

*“You’ve Changed Too”:*  
**THE EDUCATION OF THE YARROW MENNONITE  
COMMUNITY,  
1928-1960**

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In 1984, Carl Wilson, Yarrow’s long-time elementary school principal, attended a Christmas programme at the Yarrow Mennonite Brethren (M.B.) Church. Noticing the many children dressed in costumes, he could not help but recall his school’s Christmas programme during the early 1930s. Since at that time there was no other building in Yarrow large enough to put on a school programme for parents, he had asked and received permission to use the new M.B. church building. Unknowingly, he violated church policy, which forbade the use of costumes in the church. Now in 1984, he saw costumes and dancing. “So I thought,” he recalled, “you’ve changed too.”<sup>1</sup>

The Yarrow settlement to which Carl Wilson first came in the late 1920s had been made possible by a major reclamation project undertaken by the British Columbia government following World War I. The project included digging several canals (Vedder Canal was the principal one), dredging the river systems, building dikes, and installing a pumping station at Barrowtown. In 1924, land developers harvested the first crops on what had been known as Sumas Lake. C.E. Eckert, one of the developers, put up for sale 700 acres of land on the eastern edge of the old lake bottom. Divided into ten and twenty-acre plots, these 700 acres became the site in 1928 of the Mennonite settlement called Yarrow.<sup>2</sup>

Yarrow’s population increased rapidly from the late 1920s to the mid-1940s. Large numbers of Mennonite families moved to Yarrow from the Canadian prairies, especially Saskatchewan. With a few exceptions, most settlers were Mennonites known as *Russlaender* who had been born in old Russia and emigrated from the Soviet Union during the mid-1920s. Mennonites who had been

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1. The author is grateful to the Tennessee Technological University Faculty Research Fund for its financial support for research on Yarrow; to Suellen Alfred, James Akenson, Irma Epp, Jacob Loewen, Leonard Neufeldt, Neil Sutherland, Wayne Urban, and J. Donald Wilson for their critical comments on this paper. Interview with Carl Wilson, 26 Aug. 1985, in Sardis, British Columbia.
  2. Agatha E. Klassen, *Yarrow: A Portrait in Mosaic*, rev. ed. (Yarrow, B.C.: published by the author, 1980), 20-25; K. Foulds, ed., *Land Beneath the Lake* (Matsqui, B.C.: M.S.A. Museum Society, 1991).

in Canada for several generations were called *Kanadier*. The *Russlaender* of Yarrow identified with two different Mennonite churches. The largest of these was the Mennonite Brethren Church; the other, the United Mennonite Church, belonged to the General Conference (G.C.) Mennonite Church.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze the efforts of the Canadian, English-speaking society and the Mennonite Brethren community in educating Yarrow's children and adults from 1928 to 1960. The English-speaking society's activities in education, primarily confined to the Yarrow public elementary school, were designed to assimilate the New Canadians culturally, including linguistically. The Mennonite community's educational activities, including the Sunday school, German School, Bible school, and two Mennonite high schools, were designed at first to define ethnic boundaries and limit assimilation. This paper will address several questions. To what extent did Carl Wilson's observation in 1984 that Yarrow had changed describe adequately the *Russlaender's* attitude towards and efforts in education? Were the *Russlaender's* attitudes regarding education during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s in keeping with or a departure from their practices in Russia in the decades preceding the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917? Were the *Russlaender's* activities in education designed to reinforce ethnic solidarity and limit or to control the direction of assimilation?

### **Custodians of Intellect: The Russian Experience**

Yarrow's *Russlaender* brought with them memories of a golden age in Russia. The last decades of the nineteenth and first one-and-a-half decades of the twentieth centuries were years of growth and prosperity for many Mennonites in old Russia. By World War I, Mennonites in Russia had amassed more wealth, controlled more industry, and owned more farm land than had their religious and ethnic counterparts in any other country in Europe or North America. This wealth, along with their right of virtual self-government within their villages, enabled the Mennonites to establish a wide network of charitable and educational institutions. By 1914, they maintained and controlled over 400 village (elementary) schools, twenty high schools, and two teacher-training institutes. Illiteracy was rare among the Russian Mennonites. But education varied, being most

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3. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 78-86, 108-15; Alfred H. Siemens, "Mennonite Settlement in the Lower Fraser Valley" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1960), 52-59. Many *Russlaender* had received travel assistance from the Canadian Pacific Railway, which hoped to increase the value of its land holdings by bringing in settlers.

advanced in the Molotschna Colony in the Ukraine and least developed in Mennonite settlements on the Siberian frontier.<sup>4</sup>

The value of education beyond the most elementary level had not always been recognized by the Mennonites in Russia. The first generations of Prussian Mennonites who responded positively in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to Catherine the Great's invitation to west Europeans to settle in that part of the Ukraine recently reclaimed from the Turks, had little time for school. In addition some Mennonites shared the distrust for higher learning exhibited by many Anabaptists. By 1840, Mennonite leaders such as Johann Cornies, a prosperous farmer and the first president of the Molotschna colony's Agricultural Improvement Society, began to emphasize the need for improved standards in the village elementary and secondary schools. Secondary school teachers soon replaced the village preachers as the intellectual leaders in the Mennonite colonies. As John Toews points out, the secondary schools emerged after 1860

as the custodians of intellect for subsequent generations. Such schools frequently offered "half-way houses" for...academic over-achievers and provided an acceptable, even honorable, role for them in Mennonite society.<sup>5</sup>

By 1900, most Mennonites in Russia no longer feared advanced schooling *per se*. P.M. Friesen, a teacher at Halbstadt during the 1880s and historian of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia, taught that education need not be a threat to one's religious heritage as long as education could be controlled by the Mennonites. Since the *Russlaender* did not control the public school in Yarrow nor the public high school in the neighbouring town of Chilliwack, the Yarrow Mennonites prior to World War II viewed post-elementary education with suspicion. Friesen's concept of controlled education at the secondary level would reappear as the rationale for Yarrow's private high schools built in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>6</sup>

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4. John B. Toews, "Cultural and Intellectual Aspects of the Mennonite Experience in Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* [MQR] 47 (Apr. 1973): 83-101; David Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," *MQR* 48 (Jan. 1974): 5-54; Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, 1789-1910*, translated from German (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Lit.-Gen Conf. of Men. Breth. Churches, 1978 [1911]), 689-841.
  5. Harvey Dyck, "Russian Servitor and Mennonite Hero: Light and Shadow in Images of Johann Cornies," paper presented at Conrad Grebel College, May 9-10, 1984; C. Henry Smith, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites*, rev. 5th ed. (Newton, Ks: Faith and Life Press, 1981), 263-67, 269-70; Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 689-809; James Urry, *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), 120-66; Toews, "Mennonite Experience in Russia," 150.
  6. Interview with Jacob Loewen, 27 Aug. 1985, in Clearbrook, B.C.; Friesen, *The*

The *Russlaender* were never able to duplicate completely their Russian educational experience in Yarrow. In Russia, the Mennonites' formal education, no matter how limited, was much more extensive than that received by most Russian peasants. In Yarrow it was different; no longer could they view themselves as culturally superior to their non-Mennonite neighbours. They never controlled the village school. The only elementary school was a public school, taught in English by outsiders. To deal with this new situation, the *Russlaender* established their own institutions.<sup>7</sup>

At issue in Yarrow was the extent to which the *Russlaender* were prepared to move beyond cultural separatism to cultural pluralism. In Russia, their social arrangement had been one of religious, political, and economic separatism. They were a protected Protestant minority in a Russian Orthodox state. Economically and politically they enjoyed land-holding privileges and political guarantees not granted to Russian serfs. But they only enjoyed these rights as long as they remained Mennonites. Consequently, politically, economically and, to a large extent, socially, the Mennonites' experience in Russia had been primarily one of separatism. The Russification programmes in the 1880s brought with them a small shift towards cultural pluralism among the Mennonite intelligentsia. However, the intelligentsia identified only with high-brow, Russian culture. And patriotism was defined as loyalty to the Czar, not identification with the Russian masses.<sup>8</sup>

The *Russlaender* brought to Yarrow their concept of cultural separatism. This was evident in the establishment of the Sunday school, German school, and Bible school in the 1930s. However, by the end of World War II a movement from cultural separatism to pluralism was becoming evident. This movement envisioned more economic, political, social, and religious interaction with the English-speaking Canadian society than previously had been the case. Religiously, an accommodation of sorts with North American evangelical fundamentalism began to occur. Linguistically there was a shift from German to bilingualism to German as a foreign language. These changes were evident in the Sunday and Bible schools and especially in the private high schools. The

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*Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia.*

7. While literacy rates among Russian peasants did not match those of the German-speaking settlers in the Ukraine, nevertheless they were not as low as historians, including Soviet researchers, have often assumed. On Russian literacy rates and popular schooling, see Ben Eklof's "The Adequacy of Basic Schooling in Rural Russia: Teachers and Their Craft, 1880-1914," *History of Education Quarterly [HEQ]* 26 (Summer 1986): 199-223, and Franklin Walker's "Popular Response to Public Education in the Reign of Tsar Alexander (1801-1825)," *HEQ* 24 (Winter 1984): 527-43.
8. Harvey Dyck, ed. and trans., "Russian Mennonitism and the Challenge of Russian Nationalism, 1889," *MQR* 56 (Oct. 1982): 307-41.

focus for educational efforts after World War II shifted from resisting to controlling the direction of assimilation.

### Adding Something Extra: Carl Wilson and the Public School

In the history of the Yarrow public school, no name looms larger than that of Carl Wilson. Wilson was born in 1906 in Arden, Manitoba, where his father started a flour mill. In 1911, the Wilsons moved to British Columbia, where Carl's father took a job with the B.C. Electric Railway, first in New Westminster and then in Sardis, six miles east of what soon would become Yarrow. After completing his normal school course in Vancouver in 1928, Carl Wilson began a life-long career in education. He taught for a time in a one-room, one-family school, on the Yukon Telegraph Line in the Buckley Valley of north-central B.C. near Hazelton. Finding the Hazelton area too remote, he returned to the Fraser Valley, serving briefly as a substitute teacher in Sardis and Chilliwack until his appointment to Yarrow in 1929. Here he remained for the next two decades.<sup>9</sup>

When Wilson arrived in Yarrow there were two public schools. Wilson's school on Central Road served the Mennonite children while the original school on Majuba Hill above the former Sumas Lake served the non-Mennonite children. With the rapid influx of settlers and the exodus of some of the English-speaking residents, the Majuba Hill school closed. Once the Yarrow school expanded from one to two rooms, Wilson became the teaching principal.<sup>10</sup>

Yarrow's rapid growth soon created space problems in Wilson's school. When the Chilliwack School Board planned to transport some of Yarrow's children to the Vedder school, five miles east of Yarrow, Wilson suggested that the Mennonite community might provide space in the M.B. church. Eager to keep their children in Yarrow, the *Russlaender*, agreed. At first the school met in the church building itself. In 1933, the church reached an agreement with the school board whereby the church would erect a two-room building on the church yard and lease it to the board. For the next three years Wilson served as principal over a school located in two different school sites. The lower grades utilized the two-room building on the church grounds, while the upper elementary grades, taught by Wilson himself, used the one-room building on the Yarrow school grounds on Central Road, approximately one-third of a mile from the church. In 1936, the school board finally agreed to construct a four-room school. This decision was not without its critics. Money was scarce during the depression, and some critics suggested that Yarrow's population might soon decline due to

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9. Interview, Carl Wilson.

10. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 96-103; interview, Carl Wilson.

Yarrow's severe economic problems. However, Eckert, Yarrow's major land developer, donated \$225.00, and construction began.<sup>11</sup>

To work with Wilson and the Chilliwack school authorities, the Mennonites established their own board. Although it had no legal standing, Wilson would occasionally contact it. Chaining this unofficial school board was P.H. Neufeld, a *Kanadier* and former teacher, who, unlike most *Russlaender*, was fluent in the English language. The Mennonite board sought to influence the Chilliwack School Board on issues of vital concern to the community. In 1938, a Yarrow delegation appeared before the Chilliwack School Board requesting that forty-five minutes be set aside each school day for instruction in German and religion, the latter also to be taught in the mother tongue. Permission was not granted. The same year a Yarrow delegation lodged a complaint against a teacher, W.A. Manford, and requested that Mr. Neufeld be considered for appointment as teacher. Neufeld was not hired, but the teacher was transferred.<sup>12</sup>

The *Russlaender* did not share Carl Wilson's views on cultural, including linguistic, assimilation. Wilson, a thorough-going assimilationist who promoted what he called Canadianization, frowned upon any child who spoke German in the school or on the schoolyard. If a child blurted out something in German, Wilson was sure to react. He later recalled, "I'd frown...at them, I'd scold them, I'd get after them." Although Wilson spoke positively of the Mennonite teachers who taught in his school, he sought to limit their number. It was not until the mid-1940s that the Chilliwack school board appointed a Mennonite from Yarrow, Freida Nachtigal, to the Yarrow staff. The non-appointment of Mennonites to the staff can be attributed in part to the fact that few, if any, of the *Russlaender* held B.C. teaching certificates prior to 1945. However, the Chilliwack School Board assigned teachers like Freida Nachtigal, upon graduation from the normal school, to schools in non-Mennonite centres. Anti-Yarrow and anti-Mennonite sentiment was evident, especially during World War II. Wilson later observed, "We who taught in Yarrow were not frowned upon, but we were considered, I think, a lower class of teachers." School board policy relative to the appointment of Yarrow Mennonites changed significantly in the 1950s. In 1953, the year before the public school moved into a larger elementary-junior high building on Wilson Road, four of the eight teachers were from *Russlaender* families. By then Wilson had been transferred to another school in Chilliwack. It is doubtful whether he would have approved of a fifty percent Mennonite ratio in his staff in

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11. Minutes, Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church, 23 Aug. 1931 [hereinafter cited as YMBC]; Minutes, School Board, Chilliwack Municipality, 27 Aug. 1931, 6 Oct. 1933 [hereinafter cited as SBC]; *Chilliwack Progress*, 16 Nov. 1933, 12 Mar. and 5 Aug. 1936. The Yarrow community's experiment in growing rhubarb had not proven to be economically successful.
  12. Interview, Carl Wilson; SBC, 28 Mar., 2 May, 8 Aug. 1938; 30 Jan. 1940; 13 Aug. 1941.

Yarrow. He later remarked that he did not oppose the hiring of Mennonite teachers provided there were not too many of them.<sup>13</sup>

For Carl Wilson, the Yarrow school had to accomplish more than the typical public school. All schools taught the three Rs. As for the Yarrow school, he later recalled that "I somehow got the feeling...I not only had to teach them one and one makes two, but I had to teach them to be Canadians."<sup>14</sup> Teaching children to be Canadians included several aspects. One, already alluded to, was immersing the children as quickly as possible in the English language. Another was transmitting essential knowledge of Canadian culture, including history. In addition there was the inculcation of appropriate values modelled by English-speaking teachers who could be relied upon to promote national rather than ethnic goals. But for Wilson it also included the non-formal curriculum. He later observed that the school picnic could be used to teach children to be Canadians. If non-immigrant children went on picnics, the Mennonite children should also go on a school picnic. Arranging for the Yarrow children to be transported to Cultus Lake for a school picnic was part of Wilson's programme for Canadianization. Reflecting on his reaction to the *Russlaender* desire to build a private school in 1946, he recalled:

I thought how foolish....Here we are providing for education for the type that these young people need. They don't need Mennonite background. They get that at church, they get that at Sunday school, they get that in Saturday school. What they need is Canadianization, not Mennonitization....I was quite pleased when the school could not carry on.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Wilson's emphasis upon Canadianization, it is doubtful whether any outsider received as much respect and admiration from the *Russlaender* as did Carl Wilson. One can point to several reasons. First, Wilson exhibited concern, even compassion, for the Mennonite children. During the 1930s, when the *Russlaender* faced extreme poverty, he realized that parents could not afford expensive clothes but he required that the children wear shoes. He also accepted the fact that no children would show up for class during the first two weeks in September since they were all working in hopyards. And in contrast to one of

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13. Interview, Carl Wilson; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 101. Wilson's reluctance to place Mennonite teachers in Yarrow was in keeping with the views of assimilationists, such as Saskatchewan's educator, J.T.M. Anderson. According to Anderson, the "ideal procedure" was to place properly trained teachers of foreign-born parents in English-speaking communities. See J.T.M. Anderson, *The Education of the New Canadian: A Treatise on Canada's Greatest Educational Problems* (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1918), 159.

14. Interview, Carl Wilson.

15. *Ibid.* On views of "Canadianization" of immigrant children in the schools see Anderson, *The Education of the New Canadian*.

the other teachers, if children were absent for a religious holiday, he did not make an issue of it. Wilson was also respected because he was a firm disciplinarian. Both he and many of the Mennonites were strong believers in the use of corporal punishment. There is no record in the Chilliwack School Board minutes of a Yarrow delegation ever registering a complaint against a teacher noted for her violent temper and harsh punishment bordering on physical abuse.<sup>16</sup>

Although Wilson and the other English-speaking teachers were outsiders, generally speaking the Mennonite community did not view them to be a threat. They were outsiders when it came to geography, ethnicity, and language. They all lived outside the community. None spoke the German language; none married a member of the community. And since prior to 1945, few of Yarrow's youth attended high school, the teachers did not serve as role models for significant numbers of Mennonite youth. As long as the school was in Yarrow, and most of the students were from Mennonite homes, the parents did not feel unduly threatened. Because of their poverty, their limited knowledge of the English language, and their lack of an adequate corps of certified Mennonite teachers, it was not surprising that the *Russlaender* did not even attempt to build their own elementary school. Carl Wilson and the public school provided what the *Russlaender* needed, an institution to teach their children the basic skills and the laws of the land. As long as the school remained in Yarrow they could interact with Carl Wilson and the non-Mennonite teachers on their own terms. To compensate for the lack of control of the elementary school, the *Russlaender* built several other educational institutions to help safeguard their youth. Wilson's efforts notwithstanding, these institutions would define what was acceptable "Canadianization" in a culturally separate community.<sup>17</sup>

### **Doing Something Quickly to Safeguard the Children: The Mennonite Brethren Sunday School**

The Sunday school was a new institution for many *Russlaender*. In Russia, Sunday schools had not been the norm. Since part of each school day was set aside for religious instruction, there was no perceived need for Sunday schools. The Sunday school, however, was well established in Canadian Mennonite churches, especially in Ontario, prior to the arrival of the *Russlaender* in the 1920s. Upon their arrival in Canada, the *Russlaender* quickly established part-

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16. Interview, Carl Wilson.

17. Peter Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada, 1786-1960" (Ed.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1970), 283.



time language schools, followed by Sunday schools. Both were established to make up for the loss of control of the day schools.<sup>18</sup>

At first, Yarrow's *Russlaender* did not organize a formal Sunday school. Several individuals, including Gertrude (Trudy) Reimer, Gertrude Peters, and Gerhardt Derksen, invited children into their homes on Sunday afternoons, where they would share Bible stories with the children. There was no formal curriculum and no division of classes by age. Once the church began to hold services in the public school building, children also began to meet in school on Sunday afternoon.<sup>19</sup>

The late 1930s and early 1940s witnessed a steady growth in Sunday school enrolment and the creation of a more formal organization. The meeting time was changed from Sunday afternoon to morning. In 1937, the church elected Peter Loewen as its first superintendent of Sunday schools. Loewen had attended Mennonite Bible schools in Winkler, Manitoba, and Herbert, Saskatchewan, where he had been introduced to the importance of Sunday schools in Christian education. Loewen later recalled that he came to the Fraser Valley convinced that God had called him to be Yarrow's superintendent of Sunday schools. By December, 1939, enrolment had reached 250. Under Loewen's leadership different departments, including beginners, primary, junior, and intermediate, were set up, each with its group of teachers and a departmental supervisor. In keeping with the gender hierarchy of the church, supervisors of all departments except beginners were male.<sup>20</sup>

Several changes became evident by the late 1940s. German had been the only language of instruction in the Sunday school throughout the 1930s and the 1940s. In 1949 the church organized its first English class, intended for children who came from non-Mennonite families, many coming from the Vedder Crossing Army Base. During the next ten years English became the language of instruction in most classes. The Sunday school enrolment peaked at 450 by 1949. The economic attraction of outside employment led to an exodus of Mennonites from Yarrow to urban centres, especially Vancouver, resulting in a gradual enrolment decline throughout the 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

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18. Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), 451-52.
  19. Interview, Henry P. Neufeldt, 29 Aug. 1985, in Clearbrook, B.C.; interview, Peter Loewen, summer 1983, in Clearbrook, B.C.; YMBC, 8 Mar. 1929.
  20. YMBC, 13 Dec. 1939; YMBC, 16 Dec. 1960; YMBC, 24 Jan. 1961; interview, Peter Loewen; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 86-89; George D. Pries, *A Place Called Peniel: Winkler Bible Institute, 1925-1975* (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1975). On the restricted role of women in the Yarrow church, see Harvey Neufeldt, "Creating the Brotherhood: Status and Control in the Yarrow Mennonite Community, 1928-1960," in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, 9, ed. Donald H. Akenson (Gananoque, Ontario: Longdale Press, 1994), 225-29.
  21. Interview, Anne Loewen, 6 Aug. 1990, in Clearbrook, B.C.; interview, Leonard

The Yarrow M.B. Church viewed the Sunday school in part as an institution designed to safeguard its children and adolescents from the dangers of secular culture. Secular culture was not defined clearly and included much of mainstream Canadian culture. Teachers were selected carefully by the church. Conversion of the child, a personal and often emotional experience, including both a repentance of sin and a "faith in Christ as Savior and Lord," soon became one of the Sunday school's major goals. In Russia, the age of baptism had usually been the late teens or early twenties; in Yarrow it gradually fell. Increasing numbers of males and females, especially the latter, applied for baptism in their early or mid-teens. Conversion of children at an early age, even at pre-school age, was emphasized increasingly in homes and the Sunday school.

One interpretation suggests that the Sunday school's emphasis on early conversion reflected, at least in part, an attitude of fear. Compared to their English-speaking neighbours the *Russlaender* found themselves to be inferior educationally, economically, and, some felt, culturally. Jacob A. Loewen argues that there was an underlying attitude that something must be done quickly for the children. Otherwise, the church feared, the children could be lost.<sup>22</sup>

### Binding the Youth: The German School

Alongside the Sunday School stood another institution for children, the German school. Popularly known as Saturday or Religion school, the German school, like the Sunday school, was not part of the Russian Mennonite experience. There was no need for it because German was taught daily in Russian schools. Upon their arrival in Canada, the *Russlaender* quickly adopted the practice of other immigrant groups such as the Poles, Ukrainians, and Japanese, of establishing part-time language schools.<sup>23</sup>

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Neufeldt, summer 1990, in Clearbrook, B.C.; YMBC, 2 Aug. 1949; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 86-89.

22. Interview, Jacob Loewen. On the M.B. concept of conversion see J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, Gen. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), 369-70.
23. On the establishment of part-time language schools in Canada by immigrant groups, see Benjamin Redekop, "The German Identity of Mennonite Brethren Immigrants in Canada, 1930-1960" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990), 198-99; Henry Radecki and Benedykt Heydenkorn, *A Member of a Distinguished Family: The Polish Group in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 86-110; Henry Radecki, *Ethnic Organizational Dynamics: The Polish Group in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979), 67-68, 114, 222; Jeffrey Reitz,

The maintenance of language has been a concern for most immigrant groups in Canada. According to Jeffrey Reitz, language maintenance has served "as a peculiarly potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language." In his study of Canadians of Polish, Italian, German and Ukrainian origin, Reitz found a strong relationship between language maintenance and participation in ethnic group activities by second and third generation immigrants. He also discovered that language maintenance decreased significantly with the second and third generation immigrants. Reitz's descriptions fit much of the pattern in Yarrow as well. Among the *Russlaender*, however, language maintenance also took on religious overtones.<sup>24</sup>

Organized in 1928, the German school was designed to provide what the public school omitted. The importance which the *Russlaender* attributed to the German language is evident in the fact that the German school's organization preceded even that of the Sunday school. The German school began as a community venture run by a *Verein* (society), associated with but not officially part of the M.B. church. In 1939, the Church officially adopted the German school, making it, in fact, a church-run and church-financed institution. The teacher's nominal salary during the early years was paid out of student fees. Due to the *Russlaender's* extreme poverty during the pre-World War II era, even minimal fees presented a hardship for many parents and teachers' incomes were modest at best. The first teachers, all males, had received most of their formal schooling in Russia. By 1947 several women, including Anna Bartsch, a former missionary in Zaire (then Belgian Congo) and Frieda Nachtigal, a public school teacher, also were recruited to teach on Saturdays. Throughout its history, the school functioned in part as a community school. *Russlaender*, from both the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren churches, attended.<sup>25</sup>

The German school was designed to supplement the public school curriculum for students ages 7-12 (grades 1-6). It usually offered classes for four to six levels per year to some one hundred or more students. Students learned to "read and write fluently in the 'mother tongue'" and sing German songs, all within a religious context. The texts used in the school combined language instruction and religion.<sup>26</sup>

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"Language and Ethnic Community Survival," in *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Canada: A Book of Readings*, 2nd. ed., ed. Rita M. Bienvenue and Jay Goldstein (Toronto: Butterworth, 1985), 105-23; John Norris, *Strangers Entertained, A History of Ethnic Groups of British Columbia* (Vancouver: British Columbia Centennial '71 Committee, 1971), 220-29; Joseph Krauter and Morris Davis, *Minority Canadians: Ethnic Groups* (Toronto: Methuen, 1978), 60-84; Thomas Berger, "The Banished Japanese Canadians," in *Ethnic Canadians: Identities and Inequalities*, ed. Leo Driediger (Toronto: Copp, Clark, Pitman, 1987), 374-94.

24. Reitz, "Language and Ethnic Community Survival," 105-23.

25. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 92-93; YMBC, 25 Oct., 1939; YMBC, 9 Dec. 1947.

26. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 92-93.

The church sponsored the German school for several reasons. *Russlaender* who immigrated as adults to Canada were fluent in the German language. They had studied it in the village schools in Russia, spoken it in the homes, in the village, and in the churches. For these *Russlaender* German would always remain their "Muttersprache" (mother tongue). Religion and way of life were linked to the German language. The names given to the school reflected its religious nature, names such as "Die Religionsschule" or "Deutsche Religionsschule." In 1937, the church was distressed to learn that the Mennonite Brethren churches in Oregon and California were considering switching their Christian youth endeavour programmes from German to English. Maintaining the German language was deemed by the church to be essential in order to bind the youth and to shield them from ridicule.<sup>27</sup>

What did it mean to bind the children and the youth? For some, it meant safeguarding the youth from being assimilated into the Canadian non-Mennonite culture. The *Russlaender's* attempts to limit assimilation was evident in Yarrow, by virtue of the distance the *Russlaender* maintained between themselves and outsiders. It was evident in the brief flirtation of a few *Russlaender* with Hitler's pan-Germanism, even to the point of displaying the swastika in their homes prior to World War II. It was evident in the attempts of the *Russlaender* to prevent, as much as possible, marriage between German Mennonites and their English-speaking neighbours. It was also evident in the Yarrow church's definition of worldliness, a theological/ethical term in the discourse of Yarrow Mennonites which included most non-Mennonite customs and dress styles, and, to an extent, language. In Russia, ethnicity determined most primary and secondary relationships. In Canada it was not possible to limit relationships at the secondary level but maintaining the German language limited them at the primary level.<sup>28</sup>

Maintaining the German language became increasingly problematic by the mid-1940s. A marked hostility towards anything associated with Germany, including the German language, was evident during World War II in the English-speaking communities outside Yarrow. By 1945 many of Yarrow's young people had become fluent in the use of the English language. German-school teachers noted a "considerable apathy towards the German language, especially among

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27. YMBC, 9 Dec. 1947; YMBC, 17 Apr. 1937; Peter Hamm, *Continuity and Change Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1987), 93.

28. Interview, Peter Loewen; interview, Jake Loewen. Jonathan Wagner argues that the *Russlaender's* flirtation with Hitler's pan-Germanism in the 1930s is evidence that the Mennonites should be viewed in "Volkish" and not only ethnic terms. Benjamin Redekop's study raises serious questions concerning this interpretation. See Wagner, "Transferred Crises: German Volkish Thought Among Russian Immigrants to Western Canada," *Canadian Review of Studies of Nationalism* I (Spring 1974): 202-20; Redekop, "The German Identity of Mennonite Brethren Immigrants in Canada," 19-20, 45-71.

the older students." And, as will be discussed later, the tendency of some of Yarrow's *Russlaender* to identify with North American evangelicalism/fundamentalism undermined the M.B. Church's concerted attempt to preserve Mennonitism and the German language. The influx of Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay following World War II, all of whom lacked a knowledge of the English language but were fluent in German, gave new impetus to the German language. In 1952 the German school committee reported an increased interest in the German language as evidenced by the large enrolment of students—195 in all. In addition there were still a considerable number of *Russlaender*, especially among the older population, who wanted to preserve the German language. Consequently, the German school continued for over two decades after World War II. By the time the German school finally closed in 1969, the "old masters of the German language had either died or retired."<sup>29</sup>

### Three R's and the Bible: The Elim Bible School

The Bible school was the third institution which the *Russlaender* created to educate the Yarrow community. Whereas the Sunday and German schools were designed for children, the Bible school took in adolescents and adults. Like the Sunday and German school, the Bible school was basically a new institution for the majority of the *Russlaender*. Yarrow's Elim Bible School was organized in order to supplement the Canadian educational scene, especially to compensate for lack of Mennonite high schools.<sup>30</sup>

The Bible school has remained a largely invisible institution in historical scholarship. Neither educational nor church historians have shown much interest in the Bible school. Historians of higher education have focused primarily on elite institutions, tracing the drive for professionalization in medicine, education, engineering, religion, and social work. They have shown little interest in the Bible school with its low academic and admissions standards, its emphasis on training the laity rather than a professional clergy for Christian service, and its ties to evangelical-fundamentalist churches often outside the mainstream Protestant denominations.<sup>31</sup>

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29. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 92-93.

30. Interview, Peter Loewen; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 89-92.

31. Since historians have failed to take seriously the Bible school movement in America, the story of this movement has been left entirely to insiders, such as S.S. Witner, *The Bible College Story: Education with Dimension* (Wheaton, IL: Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, 1962). One exception is Virginia Brereton's recent study,

The Canadian Mennonite Brethren Bible school movement can be traced to two institutions, one at Herbert, Saskatchewan, the other at Winkler, Manitoba. The establishment of the Herbert Bible school by the Northern District (Canadian M.B. Conference in 1913) predated the *Russlaender's* arrival in Canada. The Winkler Bible school, on the other hand, was founded by *Russlaender*. It began as a private endeavour of three former teachers of the Russian Bible school at Tschongraw, Crimea. The Tschongraw school, established in 1918 and the only Bible school founded by Mennonite Brethren in Russia, was short-lived. After the Tschongraw Institute was closed by Soviet authorities in 1924, three of its teachers, A.H. Unruh, G.J. Reimer, and Johann G. Wiens, emigrated to Canada and helped establish the Winkler Bible school in 1925.<sup>32</sup>

The rapid proliferation of Bible schools by the *Russlaender* in Canada is surprising. By 1947, Mennonites had founded twenty-seven Bible schools in Canada, twenty by *Russlaender*. Yet, as mentioned, the Bible school had been a late-comer on the Russian Mennonite educational scene, the Tschongraw institution being an exception rather than the norm. Since Bible, church, and Mennonite history were taught in the Mennonite *Zentralschule* (secondary school), there was little need to create Bible schools. The Bible school reflected a compromise which Russian Mennonites would have found unacceptable: namely, that the transmission of secular knowledge to children could be left to the state and the transmission of religious knowledge to young adults to the church.<sup>33</sup>

The Yarrow Bible school began as a part-time institution: in 1930, Peter Loewen offered two evening classes to a group of young men. Up to thirty males, ranging in ages from sixteen to forty, attended these classes. Loewen also offered daytime classes to young women, but at first these were not considered to be part of the Bible school population. During the next three years, three men, Peter Loewen, Johann Harder, the senior pastor of the Yarrow M.B. church from 1931-49, and Gerhardt Derksen, a prominent layman who had moved to Yarrow from Winkler, Manitoba, in 1930, ran the school, which by 1934 offered day classes, Monday through Friday, from October to March.<sup>34</sup>

The Yarrow Bible school's humble beginnings reflected the community's poverty. The school met wherever there was space available including the men's

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*Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990). Brereton provides an excellent scholarly study of this movement. Also useful for Canadian Bible schools is Ben Harder, "The Bible Institute-College Movement in Canada," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 22 (Apr. 1980): 29-45.

32. Pries, *A Place Called Peniel*; Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," 248-81.

33. Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," 270.

34. Interview, Peter Loewen; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 91; interview, David Giesbrecht, 31 Aug. 1990, in *Yarrow*, B.C.; Pries, *A Place Called Peniel*.

coatroom in the church and in private homes. The teachers' salaries began at \$20.00 per month and were paid out of the students' six-dollar tuition fees. The faculty supplemented their salary with farming and/or working in the hopyards.<sup>35</sup>

After the mid-1930s the Yarrow Bible school grew rapidly, although enrolment fluctuated, especially in the early 1930s, with students dropping in and out of school depending on availability of work. Although the Yarrow Church assumed some financial responsibility in 1934, the school continued to be operated by a Society until 1942, when it was taken over by the church. Named the Elim (Springs of Living Water) Bible school in 1936, the Yarrow Bible school expanded from two classes in 1937 to four in 1939. The school moved from the church to the former elementary school building on the churchyard and finally, in the mid-1940s, into a new six-room building erected on the churchyard. The 1942-45 years proved to be its golden era, with six faculty and enrolment reaching the 150 mark. Students came not only from Yarrow but also from adjacent Mennonite communities in Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Greendale and Arnold, and the Black Creek community on Vancouver Island.<sup>36</sup>

With the growth in enrolment and the addition of new faculty came an expansion of the curriculum. By 1945, it included music and choir, homiletics, Christian education, ethics, child study, story-telling, Mennonite history, and psychology. The language of instruction, strictly German prior to World War II, gradually shifted to English by the late 1940s. Meanwhile, in 1941, the school added a fifth-year, postgraduate class restricted to those males who considered entering the full-time ministry either as a pastor of a Canadian M.B. Church or as a missionary in another country.<sup>37</sup>

The Elim Bible School, as was typical of most Canadian and American Bible schools, had low admission requirements. almost all of Yarrow's youth who had reached their teen years during the 1920s lacked a high school education. The turmoil accompanying Russia's Civil War, the famine of the early 1920s, the closing of Mennonite schools, and poverty had virtually shut out an entire generation from attending high school in Russia. Because of Yarrow's extreme poverty during the 1930s almost all of Yarrow's youth left the public school at age fourteen to work on farms, in hopyards, for local or nearby businesses, or as domestics in established towns or cities in the Fraser Valley, including Chilliwack and Vancouver. With its low tuition and flexible schedule the Bible school enabled young adults, including married men, to receive some schooling. Classes were aimed at students with an eighth-grade level of education, although occa-

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35. Interview, Peter Loewen; interview, David Giesbrecht; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 89.

36. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 89-92; interview, Jacob Loewen; YMBC, 27 Sept. 1941, 24 Sept. 1946, 10 and 17 Dec. 1946.

37. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 89-92; interview, Jacob Loewen.

sionally a sprinkling of students had graduated from high school, and these students found its academic standards to be rather low.<sup>38</sup>

The Bible school tended to perpetuate the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge. The Yarrow Bible school, like many of its North American counterparts, focused primarily on Bible study. Prior to World War II, students purchased few, if any, books, but each student had a Bible. Some instructors like C.C. Peters, an evangelist and teacher educated in Russia, gradually broke out of this narrow mould and incorporated more "secular" knowledge into their lectures. Once English was introduced into some of the classes during the war, texts, most of them written by American evangelical-fundamentalists, were added. These books reinforced the notion that, except for the 3 Rs, all secular knowledge was suspect. In this respect the Bible school signalled a retreat on the part of the *Russlaender* when it came to the importance of knowledge beyond the basic skills.<sup>39</sup>

The Bible school had an unintended consequence: it undermined cultural, especially religious, separatism. Some of its students became heavily involved in what were then called home missions. Groups of young adults organized vacation Bible school and religious services in other towns. These efforts eventually led to the formation of the West Coast Children's Mission. Mission stations, all in English-speaking communities, had as their primary target children rather than adults; and programmes stressed evangelical Christianity rather than Mennonite distinctiveness. As long as the focus was on children, and as long as the children were in other communities, the Yarrow church could support home missions without facing the issue of cultural and linguistic assimilation. However, the Yarrow church was confronted with a dilemma in the 1940s when a group of Bible school students contacted the children's parents in Pitt Meadows. The students brought to Yarrow sixteen adult converts who requested baptism. The church finally agreed to baptize those adults who knew some German or had names common in Mennonite circles like Froese but spoke no German. The others it sent to a Baptist church for baptism. Even those whom the Yarrow church baptized were transferred to a Baptist church. For a time at least the Yarrow church had hesitated when it came to moving beyond cultural separatism. Nevertheless, the Bible school helped push the church towards aligning religiously with the evangelical-fundamentalist camp.<sup>40</sup>

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38. Interview, Jacob Loewen; interview, Carl Wilson; interview, Erma Wiebe, 8 Aug. 1990, in Yarrow, B.C.

39. Interview, Jacob Loewen. On the emphasis on the study of the English Bible in American Bible schools see Brereton, *Training God's Army*, 87-100.

40. Interview, Jacob Loewen. On the influence of evangelical-fundamentalism in Mennonite Bible Schools, see Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," 271.



After 1945, the Bible school experienced a rapid decline in enrolment. The school was now competing with Yarrow's new Mennonite high school. As Yarrow's economic situation improved, high school attendance became the norm rather than the exception for Yarrow's youth. By 1946, Bible school enrolment had dropped to eighty. Only thirty-seven of these students came from Yarrow. The following year enrolment dropped to twenty-eight. With the closing of the recently opened Mennonite high school in 1949, Bible School enrolment increased again, but by 1954, it had fallen to fourteen. The faculty, which stood at six in 1945, decreased to four in 1946 and to two in 1954. In 1955 the school was permanently closed.<sup>41</sup>

### **What Will Become of Our Children?: The Establishment of Sharon High(s)**

By the end of World War II, many Mennonites in British Columbia were beginning to realize that the 3 Rs plus the Bible would not be sufficient much longer. The idea of a Mennonite Brethren high school was raised in early 1944 at a district meeting of the Mennonite Brethren churches. Agreement was reached to make it a district-wide project with all church members contributing one dollar. Although no decision was made concerning the location of the school, Rev. Johann Harder along with other Yarrow members hoped that it would be built in Yarrow. However, Mennonites in the Clearbrook-Abbotsford area quickly seized the initiative and decided to offer high school subjects for grades 9, 10, and 11 at the Clearbrook Mennonite Bible School. Thus began in 1944 the highly successful present-day Mennonite Educational Institute (M.E.I.). Rev. Harder now turned his attention to establishing another school at Yarrow to serve the eastern section of the Fraser Valley.<sup>42</sup>

Several factors made the establishment of a private high school both desirable and possible. One was the improved economic outlook. Although few, if any, of Yarrow's residents could be classified as wealthy in 1945, the increased demand for raspberries during World War II had helped bring Yarrow out of its poverty. Furthermore, a new generation of successful entrepreneurs was emerging. And by 1945, the Mennonites had available a sufficient pool of prospective

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41. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 89-92; YMBC, 12 Nov. 1947, 6 Dec. 1951, 5 Oct. 1954, 6 Dec. 1955.

42. Interview, Jacob Loewen; Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," 282-87; Jacob A. Loewen, "Vignettes From My Memories of John A. Harder," *The Harder Family Review* 24 (Oct. 1993): 10-12.

teachers who were fluent in the English language, and an increasing number of youth were ready to pursue studies beyond the eighth-grade level.<sup>43</sup>

One stated reason for establishing a private high school was the fear of and perceived hostility from the English-speaking society. One teacher remarked that in the Mennonite school the children could be "pious [*Fromm*] without being treated with contempt." There was some validity to the charge that the English-speaking population harboured anti-Mennonite, anti-Yarrow sentiment. During World War II, Yarrow was viewed as being pro-German. On one occasion, RCMP officers interviewed the Yarrow Bible school principal and inspected the school's curriculum. The RCMP found nothing to warrant an investigation and left.<sup>44</sup>

Hostility, though evident at times, was not the main reason for building a private high school. The major purpose was to provide post-elementary schooling in a controlled environment. By the mid-1940s the issue was no longer whether Yarrow's youth would attend high school; the issue was which high school. Either they would be educated in a Mennonite school or be bused to Chilliwack to attend a public high school where the Mennonite students would constitute a distinct minority. Men like Johann Harder sought to recreate the Russian-Mennonite *Zentralschule*. History, math, science, and even Russian had not been viewed to be a threat as long as they were taught alongside German and religion by Mennonite teachers. The curriculum of the Yarrow high school, registered with the provincial government in 1947 as the Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute, reflected the *Zentralschule* concept. It included the province's prescribed academic subjects along with choral music, religion, German, and psychology. Religious instruction included daily chapel services with mandatory attendance, and church history in grades 7-10, English Bible in grades 10-11, and Christian doctrines, church history and Mennonite history in grades 11-13. German was especially important because, as one minister's wife stated, "so much is bound up with it." Bound up with it was the legacy of Russian "Mennonitism." To pass on what "we have inherited from our fathers," one concluded, "their thinking,...their mind,...their way," that was what the school should pass on to the youth.<sup>45</sup>

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43. Interview, Leonard Neufeldt.

44. Edward Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute 1945-1949" (Unpublished paper, University of British Columbia, 1968), 24-25; interview, David Giesbrecht; interview, Jake Loewen; interview, Rudy Plennert, 13 Aug. 1990, in Clearbrook, B.C. The RCMP also searched the Mennonite Brethren Community in Virgil, Ontario. See C. Alfred Friesen, *Memories of the Virgil-Niagara Mennonites: History of the Mennonite Settlement in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, 1934-1984* (Fonthill, Ontario: Niagara Yearbook Services, 1984), 40.

45. Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute," 21-23.

By 1944, the Yarrow Church was ready to move aggressively to establish a high school. In 1944 it set up a high school committee with Rev. Johann Harder as its chair. There were problems to overcome. Building restrictions, due to the war, made it highly unlikely that construction could begin in the near future. Second, the Chilliwack public school board would most likely oppose the establishment of a school. Despite these problems, the church moved quickly to establish a school. On August 12, 1945, the church voted to merge the high school and Bible school committees into one school committee, envisioning a recreation of the Russian *Zentralschule*. Following Clearbrook's example, the new committee decided to use the Bible school faculty. Initial expectations of some thirty-five students the first year were much too low; applications reached seventy-five by mid-August and 142 by mid-September. Space problems were temporarily solved by moving several small buildings onto the church yard. The school was formally dedicated on September 17, 1945, and opened one week later with three grades, 9, 10, and 11, a faculty of 7 and an enrolment of 150.<sup>46</sup>

The omission of grades 7 and 8 and the lack of adequate space caused concern. The Yarrow public school offered only the elementary grades, 1 to 6. Seventh and eighth graders were bused to Chilliwack. The church secretary recorded:

It was like a cry of distress from the hearts of a number of parents: What will become of our children?

Would they be corrupted by the worldly influences of the public school in another town? The church agreed to include grades 7 and 8 as well as 12 and 13 in any future building plans. The first project was to erect a combined Bible school/high school building. The new three-story building contained six classrooms, a large meeting area (for chapel and auditorium), and offices.<sup>47</sup>

The rapid increase of enrolment to 360 meant that inadequate space soon became a problem again. By 1947, the Mennonite Brethren churches in Greendale and East Chilliwack had formally joined with Yarrow in supporting the high school. Four buses were used to transport students. Plans were quickly made to formalize the co-operative venture and build a new school on a ten-acre plot on Wilson Road donated by a Rev. Franz Friesen from Morden, Manitoba, to the Yarrow M.B. Church. Although not quite finished, students and faculty moved into the new school in October 1947 with Jacob Friesen, a high school teacher from Saskatchewan, serving as principal. The building, an ambitious project

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46. YMBC, 30 July 1944, 20 Sept. 1945; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 103-06; Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute," 3; Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," 293-94.

47. Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute," 3-6; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 103.

eventually costing \$200,000, included thirteen classrooms, two staff rooms, a music room, a study hall, a science laboratory, a kitchen, and a library. The gymnasium-auditorium was added later.<sup>48</sup>

Yet even before students moved into the unfinished building, the school ran into financial problems. Providing bus transportation for students outside of Yarrow proved to be burdensome. In 1947, the Canadian government terminated its practice, begun during World War II, of purchasing raspberries for shipment to Britain, thereby precipitating a marked decline in the demand for fruit and a steep drop in prices in 1948. This hit the Yarrow community hard; it forced the liquidation of the Yarrow Co-op in 1949. Shareholders ultimately received 41 cents for a one-dollar share. Meanwhile flood waters in the spring of 1948 covered much of Greendale, threatening the community's economy.<sup>49</sup>

Compounding the impact of the general economic problems was a drop in student enrolment from 325 in October 1947, to 268 in December 1948. Since tuition figured significantly in the operating budgets, the drop in tuition income made it inevitable that income would fall far short of budget projections. The drop in enrolment can be attributed to several factors. The large enrolment in 1946 and 1947 was partly an aberration. A large number of over-age students, including many former Bible school students, seized the opportunity to get a high school diploma; this was, however, a temporary phenomenon. The enrolment decline also reflected divisions within the sponsoring churches concerning the high school project. Some members in Greendale and Chilliwack questioned the wisdom of joining in a school building project in a somewhat distant location with a much larger church. Yarrow, unlike Clearbrook, could not rely on three or four growing churches within the immediate vicinity to provide a large pool of potential students. Even within the Yarrow church there was opposition to the school project. Rev. Harder, a forceful leader, had been able to galvanize support for the school. Although he himself had taught in the Elim Bible School, he was never totally committed to the Bible school concept; it represented to him too much of a "hot house type of thing," failing to adequately combine academic knowledge with "Christian material." Others, however, were saddened by the Bible school's demise. After the collapse of the berry market strained the church's financial resources, the Yarrow Church voted to assess each family a *steuer*, constituting a percentage of gross income. This led to strained relations within the church and helped to solidify opposition to the school. Thus economic factors along with internal disagreements within and among the churches led to

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48. Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institution," 3-6; Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," 293-94; YMBC, 20 Mar., 9 and 10 Feb. 1946; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 105-6.
49. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 75-76; interview, Henry Neufeldt; Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute," 3-6. On the collapse of the Yarrow Co-op, see Neufeldt, "Creating the Brotherhood," 231-32.

an enrolment decline that was nearly as swift and steep as had been its rise in the early years. Forced to close in 1949, the school building was sold to the Chilliwack School Board in 1952 to make room for an expanded public elementary-junior high school in Yarrow. The sponsoring churches were able to recover only thirty cents per dollar. Its demise was especially painful to Rev. Harder. "I was wrong," he remarked concerning his efforts in building the school, "and I don't know why."<sup>50</sup>

Although the Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute ceased operations in 1949, the desirability of a Mennonite High School did not die. Individuals like Peter Loewen and Aaron Rempel, an ordained minister and farmer, continued for two years to discuss the possibility of opening a new school. In 1951, they called a meeting and invited two brothers, Peter and Henry Neufeldt, Rempel's brother-in-law Henry Enns, Reverend Johann Harder, and Reverend Herman Lenzman. Finding support for opening a school, the group moved quickly. It requested and received permission from the Yarrow Church to utilize the old Bible school buildings on the churchyard. In September, 1951, the school opened with Henry Voht as principal and sixty-two students enrolled in grades 8-11. The next year the school officially adopted the name, Sharon Mennonite Collegiate.<sup>51</sup>

As with the first school, finding a suitable building and adequate financing were difficult problems. In July, 1952, the school's debt stood at \$7,292, over \$800 more than the entire amount budgeted for salaries the previous year. The school board had hoped that the Yarrow church might turn over to the school at least some of the money received from the sale of the former high school building, but this was not to be. Finally, in 1953 the school board decided to erect a modest building on Stewart Road on land donated by Peter Neufeldt. Relying heavily on volunteer labour, the board was able to construct the main building for a mere \$14,000. In 1957, Peter Neufeldt requested that the Yarrow church take over the school and assume its building debt of \$9,400 and operating debt of \$6,763. The church refused to assume the debt but assumed financial responsibility for the school in 1958.<sup>52</sup>

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50. YMBC, 2 and 20 Apr. 1946; 17 Jan., 24 Feb., 17 June, 11 and 25 Aug., 15 Sept. 1947; 25 June 1949; 3 May 1950; SBC, 1 Mar. 1949; 30 July and 24 Sept. 1952; Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute," 12-19; Neufeldt, "Creating the Brotherhood," 231-32; Loewen, "Vignettes From My Memories," 10-12; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 106.

51. Interview, Peter Loewen; minutes, Sharon Mennonite Collegiate, 13 May 1952 [hereinafter cited as SMC]; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 106. The word Institute was dropped from the name so as not to duplicate the exact name of the first institution. There may have been an agreement not to do so with the Chilliwack School Board at the time of the sale of the first school.

52. SMC, 22 July 1952; 20 Mar., 2 Sept. 1953; 24 Apr. 1954; 15 Jan. 1955; 7 Mar., 18 June 1957; 8 May 1959; Klassen, *Yarrow*, 106.

Although the second school assumed most of the name of its predecessor, there were differences between the two schools. The first high school, with faculty like C.C. Peters who had been principal of the Bible school, understood and respected the Russian Mennonite *Zentralschule's* concept of controlled education including an emphasis on German and religion. It was in spirit, as well as in name, a Mennonite school. Sharon High also offered mandatory courses in German and religion. Moreover, students were required to attend chapel each morning and a thanksgiving and testimony session at the close of each week. However, German was becoming a foreign language. By 1955, teachers were being criticized by church members for giving low priority to the instruction of German.<sup>53</sup>

The language issue underscored the confusion surrounding the school's purpose. Sharon High was Mennonite primarily because its faculty and students were from Mennonite homes. In its religious orientation, however, the school was more evangelical-fundamentalist than distinctively Mennonite. This was true of much of the faculty as well, including the first principal, Henry Voth. Although Voth had attended the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, he never stressed Mennonite distinctiveness, including non-resistance. During World War II, he had chosen to serve in the Canadian armed forces in the noncombatant corps rather than do alternative service, and he wore the uniform with pride.<sup>54</sup>

Sharon High never won unanimous approval from the Yarrow Church. Painful memories still lingered over the controversy surrounding the first school. Some church members were reluctant to assume another financial burden. In 1956, the principal informed the school board that the teachers were working under stress because they believed that they did not have the church's moral support and recognition.<sup>55</sup>

Enrolment determined which grades would be added or deleted. Grade 13 was added in 1955 but dropped in 1957, and enrolment declined thereafter, due, in large part, to the exodus of Mennonites from Yarrow. By 1966, Sharon High, as it was popularly known, was down to fifty-five students, four grades, and three teachers. When projected enrolment for the fall of 1969 dropped below thirty-five, the school was closed. That would prove to be the last Mennonite experiment in private schooling in Yarrow.<sup>56</sup>

The closing of the second high school, however, cannot be attributed primarily to controversy within the Yarrow M.B. Church. More important was the population shift among British Columbia's *Russlaender* during the 1950s and 1960s. By 1961, one-third of Canada's and one-half of British Columbia's

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53. SMC, 2 Feb. 1953; 1 June 1955.

54. Interview, Leonard Neufeldt.

55. Interview, David Giesbrecht; SMC, 14 Nov. 1956.

56. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 106.

Mennonites lived in urban areas. The most urbanized of these Mennonite groups was the Mennonite Brethren. The collapse of the berry market accelerated the exodus of young adults from Yarrow, many moving to Vancouver or the Clearbrook-Abbotsford area. Furthermore, building two potentially rival schools at Clearbrook and Yarrow meant that neither school would become a province-wide church project as was the case of the Eden Christian College, established by Mennonite Brethren at Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, and the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute established in Winnipeg.<sup>57</sup>

Despite several members' lack of support for the school, the Yarrow Church got at least some of what it wanted from the high school. It wanted to shield its youth from what it called worldliness, which had often been equated with being assimilated into English-speaking Canadian society. It emphasized conversion and baptism as a hedge against worldliness. In this the school was very successful. In 1955, the principal, H. Voth, reported that in the wake of a revival in Yarrow, several students had "found peace," and as far as the faculty could tell, one hundred percent of the students were Christians.<sup>58</sup>

Sharon High convinced many Yarrow parents that education in a controlled environment need not be threatening. The school sought to transmit knowledge in a safe environment. Thus, a history teacher like Harold Dyck, later to receive his doctorate from Stanford University, could teach the same history, including the same theories, methodologies, and subject matter, that he had studied at the University of British Columbia. Sharon High introduced the youth to new ideas and introduced many to a life of the mind. Many graduates went on to study at institutions of higher education. As Jacob Loewen observed, a distinction was made between assimilation per se and ungodly assimilation. In this respect it recaptured some of Rev. Harder's ideal of the *Zentralschule*.<sup>59</sup>

Sharon High helped erode the final vestiges of support for cultural separatism in the 1950s, and accelerated a religious trend already evident in the Elim Bible School after World War II. Mennonite distinctiveness in doctrine and, to an extent, in social behaviour was being modified to incorporate ideas compatible with conservative North American Protestantism, including an emphasis upon premillennialism, revivalism, and even on occasion anti-Semitism. Names such as Charles Fuller and Billy Graham replaced those of Menno Simons and Conrad Grebel. Whereas in 1946 Reverend Harder had warned the church against

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57. Klassen, "A History of Mennonite Education in Canada," 282-98; Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 265-68; Hamm, *Continuity and Change*, 172; Hildegarde Martens, "The Relationship of Religion to Socio-Economic Divisions Among the Mennonites of Dutch-Prussian-Russian Descent in Canada" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1977), 162-77.

58. SMC, 15 Jan. 1955.

59. Klassen, *Yarrow*, 106; Dahl, "Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute," 25; interview, Jacob Loewen.

permitting its youth to participate in Chilliwack Youth For Christ programmes, a popular non-Mennonite, non-German-speaking revival team was permitted to hold a revival meeting at Sharon High during school hours in the mid-1950s. Although its students were physically separated from the English-speaking community, they were no longer culturally, including religiously or linguistically, separated.<sup>60</sup>

When the *Russlaender* arrived in 1929, they were strangers in a new land. Ethnically, linguistically, and religiously they represented a tiny minority. Lacking money and proficiency in the English language, they utilized the provincial school system to teach their children the basic skills. To safeguard their identity and protect their children from what seemed to many to be a hostile environment, they built their own institutions.

By 1959, the Yarrow *Russlaender* were no longer strangers in the land. Few of their youth could claim German to be their primary language. At least one aspect of Carl Wilson's goal of Canadianization, namely linguistic assimilation, had been realized. Many no longer opposed assimilation per se. The Sunday school, the German school, and, to some extent, the Bible school, had been established to limit assimilation and reinforce ethnic distinctives. The high school replaced the Bible school as the primary educational institution for Yarrow's youth. Its focus increasingly became one of controlling the direction of rather than one of opposing assimilation. By introducing youth to knowledge in the humanities and the sciences, the high school programme assumed that knowledge, in itself, need not be a threat to piety. That is what Mennonite high schools in Russia had taught their youth in the *Zentralschule*.<sup>61</sup>

Obviously Carl Wilson was correct in his observation in 1984 that Yarrow "had changed too." What he could not have known was the extent to which these changes moved the Yarrow Mennonites back to the ground they had occupied in Russia prior to World War I. What he did not realize in his lengthy stay in Yarrow was that the community's fear of secular knowledge and its emphasis on the 3 Rs plus the Bible had represented a deviation from the *Russlaender*'s past. The changes Wilson later observed brought the community back somewhat to the educational accommodations worked out in Russia by secondary school teachers like P.M. Friesen—a pluralistic concept of religion and culture while remaining physically and linguistically separate. The one difference was that in Yarrow

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60. YMBC, 2 Apr. 1946, 5 Feb. 1947.

61. By the 1970s, Mennonite Brethren found themselves in the bottom group of ethnic communities in Canada when it came to mother-tongue retention. Their experience was similar to that of the Polish Catholic communities in Canada, which also witnessed a marked decline in the second generation's ability to speak and maintain the mother tongue. On the comparison of the decline of language retention and ethnic identification among second generation *Russlaender* and Polish Catholics, see Redekop, "The German Identity of Mennonite Brethren Immigrants in Canada," 191-99.



linguistic separatism was rapidly disappearing and physical separatism ended for most youth with graduation from high school. As one former Yarrow resident observed,

This one difference had major consequences....in that it was the final and definitive factor in the dismantling of Yarrow's hegemonical socio-religious arrangements.<sup>62</sup>

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62. Written comment by Leonard Neufeldt, summer 1992.

