"Heroes of a Flat Country": Mennonite Life, Agriculture, and Mythmaking in Manitoban Newspapers, 1870s–1890s

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Within a few years of settling in Manitoba, Mennonites became part of the settler origin stories told about the creation of the new province. Initially, the newspapers reported on their arrival and how they were expected to adjust to their new homes. They had immigrated at a time of massive upheaval in the new province. Many of the early newspaper stories about Mennonites focused on their foreignness to their new home and catalogued the ways that they were out of place. At the same time, characteristics that aligned with Anglo-Canadian ways of life were emphasized to show that the Mennonites could belong. Depictions of Mennonite agricultural success were part of newspaper reflections on past and present. They demonstrated that Mennonites were using the land in the preferred ways, and that they were contributing to Manitoba's progress. Newspapers, according to Paul Rutherford, were the nation's "prime mythmaker."[1] In the period covered by this article, they "elaborated a series of mythologies of nationhood which sometimes challenged but usually justified the existing or emerging patterns of dominance in the country at large."[2] The English-language newspapers in Manitoba contributed to these myths of nationhood as they supported the emerging concept of the Canadian nation in the new province.

Mennonites became part of this mythmaking project, as early arrivals to the province, and they figured in newspaper attempts to create a peaceful, agricultural myth to replace the violent, racialized history of Indigenous land theft and displacement.

Manitoba became a province and officially joined Canada in July of 1870, after a protracted resistance led by Louis Riel and his Métis provisional government, ending with signing the Manitoba Act. Canada now had a new province, but it did not resemble the rest of Canada, which consisted of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Manitoba's recorded population was nearly 90 percent Métis, according to the 1870 census that listed the population as 12,228 people, with 5,757 French Métis, 4,083 English Métis, and 1,565 identified as white.[3] That left 823 people presumably listed as "Indian," but people were only to be included as "Indian" if they "settled on lands" or "lived in houses."[4] Since the only "Indians" counted in the census were those who met certain standards of whiteness, those numbers would have been largely made up of the community of St. Peter's Reserve. St. Peter's only existed as a reserve from 1873 to 1907, but had been an Indigenous agricultural community long before signing Treaty 1.[5] St. Peter's was ultimately relocated farther away from settler communities, because the land was deemed too good for Indigenous peoples, and the people of St. Peter's "defied colonial categories," which made them a threat to the "us" and "them" categories of settler colonialism.[6] Other First Nations people were not included in the census, meaning the ratio of settlers to Métis and First Nations peoples could not be accurately portrayed in the census.

Manitoba, the fifth province to join Confederation, was undeniably an Indigenous space, which caused the federal government to incentivize immigration in order to create a settler-Canadian space. Russian Mennonites happened to be looking for a home, and were experienced settlers, so they were recruited and given a large federal loan and other incentives to move to Manitoba.[7] The demographic shift was significant with the recruitment of just this one group. From 1874 to 1880 nearly 7,000 Mennonites settled in Manitoba.[8] Adolf Ens states that in 1875 and 1876 Mennonites were "well over a quarter" of the immigrants coming to the province, and although quickly outnumbered, were still over 10 percent of the population in 1881.[9] This significant block of Mennonite immigration occurred directly after the negotiation of Treaty 1 in 1873, as a combination of military violence and bureaucracy complicated and impeded the successful distribution of Métis land.[10] By 1880, the Métis presence and role in Manitoba had changed, as they had lost much

of their former political power, and around 90 percent of the Métis had left the Red River area.[11]

This decade, from Manitoba becoming part of Canada in 1870 to 1880, when the first wave of Mennonite arrival slowed down and the Métis nation saw major land displacement, is the focus of this paper. During this decade, Manitoba was able to remake its origin stories and recreate itself as primarily a settler space. The Mennonites were a significant part in creating the new agricultural, Euro-Canadian identity, and the local newspapers often used Mennonites to tell stories about the sort of province they were trying to present to the rest of Canada. In an era when Canada was competing with the United States, Brazil, and Argentina to attract settlers, newspapers were a method of advertising and selling the new region of Manitoba to potential immigrants.

This process of advertising and selling Manitoba was part of the process of creating a new narrative about the Canadian prairies. It simultaneously tried to replace the very recent past of conflict between the Métis nation and Canada, and provide a new, hopeful image to project the optimistic future that immigration would bring to the province. Newspapers in the late nineteenth century were tools of building communities and establishing common boundaries and experiences.[12] Beyond the previously stated role of the newspaper to justify the nation's existence and dominance, Rutherford explains that at the end of the nineteenth century newspapers were caught up in the ideas of progress and, after Confederation, nationalism.[13] In order to more fully support the nation, newspaper editors fought against the "terrible enemy" to national mythology, anarchy, also known as "liberty run wild" by promoting "the gospel of harmony"[14] The idea was that the nation was comprised of different groups of people who all cooperated and pulled together for the good of the nation. This meant silencing voices of dissent or ignoring the parts of society that did not fit neatly into the narrative of peaceful progress. As the *Toronto Mail* described in 1884, "Abroad all is confusion: doubt, rumours of war, military expeditions, and the fever of military preparation. . . . At home all is peace, progress, and prosperity."[15] Newspaper coverage of immigration to Manitoba, then, must be understood within this context of newspapers as the "nation's prime mythmaker" rather than as an unbiased depiction of reality.

These early waves of immigration were documented primarily by the *Manitoba Free Press,* the main English-language newspaper in the region. While other smaller newspapers emerged periodically, often not lasting for more than a year or two, the *Free Press* had the largest readership and the most extensive regional

coverage, existing in some form from 1872 to the present. Other newspapers often reprinted sections of the *Free Press* for their readers, especially the regional reports that appeared weekly from around the province from correspondents in areas like Emerson and Pembina.

Mennonite settlement offered a strong contrast with earlier waves of migration to the region. The Wolseley Expedition, also known as the Red River Expeditionary Force, arrived in 1870. Its 1,051 soldiers were promised land and many expected to settle in Manitoba after serving their two-year terms. The RREF was intended to aid the transition of Manitoba into a province that would more closely resemble Ontario, which meant a rejection of the Métis identity that was behind the creation of Manitoba.[16] Two-thirds of these men were from the Orange Lodges of Ontario and many admitted that avenging the death of Thomas Scott at the hands of Riel provisional government had been an incentive for enlisting.[17] Jean Teillet writes about this force:

> Sir John A. Macdonald knowingly sent into Red River an Expeditionary Force embedded with the dogs of war. These angry men from the Orange Lodges of Ontario would rape and assault, pillage and then plunder Red River. Once let out, the dogs were not easily contained.[18]

This led to a period described as a "reign of terror" by the Métis residents of Red River, and they largely avoided crossing the river into Fort Garry.[19] Even two years after their arrival, in 1872, the Métis newspaper, *Le Métis* reported that two men were beaten and threatened with knives by soldiers while the Métis men were trying to cross the bridge over the Assiniboine River.[20] This was only one example of the violence in the three-year period that has been well-documented by Lawrence Barkwell. Many Métis men and women found themselves assaulted or murdered at the hands of soldiers or settlers, among them future civic leaders of Winnipeg.[21] It was into this primarily Indigenous space, with a small population of militarized, violent, soldier-settlers, that Mennonites arrived.

The military occupation was only one part of what made life so difficult for the Métis in and around Winnipeg. The federal offices, including the Dominion Lands Office, were in Fort Garry, the same fort where the RREF was housed. This was itself a barrier for Métis who tried to register for the land they had been promised in the Manitoba Act.[22] According to historian Fred Shore, some Métis discovered when they did go to the fort that "forged documents had been used to apply for their land" and that the forged documents stated that the Métis occupant had already sold the land to the

"person now claiming the title deed."[23] The threat of physical violence and outright fraud combined with federal land policy that continued to change in Ottawa, as examined by D. N. Sprague in *Canada and the Métis, 1869–1885.* The changes in policy regarding what constituted legitimate land use meant that in December 1877, "eighty-four of ninety-three families were told that they were vulnerable to eviction" and only nine claimants had made "really valuable improvements" which gave them the "right to buy the land they considered already their own."[24] By the end of 1882, the Canadian government declared that they would no longer process any claims for Métis land in Manitoba and would not address any of the claims that had been unresolved during the previous decade.[25] All of these changes to the Manitoba Act were technically amendments to the Canadian constitution that could only be made in Britain, but Prime Minister Macdonald and the Canadian government continued to change laws to disadvantage Métis landowners without following the proper procedures.[26] While these practices effectively served to open land for settlers, initial demand for land in Manitoba was not as high as anticipated. As a result, block immigration was devised as the initial way to bring in settlers such as the Mennonites.

The first mention of Mennonites in a Manitoba newspaper appeared in the *Manitoba Free Press* in 1873, amid preliminary negotiations over Mennonite immigration to Manitoba. The article related the account of an M. Michiel, who described the marriage and burial practices of the Mennonites in flowery, otherizing language.[27] This article, based on the observations of someone who was not Mennonite, also suggested that Mennonites were "narrow and prejudiced" as a result of persecution, "but though outraged, belied, and outlawed, they have been steadfast in their faith, and have never raised their hand against the oppressor."[28] This description of the Mennonites primarily focused on the religious aspects of the culture, and the ways in which it differed from other forms of Christianity, such as the rejection of infant baptism and religious or political authorities, as well as their lack of "magnificent churches."[29] The article provided background knowledge that offered readers a basic familiarity with the Mennonites. While portraying aspects of Mennonite culture through a lens of observation, the author also expressed appreciation for the values of peace and hard work seen throughout their history. At a time when Mennonites were being considered as immigrants to Manitoba, a new province birthed in conflict and plagued with racialized understandings about what constituted "hard work," they were being portrayed as a solution to the region's troubles.

After this initial ethnographic examination of Mennonite culture, the newspapers were largely silent on the topic. Instead, they turned to addressing the number of townships that would potentially be granted to the Mennonites and the visit of Mennonite delegates to the province in June and July of 1873. On June 21, 1873, the week of the arrival of the Mennonite delegates, *Le Métis,* the French-language Métis-run newspaper wrote a background piece on the Mennonites. The first portion of this article focused on the Manitoba land that would be granted to the Mennonites, and contrasted Anabaptism with Catholicism.[30] The writers compared the pacifism of the Mennonites to that of the Moravian Brethren.[31] This demonstrated a very different understanding of the immigration. While both English and French newspapers were concerned with the religious background of the Mennonites, *Le Métis* focused on how this would impact the ongoing Métis political situation, such as which land would be given to the Mennonites, and the risks of potential violence at Mennonite hands. This coverage all occurred before Mennonites had arrived in Manitoba.

As the Mennonites began to arrive in Manitoba, newspapers reflected ideas about their foreignness as evidenced by comments on their language. On August 8, 1874, only a few weeks after Mennonite immigration began, the *Manitoba Free Press* made a comment about the new arrivals, saying:

> Upon investigation the only thing we find against the Mennonites is that they won't patronize the little Daily [newspaper]. Upon being asked to do so one of them replied "XnslrAea omiaCgsdabaeg igyf1hathtrrt Noto sDdiroahuci coet0iofilyeot a$ist filrltckt."[32]

Clearly this comment was intended to be a humorous observation that the Mennonites did not understand English, but it also presented a concern that foreign-language speakers would not help Manitoba to resemble Ontario. This type of comment was specific to the English newspapers, as Manitoba was a multi-lingual region at the time, as demonstrated by the observations of Lady Dufferin in 1877.[33] She wrote in her diary about her Métis guide through Manitoba, a member of the "local Parliament" who could speak three languages, but added that "I believe he talks Indian at home."[34] Métis communities operated in a multitude of languages, based on trade networks and kinship ties that extended and stretched beyond strict cultural boundaries.[35]

The French-language newspapers catered to an audience with complex linguistic backgrounds and so did not comment on Mennonite language, being much less concerned with being part of the

"national mythmaking" of the English newspapers. Language was mentioned where relevant, without humour or critique. When a piece of Mennonite correspondence was published, their text was accompanied by the simple remark that it was "Traduite de l'Allemande" (translated from German)."[36] Unlike the English newspapers, which were part of expounding the colonial British or "Canadian" voice, the Métis community made no demand for Mennonite linguistic assimilation.

The topic of language would remain an issue in the English newspapers, as shown by an 1890 *Free Press* article about crop bulletins, which were initially printed in "the dial [*sic*] language" of French and English.[37] While the Mennonites were not the only group in Manitoba who could not easily read French or English, during discussions the following point was raised:

> We have to consider that the Cree and Sioux Indians have instructors paid by the government who can translate for them the bulletins issued by the Minister of Agriculture, but the Mennonites have no instructor. They are well educated but they do not speak English, and unless you intend to obliterate their language you should have these bulletins published in the Mennonite tongue.[38]

This concern for Mennonite comprehension, especially when discussing agricultural regulations, demonstrated that even in 1890, the Mennonites' foreign language was not seen as a threat the way Indigenous cultural practices might have been. Despite their slow assimilation and English language acquisition, the article also expressed concern that Mennonites be informed about agricultural developments, since they were important contributors to the agricultural success of Manitoba.

Other approaches to portraying the Mennonites within the narrative of Manitoba involved observing and commenting on their agricultural quirks, from women working in the fields, to communal living and the roles people took in in these largely self-sufficient communities.[39] The newspaper writers recorded stories about Mennonite behaviour such as leading a bull, cow, and calf by tying the tail of each animal to the horns or neck of the animal behind it, which was "intensely ludicrous to spectators, but the proprietor of the cattle seemed to think it was all correct."[40] Another story about a Mennonite living in Winnipeg in 1874 noted that his cow produced a lot of milk, but that the man had "not been sufficiently Anglicized to put water in his milk yet."[41] This was in reference to the commonly-held suspicions that milkmen watered down milk in order to sell more of it. These observations may have been humorous but the idea behind them was that Mennonite success would break the ground for other

settlers to make their homes on the inhospitable prairie. As one article remarked, "there can be no doubt that when once settled, they will induce others rapidly to follow."[42]

The newspapers added Mennonites to the myth of Canadian nation-building because of their prosperity and agricultural success. The early stages of building the myth of the Mennonite role in Manitoba began as early as 1876, when the *Free Press* printed an article from the *Montreal Herald* praising the Mennonites as the highest calibre of settlers. After commenting on their work ethic and the success of their villages, it remarked:

> To place four or five thousand settlers, who you know will stay, and who you know just as well, will, in twenty years, have a thriving settlement, without any charges for maintaining order, or repressing crime in a part of the country hundreds of miles from any of the ordinary means of communication with the rest of the world, was in the exceptional circumstances of the North-West Territory, worth a great deal of money.[43]

Any expense paid towards Mennonite settlement was excused because of the benefit they brought to the lands they settled. This benefit was not only economic, but also social, as they generally settled in isolated, stable, low-crime communities.

When crime was reported in Mennonite communities (and very little of crime would have been reported to the courts or newspapers unless it involved non-Mennonites) it was used to benefit the proponents of immigration, who were trying to project the idea that Manitoba was a safe place for families to immigrate. The frontier was typically seen as a male space, largely because most of the first settlers came as single men, aside from the blocks of ethnic immigration. Newspaper coverage of gendered violence also became a means to justify the more violent or direct practices of nation-building, especially when settler women were exposed to violence. The extensive newspaper coverage about the peacefulness of the Mennonites and how Mennonite women were seldom visible outside of their communities added to the impact of the story. One incident in 1880 described how a "brute in man's form," while passing through a Mennonite village on his way to the American border after fleeing arrest, "beat the owners of the house at which he had been most hospitably treated, not only the male portion but ill-used the women also."[44] The descriptions of violence, especially against women whose men could not properly defend them because they were pacifists, were used to request increased law enforcement at the borders, because "these very peaceful citizens" were being targeted by criminals heading towards the border.[45] This violent incident confirmed the fears of many trying to promote immigration to the

prairies that the frontier was not a suitable place for women, particularly those seen as "respectable." It is important to note that the decade prior to this outrage over Mennonite women being exposed to violence had been marked by violence against Métis women at the hands of the military. This violence only increased once many of the soldiers had finished their two-year terms and were unrestrained by fear of the (usually lax) military discipline.[46] Occasionally a newspaper would shame a settler for violence against Métis women, but such acts were still often portrayed as partially justified, depending on their political and familial associations. For example, the *Manitoban and Northwest Herald* called out a group of men who had formed a mob and visited Louis Riel's home and other places he frequented. It was well-known that Riel was already gone and that only his mother and sisters were in the home. When the mob threatened the women with violence, they were accused of being cowards by the *Manitoban*, although the *Globe* correspondent "conjectured that Riel would have probably been at St. Boniface" as it was a "Roman Catholic holiday."[47] Violence against Métis women was tolerated as part of the local circumstances; men were rarely punished beyond being accused of cowardice or being temporarily confined to the barracks or fort. In contrast, the threat of violence against Mennonite women was used as justification for an increased presence of law enforcement on the prairie, which was another way for governments to increase surveillance and control over Indigenous groups and those seen as "less respectable."

Mennonite settlers were viewed as respectable despite their foreignness because of their contributions to the success of the Canadian colonial project in Manitoba. Only a few years after their arrival Mennonites were welcomed as participants in these nation-building efforts. The governor general visited the Mennonite reserves in 1877 and gave a speech to the Mennonites that connected their settlement to the politics of land and settler colonialism.[48] The main purpose of the governor general's visit was to welcome the Mennonites to Canada and to make them feel included in the colonial project of the West. This was most evident during Lord Dufferin's speech when he said:

> The war to which we invite you as recruits and comrades is a war waged against the brute forces of nature; but those forces will welcome our domination, and reward our attack by placing their treasures at our disposal. It is a war of ambition,—for we intend to annex territory after territory,—but neither blazing villages nor devastated fields will mark our ruthless track; our battalions will march across the illimitable plains which stretch before us as sunshine steals athwart the ocean; the rolling

> prairie will blossom in our wake, and corn and peace and plenty will spring where we have trod.[49]

The militaristic language in this section at first seems out of place in a speech given to the pacifist audience of Mennonites, but Dufferin's aim was to communicate how the Mennonites fit into the narrative of Canadian colonialism. Their pacifism was central to this point, as evident in the language just before the previous quote, which assured that "nor will you be called upon in the struggle to stain your hands with human blood—a task which is so abhorrent to your religious feelings."[50] According to Dufferin, the role of Mennonites in building the Canadian nation was not the same as that of the soldiers who had preceded them, nor the settlers who followed, but allowed for a new origin story that glossed over the Canada-Métis conflict and the French-English divide, since Mennonites existed outside of the definitions of Canadian or Métis, French or English.

Mennonite economic success was used as a lesson for current settlers, as well as those who would follow. Mennonites were praised as extraordinary immigrants, able to achieve success on land that was not originally seen as ideal for European settlement. This was evident on March 21, 1876, when the Dominion Land Office reported that the Mennonites would be successful on land that was "almost completely destitute of timber, and would, consequently, hardly have been chosen for settlement by the ordinary immigrant."[51] The Mennonites were given two blocks of land, one on each side of the Red River, and intended to live amongst themselves within these two reserves. Mennonites chose to engage with the governments and authorities when it came to improving the land for more prosperous agriculture, but otherwise preferred being left alone. Shannon Stunden Bower, in her examination of water management in Manitoba, observes that Mennonites were struggling to control the drainage problems in the West reserve, and became involved in municipal and provincial politics the 1880s and 1890s in order to take on larger projects to manage drainage.[52] Initially their exceptions to the Dominion Lands Act meant that the village system and communal land allowed Mennonites "a greater measure of flexibility in accommodating local environmental conditions, including surface water patterns, than was available to the average homesteader."[53] As their communities grew and they could no longer avoid the sections of land that tended to flood, they took on community projects and coordinated efforts such as hand-digging ditches.[54] These cooperative efforts were aided by Mennonites' initial block settlement, which was not granted to most other settlers.

Governments at all levels were willing to grant Mennonites land and then assist them in developing it in order to make them more economically successful. In comparison to the half million acres granted to the Mennonites, the 1.4 million acres promised for Métis reserves were protested and delayed by the provincial government. Chief Justice Wood called the idea of Métis land reserves a "curse to the country."[55] Jean Teillet explains that the objection was not about setting aside land for one particular group, since many immigrant groups were granted reserves, nor was it about language, since the Mennonites also did not speak English. The protest was rather specifically against giving the Métis the land they had negotiated. She argues that it was a combination of racism and revenge for the Red River Resistance that caused the federal government to block the Métis reserves from being correctly administered.[56] Laws were illegally changed in Ottawa and sections of the Manitoba Act were deleted to excuse governments from treating Métis claims as legitimate.[57]

While government officials resisted the idea of Métis land reserves, newspaper reports from shortly after the Mennonite immigration explained that those who had only just arrived in recent weeks and months were already making "good" use of the land. Even the families who did not yet have livestock were storing up hay for the future. Many were living in homes made of grass and hay, with clay mortar for the floors. Newspapers reported these modest beginnings as signs of hardiness and good work ethic because Mennonites were able to adjust to a difficult area without lumber.[58] Mennonite economic success was also held up as evidence of Mennonites adapting to and improving the country to which they arrived. Newspapers regularly commented on the presence of Mennonites in the local markets. In one 1874 article in the *Manitoba Free Press*, the author reported that "a large number of Mennonites who drove through with teams and cattle, arrived yesterday, and created the usual ripple upon the bosom of the city's business stream."[59] Talk of the Mennonites' "usual ripple" on the economy of the city occurred as Manitobans hoped to see their province become a wealthy part of the nation. This showed the haste with which the settler narrative began to take over the story of Manitoba, while ideas of respectability and success were portrayed as exclusive to Euro-Canadians.

Initially the land reserve system was praised and credited with the success of the Mennonites, but the coverage quickly became negative when settlers realized the value of some of this formerly underappreciated land. This anti-reserve discussion emerged in a long *Free Press* article entitled "The Land Reserves," which did not solely target Mennonites, but rather expressed frustration with the

"Half-breed," Indian, Hudson's Bay Company, French, Icelandic, and Mennonite reserves in various parts of the province.[60] This sentiment was expressed through a story that, while fictional, was designed to appeal to newly-arriving settlers. In it, a man tries to find a place to settle his family, but is continuously told by the Land Office that the land he had chosen was set aside, first as part of the "1,400,000 acres of land reserved for the children of Half-breeds" and then "a Hudson's Bay Company lot" and finally, that his homestead was "within twenty miles of a prospective line of railway."[61] The would-be settler continued his struggle several more times, before becoming discouraged and returning to Winnipeg with his family, where, according to the newspaper, "if he does not leave the country, or has not the means enough to get out, he goes into teaming and his family opens a cheap boarding house."[62] This was seen as the worst thing that could happen to a respectable Canadian settler, as teaming and running a boarding house were generally roles for less desirable immigrant families. One of the complaints raised was that "holders of these reserves will not occupy them or let others occupy them, who are ready to plunge the plow into the soil and cause the now waste places to teem with golden grain."[63] While the Mennonites were using land in a way that settlers acknowledged as valuable (for farming), and so were not the main subject of the frustration compared to other the other groups listed, they were nevertheless brought into this critical discussion of legitimate land use in Manitoba. The closing of this article contained an appeal to various levels of government (and for citizens to petition those governments) to prevent this from becoming the norm in other places, as well as to pressure governments to open "unoccupied" reserves for settlement.[64] Land reserves remained an area of conflict between the Mennonites and the Anglo-Canadian settlers living around them, even as Mennonites were praised as settling a challenging area of the province.

In 1886, the narrative of successful Mennonite settlement was still being told in newspaper accounts, but the decade since initial settlement had changed the ways in which the land of Manitoba was used. In the 1870s, there were strong First Nations and Métis claims to the land, which the English newspapers were hesitant to emphasize. By 1886, the Indigenous presence on the land was largely displaced by the agrarian production of the Mennonites and others, and this served to romanticize the history of the province.[65] These observations were published in a report about the Pembina Mountains and the western Mennonite settlement. In this report, the Mennonite settlement was praised as "the only one that has really prospered in Manitoba or the Northwest so far" and the usual discussion of

Mennonite work ethic and thrift was offered.[66] Apart from the praise of Mennonite land use, there was also a discussion of previous Indigenous presence on the land, as evidenced by large mounds amidst the plowed fields. This newspaper story was careful not to draw direct connections between the present-day Indigenous peoples of Manitoba and the people who had built the mounds. In the paragraph prior to the examination of the burial mounds, "Indians" were mentioned, in an off-hand remark about ridding the country of gophers, and that "perhaps a premium of a cent for each [gopher] scalp or tail would induce the Indians and others to go for them."[67] The next paragraph discussed the burial mounds, beginning with the phrase "Long before the present Indian tribes came to the Northwest it was inhabited by a more civilized race, of whom we have no records except the few mounds they have left."[68] The mound, called "Calf Mountain," was described, including the evidence of "skeletons of recent burials."[69] The paragraph closed with the suggestion that "in the interests of science this mound should be properly opened."[70]

While at first this description of burial mounds does not seem to have any relation to the previous reporting about how Mennonites had transformed the land, a closer examination reveals how the history of settling the prairie was being framed. Mennonite land use was praised, and the "Indians" living in the same area of the province were not discussed as farmers or as people who had previously used the land. Instead, the article mentioned that they might be able to catch gophers there. The Indigenous peoples who created the burial mounds were admired by the Euro-Canadian observers, who declared them to be a "civilized race," different from the Indigenous peoples living on the land at the present time. This type of depiction mattered, because the English newspapers, through stories like this, were able to retell and reposition the history of settlement in Manitoba. In this version of provincial history, the Mennonites and the government did not take land that was in use by a "civilized" people, but rather, claimed land that was temporarily held by a "less civilized" people. Writers voiced this conclusion despite the evidence of recently buried skeletons in the mounds, which implied the mounds were still significant to the present-day Indigenous people. Both former Indigenous and current Mennonite land use practices were praised, while present Indigenous land uses were delegitimized so the government could continue replacing them with settlers.

As time passed, Mennonites became entrenched as a part of the history of Manitoba, particularly as their arrival predated most of the province's other settlers. This is evident in an 1892 article with the lengthy title "The Mennonites: 'Or the Heroes of a Flat Country':

A History of Manitoba's Most Prosperous Agriculturalists Briefly Told—Terms Under Which Mennonites Settled in This Province." Several columns were dedicated to telling the history of the Mennonites over the last several hundred years, how they came to Canada, and their success.[71] Mennonites were praised for mission work with Indigenous people, while excused as being "very slow" in "adopting Canadian customs."[72] This story was written by Ella Cora Hind, a stenographer and aspiring journalist who submitted articles on agriculture to the *Free Press*. Initially being denied a position in 1882, Hind eventually became the agricultural editor in 1901.[73] The language she used was clearly designed to communicate Mennonite success in transforming the province, as they were considered heroes purely because they were the "most prosperous agriculturalists."[74] They were also praised as heroes for standing firm in their beliefs and preserving their culture, something for which the Indigenous people of Manitoba were not praised. This storytelling about the formation of Manitoba into a successful farming province completely erased the long history of agriculture that had existed in Red River prior to Mennonite arrival, which had been undermined by the federal government's rejection of Métis land rights set out in the Manitoba Act.[75] In the wake of Manitoba Act, Métis land rights were dismissed and their lots were classified as "wastelands," while the Métis inhabitants were officially listed by land offices as "former occupants" of land that anyone else could claim.[76] This was part of a fifteen-year-long cycle of Métis forced relocation as they tried to apply for their land, a "four-pronged assault" in which the law, land speculators, the army, and armed immigrants or settlers all working against the Métis.[77] This prior history of agriculture in Manitoba was conveniently forgotten in celebrations of Mennonite agricultural success by Hind and others, in which Mennonites served as the benchmark for the beginnings of agriculture in the province.

Mennonites became part of the national mythmaking of the English newspapers because they occupied a distinct position in the history of the province as the first group of immigrants to settle in the new province. While individual settlers and an entire military contingent arrived before the Mennonites, their successes could not so easily be praised without considering their contributions to the conflict and violence of that era. They also struggled on lands whose economic value the Mennonites would later demonstrate. Mennonites could be observed as outsiders while also praised as heroes for their good qualities that aligned with the racialized Canadian vision of the ideal settler. They brought white women, children, and religious pacifism to the region where the white population was primarily male soldiers and fur traders, and while they did not easily

assimilate into Anglo-Canadian society, they were not French or Catholic either. Newspapers had the role of publicizing these narratives, publishing government reports as well as local editorials, while choosing which stories and voices to silence. They communicated the present-day relationships between the various actors in the province and framed the history of Manitoba in the stories they told. These narratives helped establish the power structure and boundaries within Manitoba, and Manitoba's position within the Canadian nation more broadly.

Notes

1 Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 156.
2 Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority,* 156.
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