

Masculinity, Entrepreneurship and Religion: Lumberman C.T. Loewen of Steinbach, Manitoba

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A series of photographs depicts Steinbach, Manitoba lumberman, Cornelius Toews (C.T.) Loewen, his wife Helena, daughter Mary and friends Rev. Peter and Margaret Friesen on a journey to Omaha, Nebraska, where Mary was to attend Bible school. The snapshots were taken in Bemidji, Minnesota, in front of a statue of Paul Bunyan, the mythological, giant lumberjack. According to American legend, he invented logging in the Pacific Northwest, dug Puget Sound in Washington State to float huge logs to the mill, cleared North and South Dakota for farming, and scooped out the Great Lakes to provide drinking water for his giant blue ox Babe. As a lumberman who demonstrated great strength, a pioneering spirit and just plain hard work, Bunyan possessed many “manly” qualities venerated in C.T. Loewen’s Steinbach. C.T. would have enjoyed “meeting” Paul Bunyan.

This article explores what being a man meant to C.T. Loewen and his communities of family, village, and church. C.T. has been variously described as a “man of action,” a “real man,” a “he-man,” a “man’s man,” and as a “man of courage, faith and enterprise.”¹ What, in these estimations, made a man, a man? Masculinity, we know, is constructed. Anthony Rotundo writes that manhood “is not a social edict determined on high and enforced by law. As a human invention, manhood is learned, used, reinforced, and reshaped by individuals in the course of life.”² Rotundo seeks the meanings of manhood, asking a series of questions: “Who is a real man? What is ‘naturally’ male? How does a ‘manly man’ act?”³

A number of works are instructive in answering these questions for C.T. Loewen. In an article examining nineteenth century “Christian Businessman” Charles Colby of the Eastern Townships in Quebec, Marguerite Van Die argues the importance of incorporating religion into a discussion of masculinity. Her work challenges historians’ understanding of nineteenth century women’s “cult of domesticity” and the juxtaposed men’s “myth of the self-made man,” which assumes that for men “participation in religious activity was a remnant of the old order.” Religion, Van Die states, was “intimately interwoven with

economic, social and political concerns, which in turn bound families to larger networks of kinship and community.”⁴ She concludes that in Colby’s case a religious-moral responsibility “did not seek to undermine the capitalist socio-economic order” but did temper individualism by reminding men of their responsibilities “to family, community, business partners, nation, and God.”⁵ It is a list that defines C.T. Loewen. He was defined by his work, a “lumberman” to all who knew him; his obituary remarked that his “most notable accomplishments were, of course, in the business realm.”⁶ However, family, faith, and work were interconnected, creating multiple and simultaneous identities of C.T. – lumberman, Mennonite, Anabaptist-Christian, husband, father, and Steinbacher.

C.T. Loewen, however, was also a ‘self-made’ man of the type described by Anthony Rotundo in *American Manhood*. Rotundo asserts that the nineteenth century emphasis on individualism deeply affected masculine identity. The resulting *self-made man* found his identity in his work, rather than his household, and was able to secure his status and identity through his achievements, since his place in society was no longer pre-determined at birth.⁷ He was an “individual” who “emerged in importance from the communal context,” one whose work took “on a separate meaning and provide[d] the chief substance of his identity.”⁸ Yet the same man spent much of the day away from the business performing public and religious roles in the community. This was C.T., hard worker, independent, and, as will be demonstrated, active in his community as a philanthropist.

C.T. Loewen, however, is perhaps best understood through Joy Parr’s description of Daniel Knechtel, a late nineteenth-century furniture factory owner in Hanover, Ontario. Knechtel’s obituary spoke of a man “ever engrossed in his business, his home and his philanthropy,” an ‘example of Christian manhood.’⁹ Knechtel emphasized work and believed that status was achieved not inherited and that “the men employed in his factory could have all he had.”¹⁰ He had been just like the men he employed and to some extent remained like them, living “without ostentation...in a house near the plant, refusing leisure as weakness.”¹¹ From this position of earned status, Knechtel “worked to serve God,” possessing a “sense of manly work” that “extended to good works.”¹² This self-made man’s involvement in community was not organic, arising from a wish to conform and identify first and foremost with the community; rather, this man was an “individual” whose contributions of time and money were given from a sense of personal responsibility or duty.

Rotundo’s description of the “self-made” man, Van Die’s examination of a “Christian businessman” and Parr’s depiction of upwardly mobile, hardworking, self sacrificing and philanthropist Daniel Knech-

tel, are all relevant to the study of C.T. Loewen. They all describe an independent person, born into a communitarian culture, but ultimately not bound by it.

Boyhood and Youth

In a sense C.T. Loewen's childhood was that of an ordinary Menonite farm boy. He attended the village school and worked on the family farm from an early age.¹³ But as the eldest son whose father C.B. Loewen worked away from home weeks on end at the family's sawmill in the forests to the east of Steinbach and whose household in Steinbach consisted of a mother with young children and a infirm grandfather, C.W. Loewen, young C.T. was responsible for numerous household chores. He split wood, took care of the cow and did other chores everyday after school.¹⁴

School, moreover, seemed to hold little meaning for him. Three stories suggest that C.T. did not enjoy the classroom or do well in it. In one account a fellow student remembered an exchange between Cornelius and teacher G. E. Kornelsen at spring *Pruefung*, the public oral examination time when parents came to school to watch their children being tested. Apparently the teacher was pleasantly surprised when young Cornelius raised his hand in response to one of his questions, "thinking that at last the boy was showing an interest." "But," the narrator explains, "far from having an answer to the question, young C.T. was only concerned about a noise he had heard at the other end of the building where the stable was located." The story teller suggests that the reason Kornelsen had difficulty teaching Cornelius anything was "perhaps [because] his mind was filled with more practical things."¹⁵ Another Steinbacher recalled that C.T. and fellow student A. A. Reimer spent some winters in the bush at a sawmill their fathers owned jointly. As boys of around ten years old they were given school instruction in the morning and then cut boards under teacher supervision in the afternoon, often severely testing the patience of the teacher.¹⁶ A third source recalls seeing, in schoolteacher G. E. Kornelsen's records, a *Strafliste* (a punishment list), in which C.T.'s name appears. He was apparently the recipient of corporal punishment as a result of *pludern*, that is, talking in class.¹⁷

C.T., it seems, was less interested in school than in household or economic affairs. As his younger brothers grew, Cornelius was able to leave the family household and accompany father to the family's sawmill interest in the forests at Pinehill, to the southeast of Steinbach. Tragic events requiring readjustments in the Loewen household catapulted C.T. even further into business. C.T.'s sister Elisabeth

recalls the events. She remembered that in 1902 her father and young C.T. had taken the family's steamer and thresher out to custom thresh and did not return to Steinbach until November. Shortly after their return, the family was preparing to butcher pigs when suddenly one evening mother became quite ill. C.T. traveled eleven kilometers by horse and buggy to fetch the doctor in the cold and dark. The local lay doctor, Johann Warkentin, spent the night tending to mother, but she died the next morning. Elisabeth writes that her mother's death was heart breaking for all the family. But life had to go on, the family butchered the pigs the following week and after Christmas father, C.B. Loewen, left for the sawmill once again. But life did not return to normal. In June 1903 C.B. remarried to Maria Dueck Reimer of Blumenort, gave up the sawmill enterprise to C.T. and began to focus solely on farming. He now became a community man, living within the Steinbach district, and even followed local custom by taking his new wife to visit neighbours during the week.¹⁸ C.T. at age twenty-one had become an independent entrepreneur.

Stories about the period leading up to the purchase of the sawmill describe C.T.'s life as unsettled and even reckless, testimony in part to ideas that pre-industrial youth often faced times of social *laissez-faire*.¹⁹ Stepmother Maria's daughter, Maria from a previous marriage, remembered her mother weeping many times as she adjusted to eight step-children, with C.T., the oldest, only nine years younger than she was. The five Loewen boys, ages eight to twenty, gained a reputation for shooting guns, both on Main Street to frighten horses and in the house to see how many times the bullet would ricochet off the walls, thereby understandably scaring their step-mother.²⁰ It is true that in Mennonite Steinbach at the time, young men were expected to sow their wild oats, drinking, smoking, card-playing and even owning guns, none of which would have been permissible for a church member. But they were activities that could be put down to the follies of youth among unbaptized young men. It was an acceptance rooted in the quiet assurance that the youths would be transformed into 'men' at around age twenty-one. At this age young men almost inevitably entered into baptism, courtship and then marriage within a very short time, sometimes within just a few weeks. In youth, then, a young man was given time to enjoy a certain amount of freedom and male camaraderie before becoming a man, baptized, married and, usually ten months or so later, a father and breadwinner.

In one way C.T. was an exception to this Mennonite rule. Though he purchased his father's sawmill interests when he was twenty one and was baptized at age twenty-two into the Kleine Gemeinde church of his parents and grandparents, he did not marry shortly thereafter.²¹ In fact, he did not marry until 1914 when he turned thirty-one. Instead he

spent the nine years following his baptism in establishing his business. The reason he did not marry can be debated for it seems C.T. was interested in getting married. As a young man, he is said to have been in love with Anna H. W. Reimer, a daughter of the Reimer merchant elite family of Steinbach. A general consensus among community members recalls that this union did not take place because C.T. was not considered to be “good enough” for Anna.²² Some acquaintances suggest that Anna’s brothers, for one, considered C.T. without sufficient finances or status to marry Anna. Others asserted that it was C.T.’s unsettled and adventurous character that continued after his baptism that convinced the Reimer brothers that C.T. was an unsuitable partner for their sister Anna.²³ For whatever reason, marriage did not immediately follow C.T.’s baptism.²⁴ Perhaps it was his personality or his social circumstance, but early signs pointed to the development of a self-made, independent man in communitarian Steinbach.

Business

Throughout his 20s as a bachelor and for the rest of his life, C.T.’s identity was intimately tied up with his work in building a town-based lumberyard and millwork and his passion for that work. In the pages of the *Steinbach Post*, the local weekly German-language newspaper, C.T. Loewen was regularly referred to as “our Lumberman” regardless of whether the columnist was noting the birth of a child or the installation of a new piece of machinery in the woodworking factory. It was a designation that suggested that in the community C.T. was first and foremost defined by his work.²⁵

C.T.’s work ethic during this period is emphasized by all who knew him. His daughter Mary recalled that on one occasion before C.T. was married he visited the doctor because he couldn’t pick up a fork without shaking and was told to stop doing “the work of five men.”²⁶ His obituary describes him as a man who was “never content until he had exhausted all the possibilities of everything he set his hand to.”²⁷ A booklet celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of C.T. Loewen and Sons expanded on this theme by stating that people remembered C.T. for his drive, “his willingness to try things he or others had never tried before,” and for his strong belief that “the one and only way you could determine whether a given course of action would work, was by trying it.”²⁸ C.T. employed this proactive mantra even in the financially difficult times of the late 1920s and the 1930s. A trip C.T. took east into Ontario during the early 1920s, resulting in his decision to begin a bee-keeping supplies factory, his hiring of local inventor Isaac Plett to design an improved new waxing procedure, his national distribution

of a beekeeper's catalogue in 1936, not to mention his decision to paint the storefront on Main Street during the worst years of the Depression, all point to an inveterate optimism.²⁹ C.T. took his position in the community seriously.

As a businessman, C.T. also cultivated a reputation of generosity, one that is recalled particularly by past employees. One employee recalled that C.T. often hired one or two people more than he actually needed in order to provide work for those who needed and wanted it.³⁰ Nora Rieger, C.T.'s bookkeeper from 1937 to 1945, recalls C.T. employing a man who had served a prison term.³¹ Others remember him moving employees from position to position, giving them a second and even third chance.³² Two men who worked for him during the 1930s in order to pay off debts that their father C.B. had incurred, recalled that C.T. helped them build their first houses. He instructed them to start the construction by borrowing materials from his lumberyard and then work to pay them off later.³³

While C.T.'s generosity as an employer is well documented, previous employees also emphasized another side; he could make demands on his workers. C.T. was not a "soft touch" and he is said to have expected all his employees to work hard. Employee Ralph Guenther, who started as an accountant at C.T. Loewen's lumberyard in 1950, remembers that C.T. told employees that they were not only working to earn a dollar a day for themselves, they also needed to earn a dollar for C.T.³⁴ Another employee, William Reimer, recalled that C.T. corrected employees easily and that "you knew who was boss." When William was driving truck for C.T. in the 1930s he asked for a heater to be installed in the truck, only to be rebuked for being a "sissy." Reimer notes that eventually C.T. did break down and install a heater.³⁵

C.T.'s status was also underscored by those who remembered him as an excellent judge of character. His two managers – Frank Friesen, foreman of the wood products factory, and Jonas Friesen, in charge of the lumber store – particularly are remembered as extremely competent employees. Nora Rieger noted that C.T. left much of the office work to Frank Friesen, the brother of C.T.'s wife Helen, and Jonas Friesen (no relation to Frank). The presence of these two men, Nora suggested, allowed C.T. great latitude. Though she saw him at work every day he much preferred to be outside in the lumberyard itself, or even to go out debt collecting.³⁶ Employee and nephew Dave Loewen, among others, has noted that C.T. was not a person for detail.³⁷ In this respect Frank Friesen is often described in contrast to C.T. Frank was a perfectionist while C.T. was a lover of action and adventure, a man with big vision, an entrepreneur willing to take risks and wise enough to allow Frank and Jonas to run things.³⁸ C.T. opened the doors of his Main Street business every morning before the employees arrived,

but the day-to-day running of the business was largely in the hands of his managers.³⁹ C.T. recognized this himself and emphasized in a 1951 *Carillon News* interview that “of course, all of this [the business success] would not have been possible without competent help.”⁴⁰

C.T. was not just a pragmatist; he also had ways of building rapport with his employees. In the early 1940s he purchased a lumberyard in Rosenort, Manitoba and reportedly not so much because he wanted it, but because a widow needed to sell it. C.T. offered both of his managers, Frank Friesen and Jonas Friesen, as well as Nora Rieger, his bookkeeper, and another employee shares in this business. According to one source, individual investments of \$500 later yielded returns of upwards of \$10,000 and even allowed one employee to leave Loewen’s and purchase a competing enterprise.⁴¹ The consensus in the community was that C.T. was gracious and encouraged others to make their mark.⁴²

C.T.’s work defined him. He worked hard and his success afforded him the opportunity to delegate much of the inside store and factory work to his employees. This left C.T. free to do the things he enjoyed most. But his passion was all work-related for C.T. did not have the aptitude for leisure that his sons would be able to display. Rather he was drawn to the outdoor, physical, action-and adventure-packed sawmill camps of the lumber industry. He would even rather travel the countryside, to go debt-collecting in the 1930s than remain in the office.⁴³ Daughter-in-law Helen (son George’s wife) remembers that during the 1940s, when he was in his sixties, C.T. would come to visit the lumber camps for up to two weeks at a time, not even bothering to keep up the image by bringing a change of clothes. And during those visits he was involved. He readily questioned why certain tasks at the mill were taking so long or could not be done. Occasionally he suggested unconventional remedies, as he did one time when, to start the engine of a truck in extreme cold he instructed employees to start a fire under it. When neither oil nor gasoline sufficiently warmed the truck, he called for the use of “high-test” gas that, unfortunately, made for such a fire it ruined the truck. C.T. reportedly shrugged off the accident, declaring that it was good that at least they had tried something!⁴⁴

After suffering his first heart attack in 1948, C.T. seems to have become more nostalgic and reflective. Nephew and long-term company sales representative Dave Loewen remembers that one day C.T. surprised him by asking to come along on a sales trip that would take them to Pine Falls in eastern Manitoba and then to Kenora and Fort Frances, in northwestern Ontario. At one point on their trip, Dave noticed that C.T. was holding his hand to his chest in pain; when Dave suggested they turn back C.T. declared that his pills would eventually do their work and that they should go on and get the work done. After

visiting the three towns, Dave and C.T. stayed overnight at a little hotel in Piney in southeastern Manitoba and then traveled back to Steinbach through the forests of Sandilands and Woodridge. Knowing the road and not being in any hurry, C.T. asked Dave to stop at a particular point along the way so they could visit the site of C.T.'s first sawmill. Dave recalls that C.T. became very excited and realized then that the visit to this spot had been in C.T.'s plan all along.⁴⁵ In 1951 Steinbach's *Carillon News* interviewed C.T. and the elderly lumberman concluded that it had not been easy to build a large business. "But looking back," said C.T., "every minute of it has been enjoyable, particularly the instances when there were obstacles to overcome, and when such instances were brought to a successful conclusion."⁴⁶ As his health failed, C.T. became ever more nostalgic about his lifelong work. This was a man who defined himself by his work.

Family

Useful to a description of C.T. is Parr's observation of an "inherent instability in identities" in the life of Daniel Knechtel, "that being simultaneously a worker, a Baptist, and a father, one is never solely or systematically any of these."⁴⁷ During his lifetime C.T. was never just a businessman but also a husband and a father, as well as a church member and a civic leader.

C.T. and Helena's relationship appears to have had an uncertain beginning before developing into a close bond during the course of their marriage. Interviewed family and friends remembered that C.T. stood up Helena on their wedding day at least once, maybe even two times.⁴⁸ Helena was nine years younger than C.T. and though she was known as a quiet woman several interviewees thought that perhaps it was she who had pursued him and not the other way around.⁴⁹ Interviewees were quick to assert that after this difficult beginning theirs was a good marriage. Daughter Mary describes Helena as "gentle," "kind," and "very devout." Mary writes that her mother was a good homemaker who had a large garden that she taught her children to tend. Mary also asserts that her mother, who gave birth to thirteen children but lost six of them in infancy, was able to accept the loss of her children through her faith in God, which prompted her to pray that "if life became too hard for the child, God would take it home."⁵⁰

This picture of Helena contrasts somewhat with others' representations of her. Most notably, family members remember that the loss of six children devastated her, with the loss of the first two being especially hard. Daughter Elvira recalls one of her sisters-in-law telling her that she had talked to Helena about this once:

Father would go out for the day and what have you, and then in the evening he would come back from the bush and mother would have gone out to sit on the steps, and she could not go into the house because the crib was empty. Until Dad would come home and then they would go into the house together.⁵¹

Elvira speaks openly about her mother's ill health and her father's response to this. As she saw it, C.T. did not look down on weakness but understood that it meant the person needed to be protected. And so, Elvira explains, C.T. always hired a maid for Helena and tried to make sure she would not have to worry. Elvira remembers that her father told her if she tired of living at home, she could just leave as long as she told them where she was so that mother wouldn't worry: "it was always mother--so that Mother will not worry."⁵² When Helena died at age 58 in 1950 she had been married to C.T. for more than 36 years. Daughter-in-law Helen remembers the tears in C.T.'s eyes at Helena's deathbed.

For a discussion of C.T. as a father, Rotundo's description of the *self-made man* as father is apropos. Such a man was still the head of the household with the decision-making powers and strongly-felt responsibilities of supporting it financially, disciplining the children and using his influence to get his sons started in the family business.⁵³ He was also a moral teacher supplementing the wife's role in this educational process with religious instruction and teaching "values governing work, achievement, and property...the importance of perseverance and thrift, of diligence and punctuality, of industry and ambition"⁵⁴ Finally, he also loved and cherished his children, hoping for a close friendship as they matured. Interviews with C.T.'s children identify many of these values and characteristics in their father.

Mary, C.T.'s eldest daughter, remembers her father as a devout man who brought his children to pray together when their mother was ill in hospital in Winnipeg. She attests to his position as the head of the household to whom their mother was submissive, and to his role as the spiritual head as he led devotional readings every morning before breakfast. She also notes that he participated in weekly Bible studies that were sometimes held at the Loewens' home, and that he took local children to Sunday School on his sleigh.⁵⁵ Elvira offers a somewhat different picture of her father. She too recalls the time they prayed for their ailing mother, but does not remember him as an especially pious man. She tells of the time he was meant to close a joint church service and told Helena beforehand that he intended to invite the congregation to sing "God Save the King"⁵⁶—an anathema to most pacifist Mennonite worshippers. It seems that while this would have shocked both Helena and Mary, it greatly amused C.T. and Elvira.

Mary and Elvira both remember their father's wisdom similarly, wisdom that would herald the self-made man. Daughter Elvira recalls C.T.'s "three laws": you can't say I can't, you can't complain, and you must pay the consequences if you say no to trying something. C.T. employed these rules at home as much as at work, and his children as well as outside observers recognized that C.T. let his children learn the lessons of life by trial and error. There was a certain, surprising freedom to being a son or daughter of C.T. One friend of C.T.'s daughter Anna remembers vividly the time that C.T. allowed Anna to drive herself and her friend Amanda to DVBS (Daily Vacation Bible School) across town, even though she had never driven before.⁵⁷ Elvira illustrates how he put his rules into practice with her story of his advice about driving:

Just take responsibility for your actions. If you get stopped by a cop for speeding, don't give excuses, just pay the penalty. There's a law that says that. But it's not a sin. You see, so often, everything would be made religious. My father would say, Nah, this is a law that gets changed by people. But he said, 'If you get stopped by a cop, make sure it's not for driving too slowly!'⁵⁸

Mary recalls C.T.'s appreciation for his children's attempts to try something new. Once, when it was second son George's turn to milk the family cow, George made a deal with a Mr. Thiessen to exchange the cow for a daily supply of milk for the Loewen family. According to Mary, C.T. liked the innovative plan and thought it time to get rid of the cow anyway, "as it no longer fitted into mid-town."⁵⁹

While it was work that defined C.T.'s identity, he was also the head of a household, the breadwinner, a protector (particularly of wife Helena) and an educator of his children. It was a role he took very seriously, teaching them to think independently, act and then accept the consequences of those actions. He also developed good relationships with his children as they grew up. The 1951 *Carillon News* article on C.T. Loewen noted that failing health had forced him at age 69 to the sidelines. Nevertheless, the reporter wrote, the three sons who now ran the business still regarded the advice of their father as law: "There is a fine father-son relationship that could be the envy of many a father."⁶⁰ His daughters equally remember a man who, in Elvira's words, was "absolutely the wisest man I have ever known...and not just because he was my father. He knew human nature, he knew he had [little] formal education, but he had a lot of wisdom. And he applied it." C.T. was not only a lumberman, he lived within a family as a husband and a father.

Community and Church

Beyond the walls of C.T.'s home and business was the growing service center of Steinbach, Manitoba. C.T.'s participation in the life and growth of this community is again reminiscent of other self-made men. Parr observes that such men were philanthropists whose religious convictions provided a sense of manly work that "extended to good works."⁶¹ Van Die similarly observes such men participating in the civic and religious life, including financial contributions to church and college buildings.⁶² C.T. served on Steinbach's "village committee" for more than a decade, was president of the village's first telephone system, fire chief, and chair of the Victory Bonds committee during the Second World War. He was the first president of the Rest Haven senior citizens' home, a venture undertaken by his *Kleine Gemeinde* Church. He was also a member of the planning board for the Steinbach Tabernacle, a town-based hall geared for large inter-church gatherings, especially extended religious revival meetings, and he was one of four men who started the inter-denominational Red Rock Lake Bible Camp, an evangelically oriented youth camp located in Manitoba's Whiteshell Provincial Park. He was even personally responsible for the first board sidewalk in Steinbach.⁶³

The extent and the nature of C.T.'s involvement in Steinbach civic life are both significant. C.T.'s position as a successful businessman afforded him opportunities to participate in civic affairs and he embraced these opportunities. As fire chief of Steinbach's volunteer fire brigade, as a member of the "village committee," Steinbach's governing council until its incorporation as a town in 1947, and in undertaking the sidewalk project, C.T. demonstrated his belief in community and in "progress." The establishment of the Rest Haven seniors' home was evidence of a fundamental shift in Steinbach society; older family members no longer needed to be left to age within the family household.

The overtly religious projects – the Tabernacle, and the Red Rock Bible Camp – are also illustrative of new influences and interests in Steinbach. Both are examples of a new evangelical and individualistic culture that was taking hold in Steinbach in the 1940s. C.T.'s grandfather and father, C. W. and C.B. Loewen respectively, had in their day attended *Bruderschaft* meetings where community concerns were raised, immoral behavior was admonished and the "world" was kept at bay. C.T. also had attended these meetings in his early adulthood and taken admonitions regarding his personal life.⁶⁴ However, by the 1940s C.T. was undergoing a religious reorientation. His support for the Tabernacle project suggested an appreciation for personal salvation, evidenced by an emotional religious rebirth experience. One local

history suggests that the Tabernacle held “fond memories [for many] as the place where they met God in a new way.”⁶⁵ This was the language of a personal relationship with God that would have been foreign to a member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Red Rock Bible Camp was founded on similar principles with similar hopes. In this instance, though, the focus was on youth and the hope was that the message of personal salvation and personal morality would reach Steinbach’s teenagers long before they became baptized members of the church.

One employee of C.T. Loewen points out that C.T. was not an exception in his community service; rather, it was customary for leading businessmen of Steinbach, with time and means, to fill these important positions and support innovative ideas.⁶⁶ Certainly a number of other men were equally involved in the community’s organizations and institutions. Yet a report on C.T. and P.T. Loewen, the “two partially paralyzed brothers,” (C.T. was left paralyzed following a stroke in December 1951 while his brother Peter T. Loewen suffered a paralyzing stroke in December 1952), in a 1952 issue of the *Carillon News*, reflected that “the name ‘Loewen’ symbolizes wholehearted generosity towards fellow-men which has, providentially, been transplanted from father to son, of which we’re glad.”⁶⁷

Perhaps the generosity spoken of here extends beyond committees and sidewalks. Stories of C.T.’s generosity abound. One account by Steinbach’s provincial representative, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Jim Penner, recalls his own father going on a trip with C.T. to collect overdue debts; Penner was impressed that C.T. took six bags of flour along to give to those who couldn’t afford to pay their bill.⁶⁸ Nora Rieger remembers that C.T. would come into the store when somebody he knew needed to go to Winnipeg for a doctor’s appointment; he would ask manager Jonas Friesen if there was anything he, C.T., could do in Winnipeg for the firm, making it appear as if he had a “real” reason to go. The narrators concluded that C.T. was modest in his generosity, “hiding his light under a bushel.” This biblical reference suggests that, like Parr’s Knechtel, and Van Die’s Colby, C.T. was an example of “Christian manhood,” a “Christian businessman.”⁶⁹

C.T.’s position in the *Kleine Gemeinde* church he had joined as a young man is a story of irony. This progressive man remained loyal to the old communitarian church even after most of Steinbach’s businessmen had gravitated to the more evangelistic *Bruderthaler* Mennonite church. C.T.’s youngest daughter Elvira describes him as having “a spirit that was just so big, and so large, and so exuberant that it couldn’t be contained by [a] straitjacket.” Several stories suggest that C.T. sought and found a certain independence from the church while remaining an active member.⁷⁰ His eldest daughter Mary learned to

play the piano as a young girl and when C.T. was taken to task for this act of worldliness at a *Bruderschaft* meeting, he apparently replied that one day the church, which did not allow musical instruments, would acquire a piano and he was just preparing a player for that time.⁷¹ C.T. was also criticized for building a large and ostentatious house, one with oak doors and railings, and judged to be an extravagance unsuitable for a follower of Christ and the simple life that he demanded of his church. Again C.T. had an answer, responding that he didn't want to have to build two houses and since his boys were so boisterous he wanted to build something solid which could stand up to their antics. The story goes that the boys did in fact manage to break one of those doors. And Mary did become a pianist in the church.⁷²

C.T. had definite opinions on these issues, though some family members suspect that he only stated them when he was asked to, that is, in situations like the *Bruderschaft* meetings. His daughter-in-law Helen felt that he did not pursue divisive issues because he did not want the community to be divided.⁷³ Yet it does seem that the independent thinking that he attempted to instill in his children was an important part of his own religious identity. This is surprising to those who remember or study the conservative *Kleine Gemeinde*. It leads C.T.'s daughter Elvira to contemplate why her father was not ousted from the church. One previous employee remembers C.T.'s contributions to the church and asserts that "if you had money, it talked."⁷⁴ Elvira also thinks that her father's generous giving allowed him a certain freedom. She also emphasizes his sensitivity to peoples' needs and beliefs, which perhaps allowed him a continued place in the religious community. He told his children, "don't be too hard on the ministers,...they are constrained by other people who are conservative, because it's a large conference." Elvira remembers that "he could handle the conservative element as well as the other element. And he respected them. So if he respected them, why would they ask him to leave?"⁷⁵ C.T. found a way to live within this conservative church community; the progressive *Bruderthaler* church would not lure him as it did many progressive businessmen. In an ironic way, his own confidence allowed him to feel unrestrained by the conservative and communitarian teachings of the old *Kleine Gemeinde*.

Conclusion

As a boy, C.T. did the farm chores and muddled through school. As a youth he enjoyed a period of sometime raucous social freedom, but he also discovered the bush and the lumber industry in which he worked for more than forty years. Work, marriage, fatherhood, civic

and church responsibilities were the components of adult masculinity and they occupied much of C.T.'s life.

C.T.'s last ten years, spent in illness and infirmity, however, also holds stories of independence of thought and unconventional behaviour. C.T.'s time as the self-made man, focused on work, civic responsibility and independence, came to an abrupt end in November 1951 when he suffered a heart attack followed a few days later by a stroke. C.T. was paralyzed on one side and was bedridden for the remaining nine years of his life. C.T.'s frustration during this last decade illustrates further the extent to which he had been a self-made man in his adult life. Family members and friends recall C.T.'s frustration with his condition, noting that he was at times difficult, even forceful.⁷⁶ A newspaper article for which C.T. was interviewed only weeks before his debilitating stroke, described C.T. as an "energetic businessman." It is no surprise, then, that a decade spent in and out of his own home, the Steinbach hospital, and the Rest Haven home, having to be transported on a stretcher to view the renovated C.T. Loewen & Sons store, would frustrate such a man. His obituary described him as "a man of phenomenal energy, unlimited vision, and irrepressible drive," noting that a "crippling stroke" had "put an end to his tremendous activity."⁷⁷

C.T. was defined by his work. He loved lumber and winters in the bush. He spent holidays in B.C. looking at sawmills and stopped on the side of the road in Minnesota to have a photo taken with Paul Bunyan.⁷⁸ He was "our Lumberman" to the people of Steinbach, one who claimed that "every minute of [work] had been enjoyable." Yet he was also a husband, a father, a community leader, and a church member. All these roles further defined him. He was Rotundo's *self-made man*, resembled Parr's Daniel Knechtel and Van Die's Charles Colby. He, too, saw good works inspired by faith as a natural extension of his manly responsibility to provide and protect.

C.T. has been described as a man of action, a real man, a man of courage, faith, and enterprise.⁷⁹ Being a man entailed financially providing for one's family, teaching one's children about a world that was unknown to women and lesser men, but also about participating in their religious and moral instruction. Being a man meant taking a leadership role – in the home, in a marriage and, graced by success in business, it also meant taking on responsibilities in the community. But most of all, being a man was about work. Boys played, youths sowed wild oats, women cared, nurtured, and lived in domestic spheres and female networks, but men "worked". For C.T. it was a life that carried an exuberant claim; life was adventurous, action-filled, rewarding and enjoyable "every minute." It was the reward of a self-made man.

Appendix

“Memories of C.T. Loewen” by Al Reimer, University of Winnipeg

My memories of C.T. Loewen go back to the 1930s and '40s when I was growing up in Steinbach. Cornie, the youngest son, and I were classmates at school and close friends. Cornie, incidentally, had much of his father's sparkling personality and creative business sense, as he proved abundantly when he later took over the larger part of the family business.. As an adolescent I also worked at the C.T. Loewen Lumberyard one summer and had the opportunity to observe C.T. at close range almost daily, although he was by that time considered to be more or less retired.] C.T. Loewen was small in stature but, like Napoleon, he loomed large as a magnetic presence. Even when he looked up at you, you had the feeling that his eyes—alert and penetrating—were always on a level with your own. He usually wore casual pants, a tieless shirt and broad suspenders. He always spoke assertively, but with a curious sing-songy intonation. His Low German compelled you to listen because he gave an odd enunciation to certain words and vowels, as though he were delivering a special lecture and didn't want you to miss a single word. His manner, however, was friendly and unaffected. He spoke to you not as the boss he was but as though you were his equal. He once directed me, after a heavy rain, in the digging of a run-off trench in the loading area between the back of the store and the lumber piles. It was an experience I have never forgotten because, although a minor task, he approached it with a thoroughness and energetic focus such as I had never been exposed to before. I tried to follow C.T.'s many minute instructions with scrupulous care and when he finally declared that the job was finished and that I had done it just right, I felt so elated I couldn't keep the grin from my face as I walked back to the lumber piles to resume my work there.⁸⁰

Notes

- ¹ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, Frank Reimer, Nora Rieger, Wilbert Loewen interviews, C.T. Loewen Oral History Project, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB. All interviews cited in this article are from this collection at the Mennonite Heritage Centre.
- ² Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 7.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁴ Marguerite Van Die, “A ‘Christian Businessman’ in the Eastern Townships: The Convergence of Precept and Practice in Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Gender Construction,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 10 (1999), 125.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

- ⁶ *Carillon News*, 28 October 1960.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁸ Rotundo, 167.
- ⁹ Joy Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 140.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 140.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 140-141.
- ¹³ Joseph Kett, "Growing Up in Rural New England, 1800-1840," *Growing Up in America: Historical Experiences*, ed. Harvey J. Graff, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 177.
- ¹⁴ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, "Cornelius Bartel Loewen (1863-1928)," *Preservings* Part One 9 (December 1996), 46.
- ¹⁵ "Oldest Resident Recalls Many Steinbach Changes," *Carillon News*, September 16, 1960, 2:2-3.
- ¹⁶ Levina Reimer, "Aganetha Barkman Reimer 1859-1955," *Preservings* 17 (2000), 102.
- ¹⁷ Story told by Royden Loewen.
- ¹⁸ Elisabeth Loewen Giesbrecht, 46.
- ¹⁹ Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 35.
- ²⁰ Lorne Rempel interview, author files.
- ²¹ "Todes Bericht" (C.T. Loewen obituary), *Christlicher Familienfreund*, 4 November 1960, 4-5.
- ²² Anne Hildebrand Loewen, Elvira Loewen Toews, Helen Barkman Loewen, Amanda Reimer interviews, author files.
- ²³ Elvira Loewen Toews interview, author files. Helen Unger Loewen remembered that even when married at thirty-one C.T. was not baptized and that he only became a Christian after the deaths of his first two children. This appears, however, to be a description of C.T.'s younger brother, Jacob T. Loewen.
- ²⁴ Anna H. W. Reimer remained a spinster who, as a middle-aged woman, suffered a tragic car accident that left her mentally handicapped for the remainder of her life *Steinbach Post*, 24 September 1924, 6.
- ²⁵ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 140-141.
- ²⁶ Mary Loewen Hoepfner interview, author files.
- ²⁷ "'C.T.' Leaves Deep Mark on Steinbach," *Carillon News*, 28 October 1960, 1.
- ²⁸ "75th Anniversary Flashback."
- ²⁹ These events are described in greater detail in Chapter 3: From Bush Camp to Small-Town Business, in the thesis from which this article (Chapter 4 in the thesis) is adapted, Rachel Mills, "Gender, Ethnicity, and Religion in the making of Entrepreneurship: The Loewen Lumber Businessmen of Steinbach, Manitoba, 1877-1985," (M. A. Thesis, Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg, 2003).
- ³⁰ Ernie Toews interview, author files.
- ³¹ Nora Rieger interview, author files.
- ³² Anne Hildebrand Loewen, Ralph Guenther interviews, author files.
- ³³ William Reimer, Ernie Toews interviews, author files.
- ³⁴ Ralph Guenther interview, author files.
- ³⁵ William Reimer interview, author files.
- ³⁶ Nora Rieger interview, author files.
- ³⁷ Dave Loewen interview, author files.
- ³⁸ Corinne and Frank Klassen, Wilbert Loewen, Ralph Guenther interviews, author files.
- ³⁹ Dave Loewen interview, author files.
- ⁴⁰ "Hard Work & Spunk Needed For Success Says Veteran Businessman," *Carillon News*, 23 November 1951, 3.

- ⁴¹ Nora Rieger interview, author files. Nora was also offered the opportunity to buy a \$500 share, but she did not want to spend that much money. She noted in the interview that she had “missed her chance!”
- ⁴² This finding again echoes Parr’s discussion of Daniel Knechtel’s pride in employees who left his “machine room...to take charge of factories... and run them successfully. Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 141.
- ⁴³ Nora Rieger interview, author files.
- ⁴⁴ Helen Barkman Loewen, Lorne Rempel interviews, author files.
- ⁴⁵ Dave Loewen interview, author files.
- ⁴⁶ “Hard Work & Spunk Needed” *Carillon News*, 23 November 1951, 3.
- ⁴⁷ Joy Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” *Canadian Historical Review* 76 (September 1995), 361.
- ⁴⁸ Herman Loewen, Elvira Loewen Toews interviews, author files. Herman Loewen, C.T.’s nephew, remembers that C.T. wanted to back out, but his brothers made sure he went through with his commitment. Elvira Toews, C.T.’s daughter, says that C.T. stood her mother up twice.
- ⁴⁹ Helen Unger Loewen, Amanda Reimer interviews, author files.
- ⁵⁰ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, “‘C.T.’ Loewen 1882-1960, Steinbach,” *Preservings*, 17 (December 2000): 116.
- ⁵¹ Elvira Loewen Toews interview, author files.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Rotundo, 26.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 27.
- ⁵⁵ Mary Loewen Hoepfner interview, author files.
- ⁵⁶ Elvira Loewen Toews interview, author files.
- ⁵⁷ Amanda Reimer interview, author files.
- ⁵⁸ Elvira Loewen Toews interview, author files.
- ⁵⁹ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, 114-115.
- ⁶⁰ “Hard Work & Spunk,” *Carillon News*, 23 November 1951, 3.
- ⁶¹ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 141.
- ⁶² Van Die, 115, 120.
- ⁶³ Much of this community involvement is noted in C.T.’s obituary in the *Carillon News*, “‘C.T.’ Leaves Deep Mark on Steinbach,” 28 October 1960, 1.
- ⁶⁴ See the full discussion of these criticisms below.
- ⁶⁵ Abe Warkentin, ed., *Reflections on our Heritage: A History of Steinbach and the R. M. of Hanover from 1874*, (Steinbach: Derksen Printers Ltd., 1971), 212.
- ⁶⁶ Ernie Toews interview, author files.
- ⁶⁷ *Carillon News*, 5 December 1952, 1; 7 November 1952, 4.
- ⁶⁸ “Provencher residents honored with medals,” *Carillon News*, 14 November 2002, 2A.
- ⁶⁹ Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners*, 140, Van Die (from the title of her article).
- ⁷⁰ Elvira Loewen Toews interview, author files.
- ⁷¹ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, Lorne Rempel interviews, author files.
- ⁷² Lorne Rempel interview, author files.
- ⁷³ Helen Barkman Loewen interview, author files.
- ⁷⁴ William Reimer interview, author files.
- ⁷⁵ Elvira Loewen Toews interview, author files.
- ⁷⁶ Elvira Loewen Toews, Wilbert Loewen, Ralph Guenther interviews, author files.
- ⁷⁷ “‘C.T.’ Leaves Deep Mark on Steinbach,” *Carillon News*, 28 October 1960, 1.
- ⁷⁸ Mary Loewen Hoepfner interview, author files.
- ⁷⁹ Mary Loewen Hoepfner, Frank Reimer, Wilbert Loewen interviews, author files.
- ⁸⁰ Al Reimer, correspondence to Royden Loewen, 19 February 2004