Two Governments, a Railway and a Church: The Old Colony Mennonite Relocation to Central British Columbia in the 1940s

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In the spring of 1940, ten Old Colony Mennonite families from their rural community south of Swift Current, Saskatchewan, boarded a train that would take them to Burns Lake, a small town in central British Columbia. Upon arrival, the group traveled some sixty five kilometers to the south, where they began creating a new agricultural settlement. These pioneers were joined a month later by fourteen additional families from the Hague-Osler Mennonite community, north of Saskatoon. A move by conservative Mennonite families into the boreal forest was not unusual, but what distinguishes this movement is that the Governments of Saskatchewan and British Columbia, and the Canadian National Railway (CN), cooperated to enable these families to begin new lives in central BC. This paper, written largely from the perspective of the CN and the Saskatchewan Department of Relief (because its documents have been preserved), analyzes the

circumstances that led to the migration, describes the process of assisted settlement, and explains why most families ultimately departed. It demonstrates that a common faith, while playing a role in the early success of the venture, was not enough to sustain this isolated settlement as the pressures of modernization intruded on the community.

Scholars have well documented the long and varied history of Mennonite migration, whether it was the original migration from Europe to the Americas, from Canada to Latin America, or within Canada. Over the centuries, the reasons behind the near constant movement of Mennonites from place to place have ranged from persecution and the desire for religious freedom, emergent differences in theology, concerns about the intrusion of government, and the need for additional land upon which to develop agricultural enterprises.[1] In the early 1940s, provincial relief officials working in collaboration with the CN's colonization department planned a small movement of landless Old Colony Mennonites in Saskatchewan to BC. This type of government-facilitated relocation is unprecedented in the history of Mennonite migration and as such it is an experience that should be investigated.

Initial Efforts

Conditions in Saskatchewan were difficult during the 1930s as widespread drought and low commodity prices had taken a toll. During this period, the province had been active in promoting the resettlement of farmers and landless agricultural workers from drought-stricken areas, as well as city residents with agricultural experience, on lands in the north.[2] By the end of the decade, however, large blocks of suitable land within the province no longer existed, and growing numbers of Mennonites, living in insular communities that the government regarded as "seriously overpopulated," had become a "relief problem."[3] In the fall of 1939, the Saskatchewan government asked the CN for "suggestions as to what might be done to remove … families which then appeared to be permanently on relief, with no hope of rehabilitation near their own homes."[4] According to the government, there were between four and five hundred Mennonite families who should be resettled. The CN took an active role in the development of a scheme that ultimately led to the movement of twenty-five families in 1940. This first step was, however, regarded

as an "experiment," the success of which would determine future efforts.[5]

Although there was a federal plan whereby farmers from Saskatchewan could be resettled in other provinces if supported by the Saskatchewan government, BC did not participate. In early 1938, the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Terrace, BC, wrote to the Premier asking why, if he was "in favour of increased population," was BC not supporting the movement of Saskatchewan settlers to the province?[6] The MLA continued: "It looks like the best opportunity we ever had of getting experienced farmers with all required stock and equipment and a two year guarantee for support from Saskatchewan." The first discussions regarding a specific movement of Mennonite settlers apparently took place in 1939 when J.G. Taggart, the Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, sent a memo to K.C. MacDonald, his BC counterpart. The proposed arrangement outlined the responsibilities of both governments, the CN, and the Mennonite community.[7] The Saskatchewan government would guarantee relief for a period of three years, the BC government would provide "roads and social services in line with those available in other settlements similarly situated," the CN would "actively supervise, guide, and manage settlement," and the Mennonites would "provide their own household effects, livestock, [and] implements."[8] McDonald sent the memo to the BC Premier, T.D. Pattullo, on November 27, 1939. One day later, Pattullo wrote: "I understand that these Mennonites object to military service, and I do not think we should encourage anyone to come into this province who is not prepared to fight."[9] When asked again about the issue three months later, Pattullo tersely responded:

> I thought that my views had already been made clear. I am not in favour, nor will I encourage any settlement in this Province of people who are opposed to fighting for the country. ... In addition to this particular sect, I am opposed to group settlement generally. It makes assimilation very difficult; in fact, they very seldom completely assimilate.[10]

It would seem that despite the desires of Boards of Trade and Farmers' Institutes in central BC, no one at the provincial level was willing to implement resettlement as a potential solution to the increasing agricultural development within the central part of the province.

Little documentation of this initial effort remains. One additional brief reference in a letter, dated March 13, 1940, alludes

to an effort last year "to move the Mennonites to British Columbia which apparently fell through."[11] The proposal of 1939 had generated sufficient interest, at least within the Old Colony community, that three of their members had traveled to inspect available land south of Burns Lake with the expectation that a move would soon take place. Despite the BC Premier's lack of support, the Mennonites remained committed to leaving Saskatchewan. A short report written for the Saskatchewan Director of Relief gave further details on the efforts of the Mennonites. A representative from the Osler community, Bishop John J. Loeppky, and one from Swift Current, J.J. Petkau, discussed their desires with the provincial Minister of Agriculture, who then directed a representative to interview the men and record "all the particulars." Loeppky and Petkau produced a letter from the BC Lands Branch which, while not supportive of "the settlement on a colony basis," indicated that there were no restrictions on individuals coming to British Columbia to homestead or purchase land. The men who had inspected the land reported that there was enough for three to four hundred families. Loeppky and Petkau requested that Saskatchewan pay to move families and provide them with relief. They also reported that about two dozen families had already expressed interest, and the meeting concluded with a commitment from the two men "to do further groundwork in their [communities] with a view to ascertaining the exact number of Mennonites who could ultimately be moved to this area."[12] Although it is impossible to state with certainty that the Old Colony Church encouraged the move, it is a likely assumption given that one of the three men involved was a bishop in the church and thus an influential leader.[13] Despite the fact that the migration to Mexico in the 1920s had reduced some population pressure, two decades later, both the Swift Current and Hague-Osler communities in Saskatchewan were once again experiencing a shortage of farm land, a significant problem for a people who believed that they were to live an agrarian life. For church leaders who held firm to the belief of being separate from the world, a move to an isolated location in BC would enable them to continue that tradition.[14]

The Assisted Migration

What is clear from the correspondence is that discussions between the various Saskatchewan government departments and the two provincial governments, which began in the late 1930s,

never actually stopped. A letter from W.W. Dawson, Saskatchewan's Director of Relief, to J.G. Taggart in early April 1940, recorded that there was "some difficulty in determining the British Columbia law with reference to assisted movement of this kind," but that regarding relief, the BC legislation required that "after three years residence within the province, the municipality in which the individual has had the longest residence is responsible for the relief requirements."[15] Dawson concluded that it would be "reasonable" to provide relief for a period not to exceed three years and to rely upon the opinion of local relief authorities in BC regarding need; he further noted that the province would pay for transportation of families and their equipment to BC. Dawson ended the letter by stating that no action could be taken without the permission of the BC government.[16] Less than three weeks later, following a meeting between E.H. Gurton, CN's Western Superintendent of Colonization and Agriculture, representatives Loeppky and Petkau, and members of the Cabinet, the government of British Columbia agreed to allow "a limited number of Mennonite families" to move to the area south of Burns Lake.[17] There is no explanation why Pattullo changed his mind, or even any statement from him regarding the Burns Lake settlement. Conditions set out in the letter included BC's desire for "an investigative report covering each family," an assurance from Saskatchewan that it would "accept responsibility for medical assistance and hospitalization," and that claims for relief that BC paid to the families would be submitted to Saskatchewan on a monthly basis.[18]

How the individual families were chosen for resettlement is not entirely clear, but it was the CN's responsibility, in close co-operation with Saskatchewan's Department of Agriculture and the Direct Relief Branch, to select participants. All of the families were relief recipients and none of them owned land.[19] Documentation for each of the families who were to be relocated included a list of the name and age of the male household head, his wife's age, and the sex and age of each dependent child. The list also inventoried the number of animals, agricultural equipment, and crops in the possession of each family, as well as cash, and a representative of the Department of Agriculture witnessed and signed each report.[20] Another set of data was collected by the Direct Relief Branch; its reports contained the same information with the addition of the "Relief Record," a statement of how much direct relief was paid to the family each year, as well as agricultural assistance.[21] The BC government required that each family have one hundred dollars in cash; this would cover the cost

of building materials, such as windows and hardware, that was "not attainable from the forest," and any unanticipated "small emergencies" that were otherwise not covered by the agreement.[22] The families from Swift Current had almost $1500 among them, most of which came from the sale of surplus livestock and machinery that was "suitable only for large scale prairie farming."[23] Although none of these families had owned land in Saskatchewan, the evidence makes it clear that they possessed sufficient resources to undertake the migration. Each family had a number of livestock and poultry, as well as a wide variety of agricultural implements, in addition to cash.

Figure 1. Settlers passing Tsinket Lake on route to Cheslatta, May 9, 1940. Source: Mennonite Heritage Archives.

On May 3, 1940, eighty-seven men, women, and children from Swift Current loaded their household possessions, agricultural implements, and livestock onto seventeen rail cars, and departed for Burns Lake.[24] A.H. Unruh, a CN representative of Mennonite origin who had worked for the company since 1927, accompanied the settlers and later reported that they would "do their utmost to justify the confidence placed in them."[25] Unruh further observed that the "settlers appeared to be very concerned about making good," and that, in his opinion, they "represent in every respect as good a class of settlers as may be found anywhere in Western Canada."[26] A young girl, who kept a diary of the experience, wrote that when the train arrived in Burns Lake on the morning of May 7, they were greeted by a large crowd, and the townspeople helped

in unloading their livestock and equipment. After disembarking the train, the more difficult part of the journey began, for the settlement was to be established some sixty-five kilometers south of Burns Lake. Trucks carried the settlers and their goods to Francois Lake, where a ferry took them to the south shore. Once across the lake, road conditions worsened, trucks could no longer be used (Figure 1), and, in some cases, the men had to cut new trails. It was nearly two weeks before the settlers arrived at the designated location.[27] Along the way, the railway had arranged for families to stay in vacant farm houses and also provided tents acquired from the military.[28] The limited availability of temporary housing was the most likely reason why the second group of families, from Hague-Osler, did not leave Saskatchewan until five weeks after the first group.[29]

Figure 2. Mother and daughter cultivating garden, August 7, 1940. Source: Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Once their families were accommodated, the men, accompanied by H.R. Bowman, the CN agent based in Prince George, set out to examine lands.[30] They ultimately chose to settle in three areas: the greatest number concentrated in the most isolated area a short distance north of the Cheslatta River, others took up residence near Takysie Lake, and still others selected land near Ootsa Lake.
As the BC government did not permit settlement in traditional *Strassendörf* villages, each Old Colony family selected separate plots of land. Most of these parcels had some open land that could easily be prepared for planting. Soon after moving to their lands, the settlers cooperated to plant thirty acres in green feed, 5 acres of potatoes, and 5 acres of vegetables (Figure 2). In addition, they

cut hay on shares with farmers in the district and "thus [were] able to [meet] their needs for this commodity without making any purchases."[31] The second group of 105 settlers from Hague-Osler arrived in late June, and selected land in the same areas.[32] The settlers from Swift Current, having come much earlier, had an obvious time advantage, as only two of the later arrivals were able to plant any crops.[33] By the end of September, J.A. Sadler, the local relief investigator, reported that settlers had largely completed the construction of log houses and barns. A five week delay in acquiring timber permits from the BC government held up construction, and, he reported, should not reflect any lack of industry on the part of the setters.[34]

Developing a Community

In October, the CN sent A.H. Unruh to investigate conditions in the settlement, which became known as Cheslatta after a post office of that name was established. He visited each of the twenty-four families, reporting on their location, the size of their parcels, acreage in crop and estimates for 1941, as well as the number of buildings and their size. It was clear that most settlers had been incredibly industrious. Half had large log barns for their livestock and feed; another third had also constructed small sheds ranging in size from 12 by 14 feet to 18 by 24 feet (Figure 3). Collectively they had cleared more than 400 acres.[35] Unruh's remarks provide insight – both positive and negative – into the situation of each family; these perspectives were no doubt also influenced by the opinion of Sadler, who had frequent interactions with them. Those who had not fully finished their houses and/or barns had been too busy cutting hay, while others were "doing odd jobs for ranchers" or helping other settlers with carpentry and blacksmithing. One had lost a mare and thus his efforts were limited by a "lack of sufficient horse power," another was alleged to have sons who were "a handicap rather than asset," and still another, whose eldest child was a 15 year old girl, was seen as disadvantaged "by lack of grown-up children."[36] The last two references do raise questions about how families were ultimately chosen, especially when the parents of the 15 year old girl had a total of 13 children.

A report produced late in the same year by the CN Department of Colonization and Agriculture contained photographs and information about the status of the families, as well as an accounting of their livestock and farm equipment.

Figure 3. Settler's house and partially completed barn, August 5, 1940. Source: Mennonite Heritage Archives.

This report, however, provided personal assessments of the families. Comments included:

> This is an exceptionally good family, hard working and intelligent and, barring unforeseen disasters, their success may be taken for granted.
>
> Exceptionally hard working settler who is well satisfied with his location and should do well on his farm.
>
> [The settler] is not of a particularly good type, rather easy going not to say lazy, and it is only through the influence and active assistance of [others] that he will eventually succeed.
>
> [The sons] are careless with their work, losing a horse recently by tying it up improperly in the barn, and their general behaviour makes the success of the family very doubtful.[37]

Efforts to support the families by both Sadler and the Saskatchewan Department of Relief were essential to the success of the project. In September 1940, Sadler wrote to his superiors in Victoria asking if they would approve the distribution of three or four months worth of relief cheques to the settlers. "The reason for this request is that they will then be able to buy staples and haul them [to] their places while the roads are still passable for truck traffic. ... These families have not enough potatoes for the winter and it will be necessary to purchase a number of tons."[38] The government agreed and in November 1940 cheques covering four

months of relief were issued, enabling the settlers to purchase supplies and haul them to the settlement in bulk.[39]

Despite the initial progress of the settlers, their late start brought some unanticipated problems. A shortage of animal feed was already apparent soon after the first group arrived, but the fact that settlers were worrying about a potential feed shortage "this early in the year" was in the eyes of a CN official "perhaps the best assurance that they will secure an ample supply."[40] They did not. The matter received no further attention until December when Sadler, who had been told that a load of feed would accompany the last settler arriving from Hague-Osler in the summer, was surprised to learn that there had been no such shipment. The grain was to have been donated by Old Colony Mennonites in Saskatchewan, but for reasons that are not known, the donation was delayed until spring. Sadler wrote that feed grain was essential, and if it was not donated, the new settlers in BC would be forced to purchase the grain themselves from "funds which they need for food and clothing."[41] In January, a report on Mennonite stock and feed conditions revealed how dire the predicament was. Slightly more than 30 percent of the horses, but less than ten percent of the cows and calves and 15 percent of the swine, were considered as in good condition. The condition of the overwhelming majority was listed as fair or poor:

> Stock reported as fair are thin but healthy. Stock reported as poor cannot possibly survive the winter unless additional grain is obtained. ... The need for additional feed is urgent in many cases ... Several families state that they will kill off their poultry to save feed. This would be rather a disastrous move as poultry products should be a source of income to the settler.

At a bare minimum, 27.5 tons of grain were needed to prevent a massive loss of livestock.[42]

Soon after receiving this report, Unruh met with Bishop Loeppky, reminding him that when the Saskatchewan government agreed to finance the venture, it made it clear that settlers would have to secure their own feed. In its first criticism of the settlers, the CN reported that they were largely "to blame for their present predicament because, very much against our advice, they had insisted on locating closely together, … and because not all of them had exerted themselves to get an adequate supply of hay." Given the cost of shipping grain to Burns Lake, the CN advised that the church should provide cash so that hay and grain could be purchased locally. CN representatives further admonished that "in

the interest of future movements, it is highly desirable that their church take care of this emergency as the Saskatchewan government had been more than generous in making the undertaking possible."[43] In a follow-up letter to Bishop Loeppky, Gurton indicated that "at least 100 tons of hay and 30 tons of feed grain are required to see the stock through the winter;" all could be purchased locally at a cost of approximately $1000-1200.[44] The Bishop agreed that sending cash was the best option, but that he had to bring the issue to his church's financial committee for discussion. Because it was a large amount of money, relief officials said that it would be acceptable to have the amount sent in three or four installments.[45] A month later, the church sent $95 to the settlers, with another $100 soon to follow. The CN representative reminded the Bishop that "it was of the utmost importance that they should not let their friends down," and the Bishop responded that he would "approach the immediate relatives of the settlers now in B.C. in an effort to get a little more financial support."[46]

In early March 1941, a letter arrived at the Direct Relief Branch in Regina from J.J. Petkau, Reverend H.H. Bueckert, and D.M. Thiessen, a committee that represented the settlers' interests. Their stated purpose was to address the feed shortage and also the money due to the BC government for their leased land. It offers significant insight to the progress made in the first year of settlement and the challenges that settlers faced in an undeveloped region, and is quoted extensively for that reason.

> Not many of us had more than the one hundred dollars required to come here. It cost all of us quite a lot of money to have our goods hauled to Ootsa Lake. ... And from Ootsa Lake, we had on average, an additional twelve miles [20 kilometers] to haul our goods by team. ... We were also held up for weeks, getting permits to cut logs on Government land for lumber to complete our buildings.
>
> We arrived to [sic] late to put in grain except for about 30 acres of oats, wheat and barley. These thirty acres proved to us that we can raise crops of the very best in this country. We also, that is, the first settlers to arrive, put in some potatoes and small garden vegetables, which were fine, considering that they were planted so late.
>
> We all had a lot of expenses for nails for building our homes, barns, fences, also windows, roofing, etc. We also had to pay cash for the sawing of our lumber.
>
> People, who have lived here for years and who have visited us, have been greatly surprised at the amount of work we have accomplished in the time we have been here.

> It is difficult, coming to a new country, heavily wooded, and be able to find and cut enough hay for our stock, especially when the old-timers here tell us that the first year was as poor a hay crop year as they have had for many years.
>
> ... most of us spent our last money for hay and oats and it might, if the weather conditions are not too bad, see us through till Spring. But then we haven't the money to pay for the leases of our land.
>
> We like this country and certainly would like to stay here. We know we can make a go of it if we can get through this first year.
>
> We will all put in grain this coming Spring, enough so we can take care of our stock another winter.
>
> We are planning on large gardens and intend to keep right on clearing our land. There is plenty of work for us to do, and we all intend to work and make homes for ourselves and be independent.
>
> We respectfully request that you give us additional help for Spring feed and seed at this time.[47]

While they fail to specify their needs regarding the lease payments, the men make clear that they had been industrious but that their cash resources were depleted and they needed further assistance if they were to succeed. Although there is no correspondence explaining the decision, the Director of Relief replied to Reverend Bueckert stating that he had already authorized the purchase of necessary feed.[48] Bishop Loeppky's attempt to collect more cash from relatives of the settlers does not appear to have met with any success, nor is there any further evidence of discussions with church officials in Saskatchewan.

Later correspondence noted that Saskatchewan Relief officials were "quite willing to help the settlers at Burns Lake out of their present difficulties."[49] That desire was again demonstrated in June 1941, when the Saskatchewan government paid nearly $300 to purchase seed grain so that the settlers could plant all of the land that had been cleared. In justifying this expense, Sadler stated that had the seed not been supplied,

> it would have meant that some of the land which they had cleared would not have been seeded this year. This lack of seed would have handicapped them and would not have given them a fair opportunity to utilize the land on which they had done so much work. Therefore, I felt that it was necessary … in the interests of the success of this Land Settlement Plan.[50]

The settlers agreed to pay the transport charges, estimated to be $30-40, and Sadler believed that this was a good faith gesture on their part. There is no specific response from the Saskatchewan Relief Department regarding the additional cost of supplying adequate feed grain, but a letter Dawson wrote late in the year does shed some light on bureaucratic thinking:

> I should like to warn you, however, that there is a danger of showing too much paternalism, and there might be an inclination for them to become 'leaners' if they feel that their every requirement will be provided by the Saskatchewan or British Columbia Government. Perhaps they should soon be told that they are on their own – having in mind always that cases of extreme need be taken care of.[51]

As Saskatchewan continued to struggle with providing adequate relief to its own residents, it had become obvious that the government did not want to appear too generous with its assisted settlement scheme.

By the end of 1940, most settlers had not made lease payments to the BC government, a situation which is not surprising given all of the other expenses that they had to meet in that first year. In a letter sent two days before Christmas, Dawson, Saskatchewan's Director of Relief, made a stern request for action:

> While we are fully aware of the difficulties with which you and the other Mennonite settlers ... have to contend as new settlers in a new and, as yet, unimproved country, I cannot impress upon you too strongly the importance of cleaning up this balance as soon as possible. ...
>
> We ... are very much concerned with your settlement ..., and I have received, with much pleasure, the report of your and your neighbors' progress since you left here, and of your industry and determination to build yourselves permanent homes on this new land ....
>
> While we are prepared to continue to help you as much as possible, it is on your own initiative and resourcefulness that your success depends. I am asking you, therefore, to get together with your neighbors and discuss the problem of these unpaid balances with the representatives of the British Columbia government and to let me know how and when you can make settlement of the same.[52]

How relief officials expected settlers to pay the fees remains a mystery. Despite the planning that went into the assisted migration, no consideration had been given to how settlers were to

pay for the land. Nearly all settlers had signed lease agreements with the BC Lands Department when they first arrived, paying the required five dollar lease fee, but none had covered the first year's rent. Two months later, in response to the letter from the settlers' committee quoted above, Dawson suggested that they "discuss this matter with the representative of the British Columbia Government .... At the moment, I am not quite clear as to how this matter can be dealt with."[53]

In May, 1941, BC's Administrator of Relief, its Deputy Minister of Lands, and P.J. Boeckler, representing the Saskatchewan Department of Relief, met in Victoria to discuss how to resolve the issue.[54] Citing the challenge of collecting annual rents, BC officials wanted the leases terminated and all settlers to enter into purchase agreements for their parcels. They also noted that settlers might earn money through road work, but that was a decision to be made locally by the government agent and the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Boeckler then traveled to central BC to discuss whether the Mennonites would be given work on the road project. He found the local MLA very cool to the idea because, as it turned out, the Mennonites had refused to register as voters for the impending provincial election. The registration form was "rather lengthy and complicated," in the words of Boeckler, and he concluded that "the reason our settlers refused to sign these forms was because they were afraid that they contained clauses relating to compulsory military service." Desiring a meeting with the settlers, but concerned about the impassibility of the roads, Boeckler sent a message asking them to come to Ootsa Lake. There he met with Petkau, Martens, and Bueckert, the three men who represented the interests of the settlers, and explained to them the need for voter registration. The men promised that the completed registration forms would be delivered to the government agent within the week. Upon learning this, the MLA said that "he was prepared to recommend an expenditure of approximately $500.00 for road work to begin immediately."[55] This removed the final obstacle for settlers to earn the money needed to make payments on their land.

By entering into purchase agreements, settlers would have nine years to pay for the land. The parcels varied in size, as they were not laid out in a rectangular fashion, but all of them were approximately 160 acres and the average price was $400. At fifty cents per acre, the total bill amounted to approximately $1600, of which the Saskatchewan government agreed to pay $600, to be held in account by the BC Lands Department. The $500 earned by the settlers for their road work in 1941 would also be credited to

the account, as would a further $500 for road work in 1942. At that time, the purchase agreements would be completed.[56] Although this meant that the BC government would not receive the first payment until the third year of settlement, it was the best that could be done under the circumstances. All parties agreed that in 1943, when the second land payment was due, the settlers would be able to cover those payments from the earnings of their farms.

An optimistic perspective was supplied by Boeckler. While poor road conditions prevented him from seeing all properties, he did manage to visit three homesteads. He remarked:

> I could quite understand why the local government and the C.N.R. officials ... were impressed by the amount of work which these people have done in the short time they have been there. In spite of the fact that they arrived late last summer and had no experience in woodcraft, their log buildings are exceptionally well built and made snug and weather tight by the use of clay plaster .... You may not think ... that the amount of acreage is very extensive, but considering the nature of the land it represents a tremendous amount of work .... [T]hese people have done more in the short time that they have been there than many of the [other settlers] have done in five or ten years in the way of cultivation.[57]

Both the committee and Sadler assured Boeckler that once the current crop was harvested, "there would be no further necessity for issuing relief."[58] This assessment seemed to convince officials from both governments that paying local settlers to construct roads would serve two purposes: enabling them to pay for the land, but also contributing to sorely needed infrastructure in the area.

Six months later, prospects were not as bright. Sadler wrote:

> [u]nfortunately, the crops have been lighter than average this year. This is due to the fact that in the spring and early summer the weather was extremely dry and hot. Then this fall abnormal rains made harvesting difficult ... Nevertheless, these settlers, with the exception of three or four families, will have sufficient feed for their stock.
>
> On investigating the feed situation it appeared that sufficient grain and hay would be available in the settlement itself to take care of the few families who will be short. Also, it has been explained to the settlers that the families with more than sufficient feed will be expected to help the ones who are lacking in this regard.[59]

He made clear that it was up to the settlers to help one another and not expect government assistance. How the settlers felt about this situation is unknown, but there were no requests for support and no news that any family was in dire straits as had been the case in

1940. Much of the 1941 season passed without comment. At the end of the year, Sadler prepared detailed reports on each settler family. Writing to Griffith in Victoria, Dawson expressed his gratitude for the report but also disappointment "that at least some of them are not able to take care of their own living requirements this year."[60] Dawson was pleased that the reports "show substantial progress ... and that most of them at least will become self-sustaining, or partially so, early next season."[61] Sadler's progress reports demonstrated that in addition to houses and barns, almost all settlers had constructed sheds and/or stables. Each family had cows and calves, swine, and poultry. Sadler predicted that many of the families would no longer require relief when their cows began producing the following spring.[62]

Unruh, along with Sadler, conducted an investigation in August 1942 to determine which of the settlers could be removed from relief rolls. Unruh noted that there was "plenty of work available with good pay, and a great many of the settlers have availed themselves of the opportunity to acquire additional funds."[63] During the month, seventeen families received "minimum relief" and in September, relief would be given to just two families.[64] Most settlers had between 10 and 20 acres cleared and cultivated, and had cut sufficient hay to get them through the winter. With good weather conditions, each settler had "an excellent crop," and "from the feed standpoint, they [were] better off this year." In addition, they had increasing numbers of livestock, most notably cattle, from which they were earning an income.[65] The CN had facilitated the arrangement of a truck service to Burns Lake, which enabled settlers "to deliver their cream to the rail head … in good condition," and that these earnings "have aided materially in financing the families and have been an important factor in building up the creamery business." [66] Settlers would also have "young stock to sell" in the fall which would give them extra income when their cows were not producing.[67] Sadler reported that he was "more than satisfied with the progress that these people have made both from the construction and financial end. ... From now on I feel that by taking advantage of a certain amount of outside work, these people will be self-supporting individuals of the community."[68] The CN, in its annual report for 1943, confirmed that cream shipments were bringing some families "up to $50 per month."[69] A year later, the settlers requested the CN's assistance in accessing the Prince George market for eggs and poultry, with the result that all their surplus would be absorbed.[70]

The last CN report to describe the situation was written in 1946, and added little new details except to say that the "settlers seem to

have become permanently located and most of them have their land paid for."[71] The project was complete and interest in conditions in the Burns Lake settlement quickly waned as the CN moved into a post-war environment. Specifically, the "erosion of rural settlement" and rapid industrial development concentrated in the urban areas of Canada, as well as a geopolitically reshaped Europe, meant that the Department of Colonization and Agriculture faced inevitable change.[72] European migrants and refugees would continue to arrive in Canada, but none would be assisted to become agricultural settlers in areas served by the CN.

All of the settlers who participated in the move were Old Colony Mennonites. There was no specific mention of this fact in the correspondence, although Unruh did note in his first report that his "apprehension regarding their backwardness and their supposedly hostile attitudes towards any progress appeared to be unjustified."[73] Unruh's view reflected a long history of conflicts between the desire of the Old Colony to live isolated from the wider world and the Canadian government's imposition of public education. Indeed, it was this very issue that had led to the 1920s migration to Mexico where government promised them complete freedom of religion and, by extension, education.[74] It appears that relocation to BC was yet another opportunity for the Old Colony to move into isolation. Their faith and work ethic were no doubt instrumental factors in the rapid development of their farms. The goal of self-sufficiency also led to co-operation with government agencies, an unusual strategy for the Old Colony, as well as with each other, and, to some extent, with long-standing residents. In short order, the institutions of an Old Colony community were established. In June 1940, H.H. Bueckert, who had recently been ordained as an Old Colony minister in Hague-Osler, Saskatchewan, arrived in BC, along with his wife and eleven children, to start a church in the new settlement.[75] A second church, with John W. Martens, also from Hague-Osler, as minister, was formed in 1945 in response to the rapidly growing population.[76] A private German language school was also established. It is likely that children began attending this school before the end of 1940, with one of the settlers' children providing instruction in reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic.[77]

As news of the achievements of Mennonite families in the Burns Lake settlement continued to spread, at least a dozen other families, relatives of the original settlers, made their own way to the area, unassisted by any agency. In May 1941, three families from Swift Current arrived in the settlement and arranged to rent land from local ranchers. The CN specifically noted this

information to let all concerned Departments know that these families were not eligible for any support.[78] In 1942, an additional twenty-five Saskatchewan Mennonite families were settled under the same parameters as the 1940 plan near Vanderhoof, about 130 kilometers east of Burns Lake. The responsible parties believed that the initial project had been worth the investment, and had proven worthy of replicating, as it enabled landless families living on relief to become established on new lands and earn at least some income from agriculture.[79]

Decline

The fact that the Mennonites had so quickly become self-supporting was largely made possible by the availability of work in the woods, and not through agricultural production. Small sawmills were established and many of them were operated by the settlers.[80] When Reverend Bueckert moved to the area, he and his son purchased a sawmill "to make lumber for the settlers."[81] By 1942, nearly all families had some member working at a mill. Indeed, it soon appeared that the local economy was "based as much on the lumber industry as on agriculture," and four years later, the local newspaper reported the existence of "about 50 busy little sawmills."[82] As new Mennonite families moved into the area, many of them found employment in the sawmills, cutting timber and transporting it to the mill, or driving truckloads of finished lumber to the railroad at Burns Lake.[83] The fact that so many settlers were engaged in sawmilling is also indicative of the challenge associated with large scale agricultural production. A child recalls that "the farming land that father so had his mind set on [in 1948] was very scarce," and so he was forced to work in the bush for another settler who had a sawmill.[84] While many people came with the expectation of developing farms, sawmilling simply proved to be a much more lucrative endeavour.[85] Another son recalled that his family's sawmill must have been prosperous because his father was able to purchase a new pickup truck in 1950.[86] This activity, however, tested the fabric of both individual family units and the community as a whole. With so many men "in the bush away from their families," the values which the community held dear were being undermined.[87]

Although the Mennonites worked hard to develop their farms, land units were seldom larger than 160 acres, a size that was far too small to be economically viable. Their desire to settle close together also created a shortage of accessible grazing land for their

livestock, thus limiting the expansion of a promising source of income.[88] More to the point, a CN report in 1941 noted that there were fewer than "35 suitable quarter sections of land available within a 25 mile [forty kilometer] radius of the … present settlement," which the grown children would soon occupy.[89] This was far short of the initial estimate made just a year earlier, which suggested that several hundred families could be accommodated here. Some of the early settlers noted that the problem was, in fact, the refusal of the British Columbia government to sell more of its land.[90] In addition to the shortage of land, its quality also proved to be a significant obstacle. The BC government wanted to prove that the land could be farmed and knew that the Mennonites were good farmers, so it encouraged the settlement. When families arrived, they realized that the thin, rocky soils were largely unsuited for crop production.[91] The fact that there was not enough land for the next generation and that it was best suited to ranching, forced "too many sons into the lumbering industry" which created a circular and self-defeating problem.[92]

It was not long before the government began to exert pressure to establish public schools. In early 1942, the Provincial Department of Relief inquired about the provision of public education. In response, Sadler wrote a long and detailed letter which explained the situation. Because of the delay in converting the status of land holding from lease to purchase and then the subsequent payment of those fees, it was not until December 1941 that the settlers were classified as owners and taxes could be levied on their lands. "The school inspector ... could not go ahead with plans to erect a school and teacherage as his Department would not [support] ... a district from which no school taxes could be collected." Further, the problem went beyond funds for a school. The inspector "could not supply a staff as he is already short of teachers ... He also added that in his opinion it will be hard to supply teachers ... due to the isolated nature of the area."[93] The lack of a public school was hardly a concern for the majority of the Old Colony settlers, many of whom had come to northern BC as a way to embrace their private school. Although their children had attended public schools in Saskatchewan, as one descendent noted, "they wanted to leave that worldliness behind. They wanted to be in the world but not of the world, and the English school was part of that world."[94]

Expressing concern both for the situation in which BC found itself with a shortage of teachers, a problem which plagued Saskatchewan as well, Dawson wrote that he considered

> the matter of education the most important feature of proper establishment of these people. Reluctance to attend school and lack of school facilities have to a very large extent created the problem that has arisen in connection with Mennonites in this Province, and it would be too bad if the final re-establishment and assimilation of the Burns Lake group were postponed for another generation because of the lack of school facilities.[95]

The Provincial School Inspector was "particularly anxious" to establish a school in the settlement as there had been no public school for the two years that the Mennonites had been in the province.[96] Desire did not mean action, however, and the CN recorded in each of its annual reports from 1942 to 1946 that the school question had not been resolved. In its final report on the Burns Lake settlement, the CN addressed the situation:

> [The community has] been deprived of a school since the arrival of the settlers .... Probably 50 children are already passed school age without having any education. Fifty or more are of school age now and have no opportunity for schooling at the present time.[97]

Two public schools finally opened in 1947, with an enrollment of approximately fifty students between the two.[98]

It was at these moments that the settlers' faith, and their desire to live free from worldly influences, began to shape actions that would ultimately lead to the demise of the community. Non-farm employment and poor quality land were, to a certain extent, factors that could be overcome. Of greater concern for many families was the opening of public schools to which all children under the age of sixteen were required to attend. In addition to these emerging external influences, the news in 1949 that an aluminum smelter would be constructed at Kitimat, BC, instigated further, unanticipated changes for the community. To provide power for the smelter, a massive hydroelectric complex was developed, and the Aluminum Company of Canada turned the existing Ootsa Lake into a huge reservoir, which flooded a great deal of land and displaced its occupants. An influx of workers to build the dam and construct tunnels brought the area to the attention of even more outsiders, notably Americans, who began buying farms. American settlers "were not faced with the same handicap of too small farms as they were able to buy several adjoining farms."[99] In addition, other Mennonite groups, specifically those of the General Conference, began to proselytize and in 1952 a group of 15 families began to meet in private homes; a Sunday school and singing groups quickly emerged.[100] A year later, the first of six General

Conference teachers was hired to teach in the public schools.[101] With so many newcomers who had strikingly different values moving into the region, the Old Colony Mennonites became entangled in a web of what one minister declared was "too much dancing, smoking, drinking and going to sports events."[102] The younger generation, in spite of the best efforts of church leaders, "mixed more readily with the rest of the population and considerable intermarriage took place."[103] As these outsiders came to exert more influence within the community, and the isolation that the community had enjoyed for close to a decade came to an end, its religious leaders began planning an escape.

Over a fifteen year period beginning in 1948, two-thirds of the original settlers who came to Cheslatta in 1940 moved away. The first to depart joined Old Colony families from the Hague-Osler district who moved to Mexico, while others went to northerly La Crete, Alberta, where land was now available for lease.[104] By the end of the 1950s, the Old Colony Church, concerned about the influences of modernization, began actively seeking a place to create a new settlement. It sent representatives to inspect land at Cecil Lake, about twenty-five kilometers northeast of Fort St. John in northern BC, and did so both on the ground and from the air. Church leaders selected an area of approximately forty square kilometers (fifteen square miles), and purchased the land from the BC government for $10 to $15 an acre.[105] In 1959, still other families moved to Prespatou, located almost ninety kilometers north of Fort St. John. The leader of this group was a minister who accompanied four families in the spring, while the Bishop left with several more families in the fall.[106] As a sibling of one of these migrants recalled: "They went back in time. The church leaders allowed tractors but not cars, and women could not have washing machines." In this isolated region, this person asserted, it was the women who suffered the most.[107]

Assessing the Assisted Migration Scheme

Against what measures can this resettlement plan be judged? Expressing the views of the Saskatchewan Relief Office, its Director, W.W. Dawson, wrote in 1942: "the initial movement of Mennonite settlers to British Columbia" was believed to be "of mutual benefit to all concerned." The BC government wanted to "encourage settlement on vacant lands in the Northern part of the Province," the CN "require[d] additional settlers – and consequent railway traffic – to justify maintenance of railway services," and

the Province of Saskatchewan "would benefit by decreasing the population in certain areas … and … reduce [the] actual and potential relief problem.[108] Using these criteria, the CN concluded that resettlement

> has been a satisfactory [endeavor] from the point of view of the Saskatchewan Government, which attained its objectives well within the budget first approved, the B.C. Government which has obtained an enterprising group of new settlers and has sold considerable land to them, and this Company, which has approximately 300 new settlers as customers for its services ….[109]

Within three years, all settlers had been removed from the relief rolls, had made excellent progress in establishing farms, and, in most cases, had secured some form of off-farm employment to help make ends meet.

Writing about the experience several decades later, the CN's T.P. Devlin, who by then was head of the railway's western operations, wrote that "had the depressed condition of agriculture continued," the initial movement would have been used as a model "to deal with the possible necessity of moving upwards of 600 such families."[110] While it did pave the way for a second small settlement in central BC, the economic crisis in Saskatchewan was simply too overwhelming for a large scale relocation to be supported. Devlin concluded that the "advent of war has altered the situation so greatly in Saskatchewan that no further similar movement of families is likely to take place for considerable time." By employing these criteria, the resettlement efforts should be regarded as a success. But from the point of view of conservative Old Colony Mennonites who had sought an isolated place where they could live a traditional life free from outside influence, the Cheslatta settlement fell short of its mark.

In 1973, Frank Epp, the Mennonite journalist and historian, visited the communities north of Fort St. John and shared his insights of the settlement process. Asking what forces and motivations were at the root of these migrations, Epp sought out Old Colony Mennonite bishops to understand their view of worldliness. He wrote that the conversations revealed a "fascinating interpretation of 'the world' and a most interesting account of how [one congregation] agreed to resist, and to a degree overcome, the world." While several reasons were offered for the migration, the most important was public schooling and "its inevitable reeducation away from the kingdom of God." More than fifteen years after the move from Cheslatta to more remote

locations in British Columbia, the Old Colony Church reluctantly accepted public schools "only because it was possible to institute additional classes after hours three times a week, two and a half hours at a time, for the teaching of the New Testament and the German language." Epp continued:

> For some the partial acceptance of the school represents compromise and inconsistency, but [the Bishop made clear that] consistency rests not with a rigid line permanently drawn, but rather in a continuous and conscientious resistance to outside influence as long as possible.[111]

It was economic distress and the promise of government assistance, as well as their religious beliefs, that encouraged Old Colony settlers to establish a new community south of Burns Lake, where they hoped they could become self-supporting landowners and, in the process, escape the modernization that was affecting their old Saskatchewan communities. The latter, however, was short-lived, and that same faith system was responsible for the BC community's ultimate decline. Those who were willing to adapt joined other Mennonite churches that were being established in the area; the vast majority, however, chose, once again, to migrate to new areas where they could live in accordance with their values and traditions, no longer with government oversight and free from the disruptive influence of outsiders.

Notes

1 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982); Calvin Redekop, *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1969); Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Royden Loewen, *Village Among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Dawn S. Bowen, "*Die Auswanderung*: Religion, Culture, and Migration among Old Colony Mennonites," *Canadian Geographer* 45:4 (Winter 2001): 461-473; Dawn S. Bowen, "To Bolivia and Back: Migration and Its Impact on La Crete, Alberta," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 22 (2004): 59-82; David M. Quiring, *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Crossway Publications Inc., 2003).

2 Dawn S. Bowen, "'Forward to a Farm': Land Settlement as Unemployment Relief in the 1930s," *Prairie Forum* 20:2 (Fall 1995): 207-229; Leonard Doell, "Mennonite Migration to Swan Plain," in Leonard Doell and Jacob G.

Guenther, eds. *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, 1895-1995* (Saskatoon: Hague-Osler Reserve Book Committee, 1995), 434-439.

3 Letter to A.W. Gray, BC Minister of Lands & Municipalities, from W.W. Dawson, Saskatchewan Director of Relief, 3 December 1940. Department of Social Welfare, SW 3, File 988, Mennonite Movements, 1940-46, Saskatchewan Archives Board-Saskatoon Branch [SAB-S].

4 CN, Department of Colonization and Agriculture [DCA], Annual Report on Colonization, Land Settlement, and Related Activities, 1942. RG 30, Volume 5585, National Archives of Canada [NAC].

5 Letter from E.W. Griffith, BC Administrator of Relief, to W.W. Dawson, 20 April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S; Letter from Dawson to Griffith, 29 April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

6 Letter from E.T. Kenny, MLA, Terrace, BC, to T.D. Pattullo, Premier of British Columbia, 28 February 1938. British Columbia Premier General Files, GR 1222, Box 145, File 11, British Columbia Archives [BCA].

7 Memo from K.C. MacDonald, Minister of Agriculture, to Pattullo, 27 November 1939. GR 1222, Box 153, File 3, BCA.

8 *Ibid*.

9 Memo from Pattullo to MacDonald, 28 November 1939. GR 1222, Box 153 File 3, BCA.

10 Letter from Pattullo to Hon J.G. Taggart, Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, 20 February 1940. GR-1222, Box 153, File 4, BCA.

11 Report from A.S. Young, Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, to W.W. Dawson, 13 March 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Bruce L. Guenther, "The Convergence of Old Colony Mennonites, Evangelicalism and Contemporary Canadian Culture: A Case Study of the Osler Mission Chapel (1974-1994)," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 14 (1996): 98.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Letter from Dawson to J.G. Taggart, Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, 2 April 1940, SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Letter from Griffith to W.W. Dawson, 20 April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Memo from A.S. Young, Assistant Director of Relief, to W.W. Dawson, 13 March 1940. Department of Social Welfare, SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

20 CN Inter-Departmental Correspondence, 19, 20, and 24 April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

21 Inspector's Report on Mennonite Settlers to be moved to Burns Lake, British Columbia, April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

22 Letter from Griffith to Dawson, 20 April 1940; letter from E.H. Gurton, Western Superintendent of Colonization and Agriculture, CN, to Griffith, 24 April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

23 Letter from Gurton to Dawson, 24 April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

24 T.P. Devlin, "Homesteading in Northern British Columbia," *Mennonite Life* 31:4 (December 1976): 21.

25 Letter from Gurton to Griffith, 17 May 1940, and Memo to H. Bowman, CN, from A.H. Unruh, CN, 12 May 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

26 Memo to Bowman from Unruh, 12 May 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

[27] Aganita Petkau, Excerpts from her Diary, reprinted in *A Heritage of Homesteads, Hardships and Hope* (La Crete, AB: La Crete and Area Then and Now Society, 1989), 48-50.
[28] Devlin, 25.
[29] Letter from Gurton to Griffith, 24 April 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S. This group was to consist of fifteen families, but at the last moment, one decided not to go.
[30] Petkau, 49.
[31] Letter from J.A. Sadler, Relief Investigator, to Griffith, 20 September 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[32] Devlin, 21.
[33] CN, DCA, Photographs and Data on Settlement in the Burns Lake District, BC, 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[34] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 20 September 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[35] Statement of Progress in Mennonite Settlement, 2 October 1940. RG 30, Volume 5741, NAC.
[36] Individual reports on settlers, 2 October 1940. RG 30, Volume 5741, NAC.
[37] CN, DCA, Photographs and Data on Settlement in the Burns Lake District, B.C. 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[38] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 11 September 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[39] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 11 October 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[40] Letter from Gurton to Dawson, 11 June 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[41] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 11 December 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[42] Report on Mennonite Stock and Feed Conditions. Inspection made January 6, 7, and 8, 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[43] Memo from Unruh to Gurton, 20 January 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[44] *Ibid;* letter from Gurton to Loeppkey, 24 January 1941. RG 30, Volume 5746, NAC.
[45] Memo from Unruh to Gurton, 20 January 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[46] Letter from Gurton to Dawson, 13 February 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[47] Letter from J.J. Petkau, Rev. H.H. Bueckert, and D.M. Thiessen to the Director of Relief, 20 February 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[48] Letter from Dawson to Bueckert, 5 March 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[49] Letter from Gurton to W. Rempel, 24 February 1941. RG 30, Volume 5746, NAC. It is unclear precisely who Rempel was as his letter is not part of the archival material.
[50] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 5 June 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[51] Letter from Dawson to Griffith, 19 November 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[52] Letter from Dawson to David M. Thiessen, 23 December 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[53] Letter from Dawson to Bueckert, 5 March 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[54] Letter from P.J. Boeckler, Saskatchewan Department of Relief, to Dawson, 17 May 1941, SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[55] *Ibid.* The forms, of course, were written in English and most settlers had little to no ability to read the English language.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 4 November 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[60] Letter from Dawson to Griffith, 16 December 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[61] *Ibid.*

[62] Sadler, Saskatchewan Mennonite Progress Reports, 19 December 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[63] Memo from Unruh to Gurton, 22 August 1942. RG 30, Vol. 5754, NAC.
[64] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 26 August 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[65] Sadler, Saskatchewan Mennonite Progress Reports, August & September 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[66] CN, DCA, Annual Report on Land Settlement, 1942. RG 30, Vol. 5584, NAC.
[67] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 20 August 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[68] *Ibid*.
[69] CR, DCA, Annual Report on Land Settlement, 1943. RG 30, Vol. 5585, NAC.
[70] CN, DCA, Annual Report on Land Settlement, 1944. RG 30, Vol. 5586, NAC.
[71] CN, DCA, Annual Report on Land Settlement, 1946. RG 30, Vol. 5588, NAC.
[72] Brian S. Osborne and Susan E. Wurtele, "The Other Railway: Canadian National's Department of Colonization and Agriculture," *Prairie Forum* 20 (1995): 249.
[73] Letter from Unruh to Gurton, 12 May 1940. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[74] Redekop; Sawatzky.
[75] Leonard Doell and Jacob G. Guenther, eds. *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, 1895-1995* (Saskatoon: Hague-Osler Reserve Book Committee, 1995), 440.
[76] In 1940 well more than one-third of the families arrived with dependent children over the age of 18, who would soon be marrying and starting their own families; Plett, 159-160.
[77] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 20 September 1940; letter from Sadler to Griffith, 18 February 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[78] Letter from Gurton to Gray, 9 May 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[79] Letter from Dawson to A.W. Gray, BC Minister of Lands, 27 February 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[80] Arthur Shelford and Cyril Shelford, *We Pioneered* (Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers, 1988), 203.
[81] *A Heritage of Homesteads*, 204.
[82] Frank H. Epp, The True North (6): Burns Lake – where a settlement came and went. *Mennonite Reporter*, 10 June 1974, 9; *Burns Lake Review*, July 11, 1946, p. 3
[83] *Lakes District News* [Burns Lake, BC], November 5, 2004; Messenger, 2004; *Lakes District News*, December 4, 2003; *A Heritage of Homesteads*, 336.
[84] *A Heritage of Homesteads*, 412
[85] *Omineca Express* [Vanderhoof, BC], November 25, 2006.
[86] *A Heritage of Homesteads*, 218.
[87] Frank H. Epp, The True North (11): Struggles with the World and the Wilderness. *Mennonite Reporter*, 30 September 1974, 9; Helen Rose Pauls, "The Way We Were: First Mennonite Church, Burns Lake," *Mennonite Historical Society of BC Newsletter*, 14 (1), Jan. 2008.
[88] Memo from Unruh to Gurton, 20 January 1941. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.
[89] Letter from Gurton to W. Rempel 24 February 1941. RG 30, Vol. 5746, NAC.
[90] Interview with Mary (Thiessen) Wall, Prespatou, BC, 4 July 1991.
[91] Wall Interview; *The Clear Vision: A History of the Cleardale Area* (Cleardale, AB: Cleardale History Book Committee, 1982), 50-51; interview with John Neudorf, La Crete, Alberta, 19 July 2012.
[92] Frank H. Epp, The True North (11): Struggles with the World and the Wilderness. *Mennonite Reporter*, 30 September 1974, 9; Pauls.

[93] Letter from Sadler to Griffith, 18 February 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S. A few months later, Unruh reported the number of 43 school-aged children. Unruh also states that in 1940, there were 119 children under the age of sixteen who were among the original families. Memo to Gurton from Unruh, 16 June 1942. RG 30, Vol. 5754, NAC.

[94] Interview with John & Margaret Neudorf, Katharine Bueckert, and Aganita Bueckert, La Crete, Alberta, 19 July 2012. Margaret, Katharine, and Aganita were daughters of Jacob Petkau, who helped to promote the movement to Burns Lake.

[95] Letter from Dawson to Griffith, 14 March 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

[96] Memo from Unruh to Gurton, 16 June 1942. RG 30, Vol. 5754, NAC.

[97] CN, DCA, Annual Report on Land Settlement, 1943. RG 30, Vol. 5585; Annual Report on Land Settlement, 1945. RG 30, Vol. 5587; Annual Report on Land Settlement, 1946. RG 30, Vol. 5588, NAC.

[98] *Burns Lake Review* 22 August 1946, 3, 31 July 1947, 3, 23 October 1947, 1.

[99] Epp, The True North (6), 9; Shelford and Shelford, 203.

[100] Conrad Stoesz, "The Migration to Burns Lake, B.C. in 1940," *Preservings* 28 (2008): 29-32.

[101] Pauls.

[102] Epp, True North (11), 9.

[103] Shelford and Shelford, 202.

[104] *A Heritage of Homesteads*, 46, 412; Doell and Guenther, 389; *Clear Vision*, 50-51.

[105] Epp, The True North (11), 9.

[106] "New Settlement for Old Colony Group in Peace River," *Canadian Mennonite*, 8 May 1959, 1; Reimer, 42

[107] Neudorf and Bueckert Interview. The Petkau sisters have all followed slightly different paths. They were all originally members of the Old Colony Church, but some moved to Sommerfelder and Bergthal churches. Katharine explained that "you go to your church and I will go to mine, but we will walk together."

[108] Letter from Dawson to A.W. Gray, BC Minister of Lands, 27 February 1942. SW 3, File 988, SAB-S.

[109] CN, DCA, Annual Report on Colonization, Land Settlement, and Related Activities, 1943. RG 30, Vol. 5585, NAC.

[110] Devlin, 25.

[111] Epp, The True North (11), 9.