987), 90-107.

¹⁸⁰Kolinsky, 25.

¹⁸¹Cornelius J. Dyck to C.F. Klassen, J.J. Thiessen and Wm. Snyder, 8 July 1948, MHC, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, vol. 1331, file 996.

to Canada while only 171 immigrant men were missing their wives.

In Mennonite circles missing men and fatherless families presented real problems for the church's sanction of remarriage. Mennonites held more strongly than other *Volksdeutsche* to the lifelong commitment explicit in the marriage bond. The problem was most apparent among those Mennonites who had emigrated to Paraguay where it was reported that there were thirty-five men and thirty-seven women living common law in the colony of Neuland alone.¹⁸²

The Mennonites in North America, however, also felt the need to take a position on the possibilities of remarriage for separated partners. The initial approach to the problem had been proposed earlier by a meeting in the camps of occupied Germany. A brotherhood meeting in the camp at Fallingbostel in 1948 determined that the church could not sanction the remarriage of anyone unless there was reliable evidence that the spouse was no longer living.¹⁸³ The North American Mennonites concurred with this interpretation of the nature of Christian marriage. This rigid approach could not be maintained, however, in the face of a deepening Cold War that made reunification more and more unlikely. The problem appeared to reach a climax in 1949 in Paraguay at a special conference with representatives from the United States, Canada, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. The conference dealt with four issues: the determination of a standard number of years of separation before remarriage could be considered, the situation of spouses who knew that their former partners were

¹⁸²F. H. Epp, ...*Exodus*, 453.

¹⁸³"Protokoll der Bruderberatung der Mennonitengemeinschaft im Emigr.-Lager Fallingbostel am 30 Mai 1948", MHC, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, vol. 1331, file 996.

remarried in the Soviet controlled east, those who were living in unsanctioned common law relationships including those dating from their stay in Europe, and those whose spouses were known to be in the Soviet Union or its satellites but had not remarried. In summary the conference decided that where a spouse had been missing for seven years, or where the absent spouse was known to be remarried, the church would sanction remarriage.¹⁸⁴

The discussions of questions of remarriage among Mennonites illustrated the irony of women's place in the family. Although the question of remarriage affected many more women than men, women's role in maintaining family and religious life during the turmoil of war went unrecognized in deciding their marital fate.

The protracted cycle of separation appeared to instill in the ethnic German identity a strong desire for stability. The need for stability was illustrated in their desire for the resumption of family life. In spite of very different war time experiences and the psychological divide that existed between them, there was a strong desire among both men and women to resume family life. Wilhelm Marezki recalled how they had a longing for

a home, for companionship. Our generation was in the war, in the camps and everything--never family, you looked for your family--you wanted an attachment. The boys who were eighteen or nineteen were a lot older at that time compared to today; they had aged--due to the war. The girls had stayed at home--there were so many girls--they wanted to marry.¹⁸⁵

The strong desire to recreate family life, when added to the fact that women outnumbered men, changed the normal patterns of courtship and marriage. The surreal nature

¹⁸⁴*Der Mennonit*, September 1951, 141 and F.H. Epp, 453-454. See also Klassen, 47-48.

¹⁸⁵Marezki, *Interview*, 30 March 1995.

of postwar male-female relations was illustrated by a satirical article in a German woman's magazine:

The hunt for a man has assumed unprecedented proportions: 'a kingdom for a man,'--regardless of how he is! Every other woman becomes a dangerous rival in the fight for the man. Therefore, grab him with all means of seduction even if it should cost one's comfortable home or even one's personality . . . And the man? Well, as the sought-after object he sits on his throne and has the best offers presented to him. It goes without saying that his character will not improve with all the uncritical and exaggerated pampering he receives. He used to woo, and is now being wooed. Who knows how it will affect him in the long run to be spoilt only to be conquered? One thing is clear: the situation is bad for both sides, the women who panic to land themselves a man, and the men who turn into real Good-For-Nothings.¹⁸⁶

The need for stability was to some extent thwarted by the lack of marriage partners from within the community. The extreme shortage of eligible men for the surplus of women contributed to many marriages outside the community--a breakdown of the former endogamous pattern among *Volksdeutsche* in Europe and later in Canada. The statistical summary from Fallingbostal concludes that the "large percentage of families without fathers and the girls of marriageable age with no prospects of finding a marriage partner from within the group, presents a difficult social and moral problem."¹⁸⁷ The first preference for marriage partners remained other Germans and the most likely marriage candidate for an ethnic German woman was another ethnic German or a German National.¹⁸⁸ Mennonites, who had

¹⁸⁶Helga Prolius in *Constanze*, 1949 as quoted by Eva Kolinsky, 30.

¹⁸⁷Cornelius J. Dyck to C.F. Klassen, J.J. Thiessen and Wm. Snyder, 8 July 1948, MHC, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, vol. 1331, file 996.

¹⁸⁸See Andrea Koch-Kraft, *Deutsche in Kanada--Einwanderung und Adaption, Mit Einer Untersuchung Zur Situation der Nachkriegsimmigration in Edmonton, Alberta*, (continued...)

the strongest social sanctions against 'marrying out' were unable to prevent many women from marrying outside the group. The European newsletter for Mennonite refugees repeatedly bemoaned the tendency of young people to marry outsiders. The issue was complicated by the special status enjoyed by Mennonites. In some cases the camp director for the Mennonites thought that it "appeared one wanted to become a Mennonite only to be able to emigrate."¹⁸⁹ Although the church immigration organizations had an interest in having ethnic Germans marry within the religious group the second choice for ethnic Germans if this was not possible, was other ethnic Germans.¹⁹⁰ Often, however, the separation from other members of the village or church helped to change views of who made acceptable marriage partners. The new and varied social contacts coupled with the separation, the fear of abuse by soldiers, or the lack of available partners, contributed to many marriages with other groups, particularly among Black Sea Germans.¹⁹¹

Regardless of whom they married, the strong desire to begin family life conflicted with expectations of their Canadian employers and the church agencies that assisted their migration. The largest single group of domestics in the 1951-61 period were German girls and their tendency to marry before their one year contract was fulfilled illustrated the gender

(...continued)

(Bochum, 1990), 195. Koch-Kraft's study is based on 261 first generation German immigrants.

¹⁸⁹Siegfried Janzen, "An die Jugend," *Unser Blatt*, 2(2), 1 February 1948.

¹⁹⁰See Koch-Kraft, 195.

¹⁹¹See *Unser Blatt*, 1(3) 15 November 1947 and MHC, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, vol. 1363 file 1308, Susanna Miroschnik (Warkentin) to J.J. Thiessen, 18 April 1948.

dynamics of postwar Canada.¹⁹² A lively exchange of letters between the Executive Secretary of the Lutheran World Relief in Canada and the director of the CCCRR camp in Europe tried to balance the belief that women's normal desires were to have a family, with the requirements of the immigration program for domestics that required one year's service in their jobs. In response to criticism from his Canadian colleague the European CCCRR director maintained that "when some of the domestics we sent to Canada follow the most natural impulse to establish a home of their own, although they assured us they would remain one year in domestic employment, we cannot condemn them for that." The two colleagues could not agree whose fault it was that so many domestics left their places of employment before the end of their contract, but they concurred that the desire for family was a "natural inclination."¹⁹³

In spite of leaving their employment to get married, for ethnic German domestics and other wives, wage labor and working at home caring for the family had to be done simultaneously. While the immigrants' desire for stability appeared to coincide with the general trend to return to home and family that dominated Canadian women's experience in the postwar years, ethnic women made other choices. While the percentage of women in the Canadian labour force was declining rapidly, the general experience for ethnic German

¹⁹²Barber, 2.

¹⁹³G.M. Berkefeld to C.L. Monk, 27 September 1950 and 5 December 1951 and C.L. Monk to G.M. Berkefeld, 4 January 1952, NAC, *Canadian Lutheran World Relief*, MG 28 V120, vol. 29, file 20.

women was that women's lot included both wage labour and family responsibilities.¹⁹⁴ Many letters to the offices of the church organizations betray the fact that women did not carry this double load without considerable strain. While men lamented their lack of a *Beruf* (career), women just worked--and the work was hard. Willy and Alice Herke, originally from Łódź, came to Canada in 1952 and settled in Vancouver. Alice got work immediately while her husband could not find work in his field and was unemployed for the first two months. Alice's letters often indicate that it is again very late in the day and she is tired. While she seems to be happy with their start in Canada she confesses that although tired she still has to catch up on the work of providing the family's needs--work left for a housewife after a week at work contributing to the family's income.¹⁹⁵

For some families the image of the ideal postwar family prevailed. For ethnic Germans the role of women as the vessel of reproduction and family maintenance was familiar. Like postwar Canada, Nazi Germany had a high regard for the traditional women's role. This philosophy was embodied in the slogan "children, kitchen and church" which in Nazi doctrine was to be the motto of German women. For some immigrant women this 'ideal' was reached in Canada. Johannes Blumenschett approached his family's immigration in an organized way, making deliberate choices not to have his family separated again. He was also deliberate in his choice of location, requesting to be settled in Kelowna. He could work in the construction industry, giving him upward mobility very quickly. In his letters to the BWAI, Johannes reported that his wife was preoccupied with the children and her garden

¹⁹⁴ Pierson, 215.

¹⁹⁵ NAC, *Baptist World Alliance and Immigration*, MG 28 V18, vol. 19, file 19.

and was active in the local German church. Although they arrived in 1952, by 1953 they already had their own house, by 1954 had paid their travel debt, and in 1961 were arranging for Mrs. Blumeschett to visit relatives in Germany.¹⁹⁶ Having sufficient economic resources to enable the wife to stay at home with the family was, however, a rare situation. Even the educated Baltic Germans who after seven years in Canada could boast about their involvement in the economy as engineers, teachers, and technicians, also reported that 50 percent of their wives "are, along with their occupation as a housewife and mother also wage earners."¹⁹⁷

For many ethnic Germans, family was an important reason for coming to Canada. Since many ethnic Germans came to Canada in the earlier period of postwar immigration most of them were sponsored by family. Koch-Kraft's sample of 261 Germans shows that *Volksdeutsche* immigrants were three times more likely to have been sponsored than *Reichsdeutsche* immigrants.¹⁹⁸ In the early years of the immigration these sponsors were most often family members who had immigrated to Canada earlier and were part of the 30,000 applicants who had played a part in forcing the government to open the doors to ethnic German immigration. Later, the immigration experience often became a chain migration; a single daughter or son coming to Canada to work as a domestic or a farm worker, with the rest of the family soon following. The relationship between earlier immigrants and the new

¹⁹⁶NAC, *Baptist World Alliance and Immigration*, MG 28 V18, vol. 13, file "Johannes Blumenschott."

¹⁹⁷NAC, "Balten 7 Jahren in Canada," *Canadian Baltic Immigration Society*, MG 28 V99, vol. 2, file "Adolf von Pilcher."

¹⁹⁸Koch-Kraft, 118.

arrivals was not always without incident. Prospective immigrants in Europe were warned that twenty-five years of separation from their relatives had changed the relationship. C.F. Klassen, the European director of Mennonite immigration, encouraged those going to Canada not to "pass judgement on Canada and your relatives there, claiming to know everything better than they; that would be a premature criticism which hurts the relatives who have sponsored you."¹⁹⁹

In spite of all the problems of emotional, psychological, and social adjustments, ethnic German family life was central to identity and the construction of social life. Their history and the dislocation of their families left a legacy that made family life very important. After the many years of dislocation ethnic Germans wanted the stability and refuge that only family life could bring. Family life in the home was constructed around the themes of language, school, work, festivities and vacations.

While ethnic Germans pursued the English language at work, in the family German was maintained as the language of the home. At the Marezki home the use of German in talking to the children was strictly maintained until grandparents were no longer on the scene, when it gradually gave way to English.²⁰⁰ *Volksdeutsche* families had high standards for their children's performance at school. While much of their own education had been disrupted by the war, German families placed high value on education.²⁰¹ Many *Volksdeutsche* immigrants continued their own education at night classes organized for

¹⁹⁹*Unser Blatt*, 3(38-39).

²⁰⁰Marezki, *Interview*, 30 March 1995.

²⁰¹Forchner, 50.

them.²⁰² Family vacations were important and most German children in Gisela Forchner's interviews could talk about the cottage or their family vacations--often in natural surroundings. For the ethnic German family, Christmas was the highlight of the family's calendar. The occasion was marked by German carols and family festivities. Working hard was an ethic faithfully passed on to children and one ethnic German child believed that "a thing of the Germans is perfection, doing things as best you can, precision, accuracy."²⁰³

The theme of separation that dominated ethnic German family experience also shaped their identity. The dislocation and separation of families and the many years of suspended family activity produced a strong desire to return to the stability of family life. Ethnic Germans had many psychological and emotional hurdles that stood in the way of an easy return to an earlier idealized state. Often these hurdles were too great to be overcome. Divorce often ended prewar marriages. The recreation of family in the postwar period, whether in Europe or Canada was, however, accompanied by a strong desire for a stable lasting family relationship. Painful memories and details of previous constructions of family were most often repressed and not discussed with anyone.²⁰⁴ The exposure to many ethnic Germans from other regions and the imbalance in the numbers of men and women contributed to the consideration of marriage partners who would not have been eligible mates

²⁰²Karl Fast, ed., *Fiftieth Anniversary of Mennonite Settlement in North Kildonan 1928-1978*, (Winnipeg: Anniversary Committee, 1978), 62.

²⁰³Forchner, 127.

²⁰⁴Forchner says "I realized very early in the investigation that I was opening deep wounds with these [interview] questions, touching subject matters which the people preferred not to talk about.", 30.

in their prewar communities. Stanley Nadel maintains that "marriage is the one form of social interaction that probably reveals more about people's perceptions of social distance than any other."²⁰⁵ The marriages of ethnic Germans across boundaries of religion and regional origin maintained a German identity while giving up identities established by attachments to village, region and religious affiliation. In those cases where marriages combined German and, most often, Slavic partners the consequences for identity had wider implications and encompassed a broader range of social interaction. For these families, the adoption of a 'Canadian' identity was an easier choice than the choice of either Slavic or German identities. The result was a rapid adoption of a neutral 'Canadian' identity. For most ethnic German families the creation of family was the strongest means of reclaiming stability. The recreated family was important in compensating for the years when family was only a memory--the subject of constant search and longing.

²⁰⁵Nadel, 156.

Chapter Six:

Church, Language and Association: Contesting and Consolidating New Identities

The discussion in the preceding chapters has focussed on identity forming processes. The question of how features of older identities were preserved and new spheres of identity were contested has been secondary. In recreating their social lives in Canada ethnic Germans made choices about features of identity to be kept, those to be discarded and those features which served as a transition to other, longer lasting identities. The persistence of an identity that had a sense of Germanness as its central feature depended on a few specific domains, primarily the church, language, and the circle of associations in which ethnic Germans created their social reality. Church, language, and association also became arenas where new cultural knowledge was contested and new identities were forged.

The arrival of thousands of immigrants in the years after World War II had an immediate implication for their church communities in Canada. Postwar immigrants attended church in greater numbers than native Canadians and as a result the churches in communities where immigrants arrived swelled in membership and activity. Howard Palmer attributes the increased church attendance of immigrants to the fact that "churches organized the movement of many postwar immigrants who thus felt some indebtedness to the churches."²⁰⁶ Italians, whose immigration followed on the heels of ethnic German migration, exhibited similar patterns that stimulated Catholic parishes in Toronto to use Italian in conversing with

²⁰⁶Howard Palmer, *Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1975), 177.

their parishioners. Thirty-three parishes in Toronto eventually served parishioners in Italian, where only three had offered Italian language services in 1956.²⁰⁷ German immigrants were also the reason for growth in ethnic churches, particularly if these churches offered worship services in German. To a large extent the church organizations entered the ethnic German immigration arena with the specific goal of adding members to their churches. William Sturhahn, the Baptist immigration leader, was very clear about his congregation's purpose for assisting ethnic German immigration. Sturhahn's language emphasized the building of church and nation, claiming that "since we in Canada desperately needed to settle wide open plains, to increase productivity, and to add to our church membership, we looked at immigration not only as a matter of relief for the refugees, but also as a matter of economic necessity and self-help."²⁰⁸

Regardless of how deliberately churches tried to add to their membership rolls, Catholic and Protestant churches alike grew remarkably in the postwar period. The Baptist churches were able to realize their objective, as enunciated by Sturhahn, and twenty-three Baptist churches "came into existence solely by immigration."²⁰⁹ Catholic churches also experienced growth. The fact that eleven parishes ministered to the faithful in German was

²⁰⁷Jean Burnet and Howard Palmer, *"Coming Canadians:" An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart and Multiculturalism Directorate, 1988), 137.

²⁰⁸William Sturhahn, *They Came from East and West: A History of Immigration to Canada*, (Winnipeg: North American Baptist Immigration and Colonization Society, 1976), 12.

²⁰⁹Sturhahn, *They Came...*, 219.

due entirely to the postwar immigration.²¹⁰ In addition to the formation of new congregations, existing church communities also experienced growth. In the Mennonite community there were still many churches that worshiped in German and those in the cities were swamped by the influx of new members. The Niagara United Mennonite Church, founded by Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s, gained many new members during the immigration of the postwar period. In 1948 when the immigration of Mennonites was well underway, the church had a membership of 350 which already included some postwar arrivals. The continuing influx of immigrants resulted in the dedication of a new 850 seat sanctuary in December 1949. By 1954 the church's debt was retired and in 1964 membership stood at 704.²¹¹ The McDermot Avenue Baptist Church in Winnipeg reported that it was not uncommon to have 100 visitors at services during the fifties, and since "many of the newcomers had their transfer letters with them . . . the church would welcome as many as 50 new members at one communion service."²¹²

The spurt of new church growth brought with it many difficulties. As William Sturhahn described it, the various "'water currents' found it very difficult to mix into one

²¹⁰Horst, Gutsche, "Deutschsprachige Seelsorge in Kanada," in Gerhard Friesen and Karin Gürtler, eds., *German-Canadian Yearbook, IX* (1986), (Toronto: Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada Inc., 1986), 28.

²¹¹*The Niagara United Mennonite Church, 1938-1988*, (Fonthill, Ontario: Niagara Yearbook Services, 1988), 9 and C. Alfred Friesen, *History of the Mennonite Settlement in Niagara on the Lake Ontario, 1934-84*, (Fonthill, Ontario: Niagara Yearbook Services, 1984), 40. Since Mennonites become members only upon baptism as adults, these membership numbers do not include unbaptized children.

²¹²Maria Rogalsky, *100 Years and Growing: Celebrating a Century of Grace*, (Winnipeg: McDermot Ave. Baptist Church, 1989), 33.

large stream."²¹³ The new church members had come from various 'Old World' communities that typically were isolated from each other and had developed diverse interpretations of acceptable Christian lifestyles. Sturhahn mentions the problems caused by the presence of smokers and nonsmokers and of beer drinking church members and those who were dogmatic abstainers. More serious were the problems of leadership. Frequently immigrants had been deacons or pastors in their old church and had been influential in their church oriented and closed communities. These leaders sometimes found it difficult to relinquish this role in their new church communities in Canada.²¹⁴ The different conceptions of piety combined with realigned networks of power and authority caused considerable tensions in the Baptist community. In a letter to Sturhahn one Canadian church member complained that

the church and its board has had so much trouble with these new arrivals, we have gone to endless expense and forbearance. These people are loaded on us by you, still we welcome them into our fellowship and try to make things as comfortable as we can and what do we receive returned? Some of them want to be the 'Herren' they don't support financial[ly] and in the end when they can help themselves then they pull out, but not peaceful[ly], but with disgrace and insults to us.²¹⁵

The attachment to church was an ethnic German tendency not shared by their *Reichsdeutsche* fellow immigrants. Andrea Koch-Kraft's study of the Germans in Edmonton concludes that ethnic churches were most attractive to *Volksdeutsche* with low education and least attractive for highly educated *Reichsdeutsche*. With the generally lower education level

²¹³Sturhahn, *They Came from East and West...*, 213.

²¹⁴Sturhahn, *They Came from East and West...*, 216.

²¹⁵Sturhahn, *They Came from East and West...*, 213.

of ethnic German immigrants compared to German nationals the result was that while only 31% of *Reichsdeutsche* immigrants attended an ethnic church, 69.1% of *Volksdeutsche* were to be found in these churches.²¹⁶

The active participation of *Volksdeutsche* immigrants in church activities has been attributed to their wartime experiences. Gisela Forchner maintains that close association with the church was evidence of the ethnic German quest for stability. Ethnic German history included the experience of the removal from their homes in the Baltics, Russia, or Rumania; they lived through the added loss of their temporary homes in the Warthegau and the insecurity of life in postwar Germany. As a result, ethnic Germans craved stability--a stability they found in the institutions of family and church.²¹⁷

The stability of an ethnic church home was undoubtedly attractive for ethnic German immigrants, but church also became an arena where new identities were contested. While church was a vehicle that satisfied the ethnic German need for the stability provided by religious symbols, the arena of church also was the scene of the contest over the role of language in defining cultural identity. Ethnic Germans had maintained German speaking communities among their Slavic neighbours for centuries. These German speaking communities had been maintained in the face of explicit policies of Polonization, Russification, or other attempts at changes in their identity.²¹⁸ Through the centuries the

²¹⁶Koch-Kraft, 206.

²¹⁷Forchner, 220.

²¹⁸Rudolf A. Helling, *A Socio-Economic History of German-Canadians: They, Too, Founded Canada*, (Wiesbaden, 1984), 100.

church played an important part in maintaining German as the language of formal and daily life. The German church provided a centre for an entire world of shared symbols. The German Luther Bible gave a literary and educational standard for the cacophony of local variation in dialect that dominated *Volksdeutsche* social interaction. German hymns provided an emotional tie with Germans everywhere and, as Sturhahn indicates, among ethnic German immigrants, "it appeared at times that the only common factor was the German language and the treasure of songs and hymns."²¹⁹

The influx of German speaking immigrants heralded dramatic adjustments in Canadian ethnic churches.²²⁰ Often churches whose roots were in earlier German ethnic migrations were either completely or partially Anglicized by the end of World War II. The influx of German speaking immigrants put severe strains on their conversion to the English language. The arrival of new German speaking members brought back memories of their own adjustments to Canada and the English language. Some churches responded by maintaining their English language orientation while still meeting the needs of the new immigrants. The Catholic St. Mariengemeinde of Kitchener, Ontario, had become entirely English by the early 1950s; however when many ethnic German immigrants made their home in the area, the church began a German service in the basement of the church. Ultimately the

²¹⁹Sturhahn, *They Came from East and West...*, 213.

²²⁰For a comprehensive treatment of the contest over language in one denomination, see Ediger, Gerald C., *Deutsch und Religion: Ethnicity, Religion and Canadian Mennonite Brethren, 1940-1970*, PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1993.

downstairs services grew to become a permanent German service in the church.²²¹ Other churches also struggled with the growth of German language services in their basements and the cultural implications of this growth. In 1949, the Rev. C.T. Wetzstein, a pastor of a fledgling group of six Polish German Lutherans, was advised by the English Missouri Redeemer Church in Waterloo not to advertise his German language services held in their basement for fear of reprisals against Germans like those in the aftermath of World War I. In spite of this slow beginning the church grew, moving to the St. Paul's church and eventually becoming self sufficient to the extent that in 1954 the church boasted a membership of 850 that included Baltic Germans, Banat Swabians, Germans from Russia, Bessarabia and Lithuania, Transylvania Saxons, Sudeten Germans and Germans from Poland, East Prussia, and Baden.²²²

The issue of language also proved to be the source of much strife in those churches of the new land which were the recipients of the postwar immigration influx. Just before the influx of German speaking Baptists began, the McDermot Avenue Baptist Church in Winnipeg had made a decision to have an English language service on Sunday evenings. The desire of their immigrant members to also have a German Sunday evening service resulted in a decision by the church authorities to have the service in both languages, "but this brought opposition from the local people who were delighted to finally have a good English evening service for which they had been waiting a long time. To revert back to German again so soon

²²¹K.J. Schindler, "Die Deutschsprachige katholischen Kirchengemeinden in Kanada-- Teil 2," in Hartmut Froeschle, ed., *German-Canadian Yearbook II* (1975), (Toronto: Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada Inc., 1975), 276.

²²²Leibbrandt, 281.

brought much resentment and unrest." Ultimately the only solution was to have two services on Sunday evenings and even that did not prevent a group from leaving to form a new exclusively German church in 1950.²²³

The problem of language was immediate for the German immigrant and ethnic Germans were remarkably resilient in realigning their approach to language. In spite of having lived in environments that had resisted adoption of the languages of their neighbours and governing states, ethnic Germans immediately adopted English as a working language when they arrived in Canada. When Waldemar Hildebrandt and his wife arrived in Canada, they attended English classes at Edmonton's Victoria Composite High School at night.²²⁴ A report from a Mennonite town in southern Manitoba lauds the hard working immigrants in the community and mentions the evening English classes taught by a local school teacher.²²⁵ Serafina Chomitch, a Volga German, could not afford the English classes offered so she learned English "from the children and through television; ... I guess I learned to speak English because I really wanted to."²²⁶ Ethnic German immigrants facing the realities and choices about places to work and live realized that English was critical to their new identities. One writer to the German language paper, *Der Bote*, lamented the decline of

²²³Rogalsky, 33-34.

²²⁴T. Yedlin, ed., "Waldemar Hildebrandt from the area of Radomishl," in *Germans From Russia in Alberta: Reminiscences*, (Edmonton: Central and East European Studies Society of Alberta, 1984), 155.

²²⁵Frau M.S. "Unsere Neueingewanderten," *Der Bote*, 27(46) 15 November 1950.

²²⁶T. Yedlin, ed., ""Serafina Chomitch from Pfeiffer," in *Germans From Russia in Alberta: Reminiscences*, (Edmonton: Central and East European Studies Society of Alberta, 1984), 173.

German but acknowledged that English was as important as breathing.²²⁷

The aggressive approach to learning English to survive in the world of work was paralleled by serious efforts to retain the German language in church and in the home. Along with the establishment of many new German churches and the reinventing of German language services in others, ethnic Germans were very active in establishing German language education for their children. The areas of ethnic German concentrations in Ontario, B.C. and in major Prairie cities all witnessed the rise of German Saturday schools in the 1950s. The Baptist churches were instrumental in establishing these schools in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Vancouver and Prince Rupert.²²⁸ In Winnipeg an inter-Mennonite male choir was organized to support German language education among Manitoba's Mennonites. The Sargent Avenue Mennonite church and the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren and General Conference churches all had Saturday German language schools for immigrant children.²²⁹ In Vancouver the Baptists and Mennonites cooperated in establishing a German language school--a school that grew to have 200 to 300 students in eighteen classes. The Baptist and Mennonite school was joined by the Catholic and Lutheran schools and by the late 1960s Vancouver had 850 students attending

²²⁷Jacob Mantler, "Wo sind sie denn geblieben?" *Der Bote*, 27(44) 1 November 1950.

²²⁸Sturhahn, *They Came From East and West...*, 215.

²²⁹*Fünfundzwanzig Jahre: Sargent Ave. Mennoniten Gemeinde*, (Winnipeg, 1975), 31 and Fast, ed., *Fiftieth Anniversary...*, 64.

Saturday German classes in ten church schools.²³⁰ In Ontario the eight church schools in Waterloo County were joined by two club schools and there, as in the rest of Canada, on Saturday mornings church basements were the scene of German language classes for neighbourhood immigrant children.²³¹ At the height of the Saturday German school movement in the mid 1960s there were 7500 students attending German language schools in 128 different schools, and taught by 441 teachers across Canada.²³² In a circular to Mennonite pastors the newly formed *Mennonitischer Verein zur Pflege der deutschen Muttersprache in Canada* outlined the benefits of retaining the German language. The writer gave eight reasons for encouraging the support of the organization, arguing that the "German language is the root of our culture, our customs and traditions and our spiritual development," and "with the loss of this language we lose our spiritual stability."²³³

In contrast to the 1950s--the decade of a surge in German language church and educational activities due to the influx of immigrants, the 1960s was a decade in which the contradiction of ethnic German attitudes towards language became apparent. The strategy of complete and rapid adoption of English as the language of the workplace while seeking to maintain German at home and at church began to lose its validity. For ethnic churches the decade of the sixties was marked by strife centered on the issue of language. By the mid-

²³⁰Gumpp, 112.

²³¹Leibbrandt, 302.

²³²Helling, 90-91.

²³³MHC, G. Peters to Ältesten and Leiter der mennonitischen Gemeinden in Canada, *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, November 1, 1952, vol. 1334, file 1020.

sixties immigrant families already had children who were approaching adolescence armed with an education conducted entirely in English in the public school system. This exposure to English soon encroached upon the social domains of family and church. William Sturhahn suggests that by the mid sixties "a notable increase [in the use] of English began to creep into the German [church] youth groups. In a few instances this tendency was counteracted with the utmost discipline and force; we lost young people."²³⁴

The remaking of church in the sixties was an important identity- forming process for ethnic German immigrants. For many older *Volksdeutsche* the adoption of English in church challenged their identities beyond their capacity to change. As a result many churches continued a German language component in their worship even though the main stream of church life moved to English. The Steinbach Mennonite church in its anniversary book in 1968 acknowledged its language problem: while church services were still in German, the Sunday School now was changing to English.²³⁵ In other churches the German language element remained so strong that churches divided, with English groups leaving most often. Though many ethnic Germans used English in the workplace, the abandonment of German for worship was difficult. The social and emotional symbolism of German church represented a much greater threat to their self-identification than other domains of social identity. Paralleling the experience of the churches in whose basements they held Saturday language classes, the German schools began a gradual decline in activity with consolidations

²³⁴Sturhahn, *They Came From East and West...*, 215.

²³⁵Franz Froese, ed., *25 Jaehriges Jubilaeum der Steinbach Mennoniten Gemeinde 1968*, (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1968), 19.

and then closings due to continued decline in enrollment and in spite of considerable support from the West German government.²³⁶

During the bahner years of the Saturday school movement, ethnic Germans also began cultivating German associations outside the confines of family and church. While church was the primary arena of German social contact for ethnic Germans, there were significant numbers who never became active in ethnic churches. The handbook for new immigrants published by the Lutherans in 1960 complained to new immigrants that many of their predecessors were not inclined towards church attendance. J.G. Keil maintained that less than 50 per cent could honestly say that they were participating members of a Lutheran church. While many claimed that they attended regularly, when asked the name of the church they attended or the name of its pastor, they were unable to answer.²³⁷

The German language schools were a phenomenon that, while sponsored and supported by local churches, were not tied to particular religious exclusivity. Since German language schools provided a common focus for both *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche* in addition to crossing religious lines, the German Saturday School movement became a natural center for other forms of German Canadian association. As a result of the leadership given by such people as Clive von Cardinal and the members of the Canadian Society for German Relief, Canadians of German background resolved in 1952 to form a Canadian German

²³⁶*The Niagara United Mennonite Church, 1938-1988*, (Fonthill, Ontario: Niagara Yearbook Services, 1988), 19.

²³⁷NAC, "CLWR Handbuch: Helfende Hinweisungen für Neueinwanderer," *Canadian Lutheran World Relief*, MG 28 V120, vol. 30, file "CLWR Handbuch....," p28.

organization, the Trans Canada Alliance of Germans.²³⁸ While the TCA was an umbrella organization that supported German language education in Canada, the German Clubs, formed earlier in urban centres across Canada, were more immediate and relevant forms of association for local ethnic Germans.

German Clubs of various kinds were established and joined by ethnic Germans. Joe Mausser, a Slovenian German who came to Canada in the 1920s, sponsored a hundred fellow Slovenians who upon their arrival in Canada formed the nucleus of Kitchener's Alpen Club.²³⁹ Ethnic Germans formed a Hunting and Fishing Club and Baltic Germans rejuvenated the Baltic Immigration Aid Society which was formed in 1948 and had recorded its minutes in English. The Baltic immigrants used the legal shell of the society to form what became a Baltic German Club with district branches in most cities and with minutes now recorded in German.²⁴⁰

Like other German fraternal organizations the German Society of Winnipeg reorganized after the end of World War II and, although two hundred people attended the opening meeting in 1948, the group began its postwar existence with only 59 paid up members. Paralleling the experience of the ethnic German churches, the Society benefited from the influx of German immigrants in the 1950s. In the next ten years the Society purchased its own facilities and by the mid-1960s a lively mix of theatre groups, table tennis

²³⁸Leibbrandt, 287 and Gerhard P. Bassler, *The German Canadian Mosaic Today and Yesterday: Identities, Roots, and Heritage*, (Ottawa: German-Canadian Congress, 1991), 13.

²³⁹Leibbrandt, 292, 295.

²⁴⁰NAC, "Nachrichten Blatt No. 5, Oktober 1951," *Baltic Immigration Aid Society Collection*, MG 28 V99, vol. 1, file "CBIAS Circulars, 1951-59."

clubs, and women's groups were actively connected to the Society's growing social events.²⁴¹ In contrast to the trend in ethnic churches, the participation in German Clubs by *Volksdeutsche* was less enthusiastic. Andrea Koch-Kraft found that slightly greater numbers of *Reichsdeutsche* (32.4%) were members of the Edmonton German Clubs than *Volksdeutsche* (27.3%).²⁴²

German Clubs were not immune from the currents prominent in the church. The participation of Clubs in Saturday morning German schools meant that the decline of these schools brought about a reevaluation of the purposes of the Club. The German-Canadian Association of present day Thunder Bay began to seriously question its purpose when its membership stagnated in the late sixties. Club members were concerned "over the Association's future as they witnessed their own children's disinterest in it." The Club's stagnation was seemingly precipitated by the same forces that were causing a decline in German school enrollment. Marina-Rose Robinson notes that the Club's "pessimism was reinforced by news of declining German school enrollments" and although the local German school "enrolled both German--and English--Canadians and offered accredited language courses," they could "not stem the decline."²⁴³

In keeping with their strong orientation to family and church, most forms of association cultivated by ethnic German immigrants were with German relatives and within

²⁴¹ *100 Jahre Deutsche Vereinigung von Winnipeg in Wort und Bild*, (Winnipeg: German Society of Winnipeg, 1992), unnumbered.

²⁴² Koch-Kraft, 206.

²⁴³ Marina-Rose Robinson, "The German-Canadian Association: Cultural Retention or Assimilation?" *Polyphony*, 9(2) (1987), 97.

the realm of the ethnic church. Many of their families having been separated in the war, or having made choices to stay in Europe, ethnic Germans in Canada who had family in Western Europe wanted to make trips to Germany as soon as possible. By 1995, Adelgunde Hellman had been back to Germany five times to visit family.²⁴⁴ For others, most often in cases where the family remained on the other side of the iron curtain, there was no desire to return to a Germany that held mostly unpleasant memories. Although immigrants tried to maintain a German home, their own families became a diverse mixture of ethnic identities. Wilhelm Marezki's children married 'Canadians' and none of his sons-in-law or daughters-in-law spoke German.²⁴⁵ Adelgunde Hellman's children also married spouses with Ukrainian, Chinese and English Canadian identities, and while her grandchild was attending a German nursery school, she, like many other ethnic German grandmothers, had to speak to her grandchildren in accented English to be understood.²⁴⁶

Church and language were symbols of 'Old World' identities that for ethnic Germans proved the most difficult to change. Ethnic Germans worked hard to maintain the identities embodied in church and language--the sources of social truth deeply embedded in their world view. Undoubtedly the work of Canadian Baptist, Catholic, Mennonite and Lutheran churches helped to reinforce the attachment to church. Even the ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union, whose religious and linguistic lives had been severely tested, returned to their ethnic churches in large numbers. In spite of the strong identification with the church and the

²⁴⁴Hellman, *Interview*.

²⁴⁵Marezki, *Interview*.

²⁴⁶Hellman, *Interview*.

German language, the invasion of their linguistic boundaries by the world of work proved too great to withstand. While first generation immigrants wanted to maintain a dual identity, when it came to language--learning English very quickly while insisting on German at home and in church--their children no longer cast their German identity in linguistic terms nor in many cases in religious terms.

Conclusion: Identity as Process

The theme of identity has been at the centre of this story of ethnic German immigrants. Our challenge has been to view identity as a process of 'becoming,' without losing the incoherence, inconsistency and dissonance inherent in cultural and ethnic identity. The events, pressures, and stresses experienced by ethnic German immigrants at various times exhibited certain patterns and a certain coherence born out of common experience. On the other hand the cultural dynamism of war, relocation, separation, and evolving economic and social realities, meant that individuals chose identities in different ways and that certain patterns of identity had only transitory coherence and soon gave way to other patterns. This study chose a small sample of identifiable markers of cultural change to illustrate the dynamic quality of ethnic identity formation. The processes of labeling and intentional socialization, the spheres of work and family, the variables of language, church and association, have all offered insight into processes of identity formation and re-formation.

We began by examining the process of identification embodied in official labels given to ethnic Germans by various bureaucracies. Identity, which in their homelands had been culture, language, religion and history, was reinvented as the construction of a nation and a race. While many ethnic Germans adopted the Nazi view of their identity, for most who would emigrate this identity proved to be transitory. Mennonite efforts to get out of their dangerous proximity to Soviet spheres of influence contributed to their abandoning a German national identity and claiming an ambiguous Dutch identity. Other ethnic German immigrants also shed their German national identity and resumed a more familiar identity as a German minority in a now Canadian and plural majority.

While labeling appeared to produce transitory features of identity the intentional socialization of Nazi Germany was a process that left a lasting imprint on ethnic German identity. The processes of naturalization and the deliberate program of imbuing ethnic Germans with Nazi ideals profoundly influenced ethnic Germans. Their identities were drawn into sharp relief against the identities of others--primarily Poles and Jews. The socialization of the Nazi period, the unemployment and homelessness of postwar Germany, and dispersion in a Canadian society that was rapidly changing, also stimulated rapid changes in ethnic German identities. The forced reformation of their 'old world' identities predisposed them to rapid adaptation to Canadian society. To the extent that a trend to an urban, consumer society can be called a process of modernization, the processes of deliberate or inadvertent change modernized ethnic Germans dramatically, enabling them to adjust to the new Canadian society more easily than did many native Canadians.

Canadian society pressed upon ethnic German immigrants most directly in the realm of work. Here the immigrants adopted the language of their new country quickly. Changing Canadian agricultural employment trends, coupled with their own diverse work experiences during and after the war, especially in non-agricultural spheres, encouraged them to move to the cities in spite of their immigration obligations. Although they had suffered years of disrupted work experience, ethnic Germans threw themselves into their work with energy and grasped the new ideals of a consumer society with vigour. Women participated as wage earners in a household economy which valued the purchase of a house, owning a car, and moving to find better opportunities or going into debt to acquire the new necessities. Ethnic Germans remade their identities to place them on the crest of a wave of changing Canadian

social knowledge about work and consumption.

Family, on the other hand, was a locus of social life that provided a refuge for remnants of Germanness. Ethnic Germans recreated earlier identities with emphasis on language and the customs of an earlier festive calendar. Here the values of hard work, precision, and doing well at school were passed on to children. Marriage and the different wartime experience of men and women did not divert a strong desire for the stability of family. Ethnic Germans wanted to marry each other and although religious endogamy became less urgent, a shared history remained an important reinforcement for ethnic endogamy.

The desire for stability and the recreation of 'old world' identity were the dominant themes of ethnic German associations. Ethnic Germans sought refuge in the ethnic church and the use of German at home was reinforced by German at church. Along with these two structures for maintaining language, ethnic Germans created Saturday German schools for their children. Ethnic German immigrants approached language with inconsistency. While striving hard to learn English, the language of work, ethnic Germans worked hard to maintain German as the language of home and church. The realms of church, association and language were inexorably intertwined with the very core of identity and as a result these arenas were also the scene of the greatest contests for ethnic identity.

We must conclude that the ethnic German experience cannot be described simply as assimilation or as adaptation, or as a transplanting of an old world identity to a new social and physical reality. Ethnic German identities were on a trajectory of change that in many ways fell into step with a Canadian trajectory of social change. Ethnic Germans and their

fellow postwar immigrants fell into step with these new identities because of their own path of identity formation. Along the way, however, they reached back to an older corpus of social knowledge for some features of identity. In other realms, social processes produced lasting memories which ethnic Germans chose to bury in favour of new social constructions. For their Canadian born children much of their German identity remains only a memory.

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