MENNONITE OLD COLONY LIFE:
UNDER SIEGE IN MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

This research has grown out of an interest in exploring the history of the Old Colony Mennonite approach to living in the twentieth century. In the 1920s, Old Colony Mennonites moved from Canada to Mexico. There, they successfully established separate rural communities in an environment of relative freedom that was conducive to their being able to follow their religious beliefs and cultural practices. The colonies in Mexico later encountered serious problems, which have reached crisis proportions.

Canada also has come to play an influential role in the recent history of the Mexican Old Colony group. Large numbers of Old Colony Mennonites have migrated to and from Canada, creating numerous problems for Canadian society and for the Mexican colonies. More “liberal” Canadian Mennonite churches also have gone to Mexico in an attempt to help and to reform their distant brethren there, bringing outside influences into the colonies.

This study represents a fresh look at the history of the Old Colony group in Mexico and is an attempt to describe and identify key determinants of their history. Some important elements of that history were not adequately identified and emphasized in the past, which led to an incomplete and inaccurate picture of Old Colony history in Mexico.

Information contained in this study was obtained by various methods. Old Colony communities in Mexico were observed, and personal interviews were conducted with Old Colony people and with those working with them in Mexico and Canada. Archival information from the National Archives of Canada, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, and the Mennonite Heritage Centre was incorporated in the thesis. Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) files also have been used as a source. Periodicals, written in English, High German, Low German, and Spanish, have provided many details of Old Colony history, and the existing secondary body of scholarship has proven to be invaluable in providing a base of information for the research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have aided in making this research possible. Cooperation from within the Old Colony community and from those who know them well was, almost without exception, gladly given. The names of many who contributed information can be found throughout the thesis. Various persons in the larger Mennonite community were particularly helpful though in making information available and in opening doors. Among these are William Janzen of MCC Canada, Lawrence Klippenstein of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, and George Rempel, who has chronicled much Old Colony history.

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T. D. Regehr served as the supervisor for the research. With the depth of his knowledge and interest in the field of Mennonite history, he was able to confirm and direct the research in many ways, while leaving sufficient freedom for the work to proceed as independently as was necessary.

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Introduction.

Mexico is home to numerous Mennonites whose ancestors came from Canada seventy-five years ago. Most belong to the group known as the Old Colony Mennonites, a conservative group which favours physical separation from the larger world.

The Old Colony move to Mexico was one of the boldest and most idealistic Mennonite movements ever, and the Mexican environment offered the Mennonites one of the cleanest slates Mennonites have ever found for designing and implementing their vision. The group successfully carried out this enormous enterprise, sacrificing material considerations to achieve their spiritual goals.

A review of the literature about this group may lead to the conclusion that the Old Colony leadership led their followers into material and spiritual poverty. When this group is thought of, it usually is in terms of difficulties they have encountered, either in Mexico or in the migration of some back to Canada. Many looking at the colonies have judged them by outside standards. By Canadian standards, many of the colonies are materially poor, although by Mexican standards, most are not. By Canadian Mennonite standards, the colonists are spiritually bankrupt, but by Old Colony standards it is the other way around.

In order to understand the experience of the Old Colony group in Mexico, several basic things need to be established. The first is that, while the Mexican Old Colonists use the name Mennonite, they are distinct from other Mennonites, with the most obvious distinguishing factor being that the Old Colonists consider physical isolation from the world in homogeneous colonies to be essential for them to live as they wish.

The second point that needs to be understood is that the Old Colonists in Mexico successfully designed and established communities where they long were able to follow their vision of living separate from the outside world. In order to establish and maintain these communities, elaborate defence mechanisms have been used, with most aspects of the Old Colony culture serving functional roles in protecting the communities. Those defences have
not worked perfectly, and the communities have experienced severe problems maintaining barriers between themselves and the outside world.

A third important point is that it is not inevitable that the Old Colony must abandon living in separate communities. The design of their communities is not fatally flawed, nor is it incompatible with the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. Before this conclusion can be reached though, it is necessary to examine the communities, the world around them, and the problems that have been encountered.

The Mexican colonies have experienced many problems over the years, which have been blamed most often on the leadership and their decisions, economic practices, population expansion, and the Mexican environment. Leadership has been regarded as the largest and all-encompassing factor. These factors all have played an important part in bringing the Old Colony to the point they are at today.

Several other determinants of Old Colony history in Mexico, however, have been largely ignored. Unexpectedly, the primary threats to the survival of the Old Colony as a distinct group in Mexico have not come from Mexico, which has been remarkably hospitable to the Old Colony vision, but from Canada. This has taken place in two ways.

The first threat from Canada occurred because ties were never completely cut with Canada. Canada’s citizenship and immigration laws have allowed many of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who long ago shook the Canadian prairie dust off their boots, to return to Canada as a matter of right, as Canadian citizens. As a result, the Old Colony in Mexico has, over the past decades, lost up to 35,000, or roughly one-quarter, of its people to Canada. The movement to Canada has been disorganized and in defiance of the Old Colony leadership. Those who moved were, as far as the leadership was concerned, lost to the world. Had the doors to Canada not been open, many of these people and their leaders would have had to find other alternatives, which may have been more in keeping with the Old Colonists’ goals. Not only have thousands moved north out of Mexico, but many have returned repeatedly to the colonies, bringing the outside world’s attitudes and technological paraphernalia with them, against the wishes of their leaders.

The Canadian government and most Canadians cannot be blamed for this migration north, as they have not tried to attract the Mennonites back to Canada. If anything, sentiment has opposed their return and numerous roadblocks were put in their way. Canada’s
immigration laws remain generous though, as they were not written primarily to keep out Mennonites from Mexico. Neither were they written to encourage the migration.

The second Canadian threat to the Old Colony has come from Mennonite groups in Canada. Since the 1940s, other Mennonites have investigated the situation of their Mexican "brethren," and, judging them to be in dire straits, have worked to help them. The Old Colonists were diagnosed as being biologically prolific, unhealthy, unhygienic, naive, poorly educated, illiterate, financially inept, vocationally misguided, and needlessly poor. Many of these perceived problems, blamed on the Mexican environment and on the Old Colony leaders, led to efforts for the past fifty years to correct these and other deficits. A large part of what the outsiders objected to was that Mennonites in Mexico had become part of the third world. The descriptions of the Mennonites as poor, uneducated, unhygienic, unhealthy, and overpopulated are descriptions that could be applied to a large number of Mexico's people.

The outside groups also have believed in individual freedom, objecting to the refusal of Old Colony leaders to give the people a choice about many things. The Canadian Mennonites in large part accepted the twentieth-century values of liberal democracy, rejecting the traditional theocratic and isolationist values of many of their forefathers. As they believed in the right of individuals to self-determination, they did not believe in the right of the Old Colony leaders to direct the group, and challenged the leadership and traditions of the Old Colony.

In addition to diagnosing various temporal ills in the Mexican colonies, the other Mennonites believed that the Old Colony people were in need of spiritual salvation. An Old Colony person is not likely to say confidently "I know that I am saved," and then proceed to convince others to believe as they do, but is more likely to say "I hope that I am saved," and to try to influence others through exemplary living rather than by adopting aggressive proselytization strategies. Old Colonists have believed that only God knows who will live in heaven. To other Mennonites, this uncertainty about personal salvation and the nonproselytizing approach have meant that the Old Colonists were lost and in need of conversion. While to an outsider to the Mennonite or Christian world, the theological differences between the two groups may seem trivial, to those involved they are the difference between eternal life and eternal damnation. While both sides have confidently judged themselves to be right, one difference between the two sides has been that the
Canadian Mennonites have sent scores of missionaries to Mexico to convert the Old Colonists, while the Old Colonists have not reciprocated.

It is likely that the Canadian Mennonites’ attempts to change the religious aspects of the Old Colony group have been less disruptive than their efforts on the economic and cultural fronts. The Old Colony’s theology possibly could have been modified, without endangering the integrity of the isolated colony system. Some of the Old Colonists’ theological positions appear to be contradictory and difficult to justify, in light of their stated reliance on the teachings of the Bible. The other changes desired by the outsiders, though, called for a nearly complete make-over of the colonies into what the other Mennonites desired, rather than what the Old Colonists wanted.

The Old Colonists’ response was to resist and try to evict the outsiders from the colonies and Mexico. When resistance seemed futile, thousands fled to new colonies inside and outside Mexico. This was largely due to the pressure exerted by outsiders in their mother colonies, although population pressures also made this inevitable.

There usually has been a confident assumption by the Canadian Mennonites that they were right and the Old Colonists were wrong. They have felt justified in disregarding the Old Colonists’ wishes, have placed much of the blame for the colonies’ problems on the Old Colony leaders, and have encouraged the people to defy and challenge their leaders.

In two of the three original colonies, the Manitoba and Swift Current colonies, the Old Colony church has lost much of its strength. In the Swift Current colony, the Old Colony leadership left for South America, taking the church along, but leaving many former members behind. Old Colony churches remain on the Manitoba colony, made up of those who did not leave and refused to accept that the church had left. They, however, no longer can live the life foreseen in their forefathers’ vision. Instead, they have been locked in a decades long battle where they have constantly lost more ground to the vision of the other Mennonites. Farther south, in Durango, the third original colony, the battle is less advanced but nevertheless well underway. Recent skirmishes have not gone well for the Old Colonists, and many who are able may retreat to South America. The same is true of many other colonies in Mexico, which have found themselves increasingly vulnerable to the influences of other churches as they have been economically weakened by drought, devaluation of the peso, high fuel prices, NAFTA, and the resulting poverty.
It can be argued that proof exists that the Canadian churches have been right in their diagnosis that the colonies could not continue as they were and that they needed to join the modern world. The best proof for this likely can be seen in the difference between the Cuauhtémoc area colonies, including the Manitoba and Swift Current colonies, and other more conservative colonies. The first are the primary targets of the outsiders, while other colonies have escaped much of this attention. The Cuauhtémoc area colonies are doing relatively well financially, while many others are struggling for economic survival. While there is some truth to the statement that modernization has helped the one area prosper economically, to assume that the Old Colony cannot survive without joining the world does not follow. The Old Colony has not put economic considerations first, or they never would have left Canada, and they have survived, so far, through good times and bad.

Canadian Mennonites have not been neutral about the immigration to Canada. They have facilitated the flow north by looking after immigration problems and other needs, and by advocating the migrants’ cause with the Canadian government, successfully helping to remove obstacles to the migration. The Canadian churches have recognized that the movement back and forth weakens the Mexican colony system, and supplements the changes brought by their physical presence in the Mexican colonies. On the other hand, the services offered in Canada by the Canadian Mennonites have been invaluable to many migrants who have come to Canada, many of whom would have come even without the assistance offered by the Canadian Mennonites.

This should not be a controversial or unpopular story to tell, as the Canadian Mennonites have not hidden their beliefs and attitudes about the Mexican Old Colonists. They have displayed these openly in their actions, in the news media, in conversations, and in the written record of their organizations. Neither have the Old Colony leaders hidden their beliefs, as they indicated clearly that they wanted to be left alone. Telling what has happened between these two groups will not give away the game plan of either side, as both are very aware of the issues and the tactics used by the other.

In spite of the openness of the two sides about their conflicting beliefs, these issues carry a lot of emotion. Old Colony leaders angrily complain about the challenges to their colonies, and Canadian Mennonite leaders fervently describe the ills of the Mexican colonies.

It also should be remembered that these Mennonite groups are not the only ones who
have experienced long-standing divisions with profound effects on the parties involved. Schisms can also be seen between various Jewish groups, within the Canadian United Church, between the Doukhobors and the Sons of Freedom, and between the Amish, the Old Order Amish and the Beechy Amish, to mention only a few. A common theme is disagreement over maintaining the old ways and accepting changes. The details of the divisions and the subsequent relationships of the groups to each other differ greatly though.

Reaching the conclusions contained in this thesis has been a journey, and the thesis has changed as time went on. When this exploration of the history of the Old Colony group in Mexico began, my impressions about these Mennonites in Mexico had been formed largely by media reports seen in Canada. Early in the research, reading the available literature on the subject and speaking to various people in Canada reinforced the view that the colonies in Mexico were rife with problems. It became apparent fairly early in the investigation that Canadian and other Mennonites were actively involved with the conservative Mennonites in Mexico and that they wanted to and were playing a major role in writing the history of the Mennonites in Mexico. Prior to visiting some of the colonies in Mexico, it appeared that the Old Colony group had no alternative but to undergo massive changes in order to survive economically. The other Mennonites were basically facilitating necessary and desirable changes in the colonies. The primary supporting evidence for this point of view was that, based on the information gathered in Canada, the colonies which had accepted major changes were relatively prosperous while those resisting change were increasingly less viable. The other Mennonite churches were seen as benefactors.

Some aspects of the thesis are largely based on research in Canada. The information about the nature and size of the movement back and forth to Canada is largely information gathered in Canada. The assertion that Mexico has generally honoured the commitments of the Obregón Privilegium was also supported by research in Canada, as well as in Mexico.

Visiting some Mexican colonies confirmed a number of things. Many people in the colonies were struggling economically. Many villages were overcrowded and there was a shortage of land. Visits to the colonies also showed some of the reasons for the movement to Canada and some of the effects this movement had on the colonies. It also was apparent that the conservative Mennonite culture has survived to a great degree in the Mexican
environment. Visiting the colonies in Mexico showed that the other Mennonite churches have played a large role in the Mexican colonies. These visits also confirmed the presence of the conflict between the traditional Old Colony group and the forces of change coming from the other Mennonite churches. The biggest story in the colonies often has not been the everyday problems that have been reported. In addition to drought, population growth, land shortages, and the everyday problems of living in Mexico, the colonies were faced with open challenges from other Mennonites to many aspects of their way of life. The other churches’ presence often was not seen as welcome and as leading to a positive mutual solving of the problems. Rather, all too often sides were formed and heated battles ensued. The presence of the other churches often was not beneficial, but was harmful, to the Old Colonists. Often the Old Colonists responded by fleeing to more geographically isolated new colonies in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

This research cannot take sides in this dispute for a number of reasons. It is difficult to judge the right or the wrong of the theological positions taken by the two sides. Whether the theology of one party is right while that of the other is wrong is difficult to state with certainty. However, it is possible to point out the theological and other differences between the two sides and the important role these differences have played in the history of the Old Colonists.

The research also has led to a dilemma. Pointing out that other Mennonite churches have often been an aggressive and unwelcome presence in the Mexican colonies can be construed as favouring the Old Colonists. The assumption that the Canadian Mennonite churches were right and the Mexican Old Colonists were wrong has been so strong in more liberal North American Mennonite circles, that to present the history of the Old Colony group without an underlying and consistent criticism of the Old Colonists might be seen as heresy by some.

This researcher’s roots are in the General Conference Mennonite church. His ancestors parted company with the Old Colony group about 125 years ago. What has been found has surprised some Mennonite friends and acquaintances who expected the findings to be more critical of the Old Colony group. The conclusions which have been reached also raise some concerns about whether some Mennonites will cooperate in the future should this
research be pursued further.

Much of what is said is not controversial and has been said by others before. There are several areas though where this research can make a contribution. It does, in a preliminary way, look at the effects the other Mennonite churches have had on the Old Colonists in Mexico. The continuing effect of movement to and from Canada on the colonies and on Canada is also explored in some detail. Some original work also is present in looking at the relationship of the Mennonites to the Mexican environment. As well, some of the conclusions drawn, based largely on these areas of exploration, have not been previously stressed.

This research can serve as an update of the history of the Old Colonists in and from Mexico. It also introduces and emphasizes some new determining elements of the history that were not previously adequately mentioned or stressed. It can serve to supplement the work done by others in this field. Walter Schmiedehaus concentrated on describing the early history of Old Colony settlement in Mexico. Calvin Redekop has described their lives from a sociological perspective. H. L. Sawatzky has brought a geographer’s point of view to the study. Kelly Hedges has examined the linguistics of the group. Others have explored different aspects of this group’s life and history. This thesis makes no claim to supplant the work done by others. Rather, it is hoped that this information will help provide a more contemporary, rounded, and complete picture of the Old Colony experience.

The research also has pointed to sources of information that could be investigated in the future. These include further archival exploration in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. There also is room for gathering further information by interviewing persons who have lived this history, both Old Colonists and others. Much of what has happened has not been written down and may be lost if the information is not gathered soon. Also, the history of many of the colonies in Mexico has not been studied by anyone, other than quickly in passing. The history of the Old Colonists who have left Mexico also is largely undocumented. The successes and struggles of the Old Colonists elsewhere in Canada and Latin America can be a source of much potential research for historians and for those in other disciplines. The events described also have not been completed, but are still happening. The final chapters of the story have not yet been written.\(^3\)
The various groups involved, their beliefs, and their efforts deserve respect and fair treatment. Unlike much history that is written, many of the players still are alive and can agree or disagree with the information offered. It is hoped that persons who read this, who are knowledgeable about this area, will respond by offering information confirming, contradicting, and adding to that offered here.
Chapter one- A wandering people: Flanders, Poland, Russia, Canada, and Mexico.

Seventy-five years ago, thousands of fair skinned Canadians known as the Old Colony Mennonites,¹ arrived in Mexico, seeking freedom to believe and live as they wanted. That was something they thought was denied them in Canada. The subsequent years have not been trouble-free for them, as numerous crises have been encountered. By 1997, the original 6,000 had grown to about 150,000. Having outgrown the original Mexican colonies, they have established new communities, spreading to various parts of Mexico, other Latin American countries, the United States, and back to Canada.

The Old Colony Mennonites are part of the larger group known as Mennonites, who have, since their beginnings in the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, attempted to base all aspects of their lives on the Bible and particularly on the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament. How that belief has been expressed has varied greatly over the centuries, as the group and the world around it changed.

The Mexican Old Colony Mennonites differ substantially from most twentieth-century Mennonites. The most obvious, and in some respects the most important, difference is that the Old Colonists consider it essential to live in their own settlements, excluding outsiders from the community. In contrast, most other Mennonite groups are integrated in or accommodated to the larger society. While all Mennonite groups consider themselves to be Christian, and as such often find their values and actions to be at odds with the larger world around them, most Mennonites believe they can follow their Christian convictions while living in communities with non-Mennonites.

The Old Colony group has been made up of people who saw themselves primarily, not as citizens of a country or of the world, but as members of the Kingdom of God. Their primary earthly connection has been to their group. While it has not been possible to live outside the boundaries of national states, the various countries where they have lived have not been seen as homelands where they belonged and to which they felt loyalty. The Old Colonists have had contact with the world around them, but, aside from necessary economic
relationships, have tried to minimize that contact by moving to remote and uncivilized areas. Old Colony people consider it essential to live physically separated from the rest of the world in geographically isolated colonies and to control various aspects of their environment as much as possible. This is thought to be necessary to allow them to live as they believe is right and to pass on their faith successfully to subsequent generations.

The Old Colonists are unusual, not only for their strong sense of group identity, but also for the extent to which their lives are directed by their religion and philosophy. To them, faith is not compartmentalized into only some aspects of life, but pervades and influences all of life. The Old Colonists have consciously and deliberately kept a distance from the world, fearing a loss of their identity and faith.

Old Colony Mennonites are nonproselytizing, unlike most other Mennonite groups who consider it to be part of their Christian duty to win new converts to Christianity. While the evangelical emphasis in other Mennonite groups is of relatively recent origins, in many cases dating to the mid-nineteenth century, it nonetheless has become an identifying feature of these groups. The Mexican Mennonite colonies are closed, not only to non-Mennonites, but also usually to Mennonites from other groups who might want to join them. This is another way in which the group protects itself from outside influences.

The Old Colony Mennonites also are distinguished from most other Mennonites by an opposition to some forms of technology and to advanced education, a commitment to their language, and by various cultural peculiarities. Most of these characteristics can be traced at least partly to the Old Colony’s desire to be separate from the world around them, and many of these unique characteristics have served as barriers to protect the group.

The Old Colonists have been accused of living in the past. They have, in some ways, reinvented the time before the Reformation. Not unlike the Catholic church of that time, salvation was to be obtained through being part of the chosen group rather than individually. Although not conducted in the Catholic’s Latin, their church services have been conducted in a language many of them do not understand. Many in the largely illiterate group, like pre-Reformation Christians, have not read the Bible. They also have joined, within the confines of their own colonies, secular and religious authority, reversing another innovation of their sixteenth century ancestors.

On the other hand, they have been committed to their beliefs, often placing their
material welfare second to following those beliefs. They have remained pacifists and have scrupulously followed many prohibitions long abandoned by other Mennonites.

The differences between the Old Colony group and other Mennonites are larger than those between many separate religious denominations. However, because both groups still use the Mennonite name, similarities and ties, that no longer exist, are implied.

The origins of the Old Colony Mennonites and of their insistence on living in separate communities can be traced through the centuries. Mennonites are descended primarily from Swiss, Flemish, and Frisian peoples. The Mennonites, named after Menno Simons, an early leader and a former Dutch Catholic priest, were part of the Anabaptist movement during the Reformation. Early Mennonites' main distinguishing beliefs were that: everyone could read and interpret the Bible, lives were to be based on the New Testament, killing and use of force were wrong, church and state should be separate, faith should be voluntary, only adults could be baptised, and oaths should not be sworn. These beliefs and early persecution, including the killing of 5,000 to 15,000 Anabaptists, helped create ethnic differentiation and a consciousness that they were a people set apart by God.

The early Mennonites did not strive to live in isolated communities, nor to maintain barriers between themselves and the world, and they saw the winning of new converts to be an essential part of their actions. Neither were they against technology nor education.

Beginning as early as 1534, some Mennonites moved eastward from the Netherlands. Large numbers settled in the Polish territories of the Vistula and Nogat valleys and delta, where they received undeveloped land and lived in relative safety. As centuries were spent there, some family names originating in the area were added to the Mennonite group, indicating that there was some intermarriage. The distinctive Low German dialect, known as "Plautdietsch," also developed there, combining their former languages with local influences. They prospered, and came to own land and wealth.

Clearly, they did not live completely isolated lives in Polish territory, which later became Prussia. However, they and others recognized that their beliefs distinguished them from those around them. They were granted special privileges, including military exemption and freedom of religion and education. The roots of Old Colony separation can be seen in these early Privilegiums.

After several centuries in Poland and Prussia, the state halted purchases of additional
land by Mennonites, due to the resulting military weakness of having pacifists own large amounts of land, and taxation pressures were brought to bear on the Mennonites by the state and the Lutheran church. These pressures, along with the availability of land in new Russian territories in the Ukraine, caused them to move eastward again.

In 1788 and 1789, the first group of 228 Mennonite families moved from Prussia to Russia, in response to the invitation of Catherine II. A Privilegium was obtained, which allowed them their own schools, local political institutions, and a military exemption. This Privilegium reinforced the Prussian precedent, thereby setting their expectations of governments for centuries to come. Not only did it give the Mennonites special privileges, but it reinforced their separateness, leading to a preference for and recognition of the value of living in closed colonies. This physically separate condition had not existed in Prussia, although they had been largely culturally secluded there.

The first immigrants settled at Chortitza in the province of Ekaterinoslaw in the Southern Ukraine. This is where the name “Old Colony” came from, as the Chortitza colony was the old or first colony of the Mennonites in Russia. The Chortitza group was more conservative, less educated, and poorer than other Mennonites who came to Russia later. The more conservative Chortitza group was predominantly of Flemish origins, as opposed to the Frisian origins of some other groups. The Chortitza group also had more financial and religious problems than did the later Molotschna colony, which had better land, more wealth, and more adequate ministry. Within thirty years of settling there, population growth in the Chortitza colony led to the establishment of daughter colonies. The two main ones were Bergthal and Fürstenland.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, major conflicts, that would continue in Mexico in the next century, developed in the Mennonite colonies of Russia. Johann Cornies led a movement favouring advanced education as well as other changes to the established life. Cornies’ program of change and reform was powerful and gained increasing sway in the colonies, and by 1870, even the previously conservative Chortitza leaders had accepted extensive education. However, the daughter colonies of Bergthal and Fürstenland reacted by becoming more conservative, and their leaders rejected the innovations. Polarization took place as the innovators favoured modernization, expanded education, contact with the world, and personal conversion through evangelical religion, while the conservatives
favoured the traditional religion and a community-based life separate from the world.19

Other pressures were brought to bear on the colonies by the late 1860s, when Alexander II introduced reforms that “... were meant to transform the Russian feudal state into a homogeneous, integrated society in which no special privileges would exist for any one group.”20 The “Privilegium” was not inviolable. There was pressure by the government for Russian to be introduced in the schools and for the Russification of the Mennonite schools.21 The relation of civil and religious authority within the colonies also had been an issue in the colonies, with the conservative groups favouring extensive subordination of the civil to the religious.22 However, the matter of nonresistance and military service was the primary issue that led to eventual migration to the Americas. In 1871, the Mennonites were alarmed by rumours of compulsory military service that would include the Mennonites and would end their exemption.23 The possibility of alternate forms of service to the state did not satisfy at least some of the Mennonites.

The existence of what was later to become the Old Colony group in Canada and Mexico, and of many of the principles that differentiated this group from the other Mennonites, could be seen by this time. The strong preference for physical isolation from the world in isolated colonies, opposition to advanced education, and a sense of being a group distinct from other Mennonites had appeared.

Opposition to accommodation with the changing Russian environment was concentrated in the Fürstenland and Bergthal settlements where the Fürstenland Bishop, Johann Wiebe, became the leader of the group that would later be known as the Old Colony. The most influential Chortitza leaders were against a move to Canada, although many of their people joined the emigration.24

In general, the most conservative Mennonites left Russia first, fleeing the unwanted changes that were coming from within and outside the colonies.25 The religious leaders wanted to come to Canada partly to regain power and influence over the people, something that had been increasingly lost in Russia, due to the increasing influence of the secular aspects of the colonies represented by Cornies and by the encroachment of the Russian environment. This power was necessary for them to be able to follow their vision of a separate religious community. It would be false, though, to say that only those who had a clear vision of the Old Colony as a separate group left, as motives for the move were mixed,
with some desiring new opportunities and land in the new world. With some, particularly the leaders, the religious reasons for the move may have been primary, while others went along for various other reasons, including the lure of new possibilities in the new world.

At that time, the Canadian government was anxious to have settlers, including the Mennonites, settle the Canadian west. In 1872, William Hespeler was authorized to act as a special immigration agent to contact the Mennonites and invite them to Canada. On July 25, 1873, John Lowe, the Secretary of Agriculture, offered a Mennonite delegation exemption from military service, full freedom of religion and education, and the right to affirm instead of swear oaths. They were offered land in Southern Manitoba on what would be known as the “Mennonite Reserves.” The East and West Reserves were on opposite sides of the Red River.

The Mennonites took the letter from John Lowe to be their “charter of liberties,” and accepted this letter as their Privilegium. As the Mennonites only discovered decades later, Article 10 of the agreement was illegal. It read: “The fullest privileges of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Mennonites without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools.” However, the British North America Act of 1867 had given educational matters to the provincial governments and so the last part of the clause was always invalid. Later, the words “as provided by law” were added to the clause giving educational rights to the Mennonites. The addition of “as provided by law” changed the agreement over educational freedom, although the Mennonites were not told of this change. Even though the Mennonites relied on the word of the Canadian government, this clause and the problems over it soon had profound implications for them.

In 1873 and 1874, approximately 12,000 to 15,000 Mennonites, about one-third of the total Mennonite population of South Russia, migrated to Canada and the United States. Most Bergthalers moved to the East Reserve while many from Fürstenland and Chortitza moved to the West Reserve, occupying seventeen townships or 1,620 square kilometres. On these blocks of land, they set up their Strassendorf/Gewannflur pattern of village and land organization and continued their village type of settlement, considered by them as essential to their religious life style. Their elders gained much more authority than they had in Russia, as the land still was relatively free of rules and regulations.
It was during this early time in Canada that the Old Colony came into being as a distinct group, separate not only from the larger Canadian society, but also from the larger Mennonite world. They took the name of Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde because most of their villages were in Reinland Municipality, but commonly referred to themselves as “Altkolonisten” or Old Colony people, because of their origins in the old colony, Chortitza. By 1890, there was a strong sense of Old Colony identity, while the Bergthaler church was an alternative for some who were not as willing to follow the old ways. The Bergthaler, while also conservative, were less conservative than the Old Colonists in some respects.

The conflict between different Mennonite visions soon threatened the Old Colony group in Manitoba, as differences emerged between the Bergthaler and Old Colony groups. The latter rejected interaction with the outside world and various innovations, and reversed...
some of the changes they reluctantly had accepted while still in Russia. They opposed advanced education, reverted to the old *Langeweise* singing style in their church services, and attempted to establish a strict, church-controlled, and isolated society.

Their isolation was threatened though by 1880, as Bergthal Mennonites from the East Reserve also moved onto the West Reserve, and pressures in the form of teacher training from the Bergthalers and from evangelizing Mennonite Brethren disrupted the Old Colony. The Sommerfelder, who later were to play a part in Old Colony history, came into being as a splinter group from the West Reserve Bergthaler group.\(^{36}\) The presence of other Mennonites, who did not share the goals of the Old Colony group, made it difficult to maintain the unified and isolated communities that were desired by the Old Colonists. The Bergthalers were winning out in the conflict,\(^ {37}\) and the Old Colony group was threatened.

Threats to the desired isolation also came from the government. Manitoba's reeve system of local government threatened the traditional organization,\(^ {38}\) and the government did not support the Mennonite system of *Vorsteher* and *Schult*, which administered the civil aspects of the villages. The Dominion Lands Act, with its individualistic orientation, only supported voluntary participation in the colony life considered essential by the Old Colony group.\(^ {39}\) The government concessions “... were permissive, not binding, and at best allowed certain modifications to prevailing settlement practice subject to the Mennonites' ability to achieve universal compliance within their own ranks.”\(^ {40}\) The Old Colonists' preference for living in self-controlled colonies was strong by this time and they wanted as complete control as possible over the colonies and all aspects of life therein.

The above factors, along with increased overcrowding on the West Reserve, led to the movement of about 1,000 people to the Osler and Hague area of Saskatchewan beginning in 1895 and of about 900 people to the Swift Current area of Saskatchewan in 1905.\(^ {41}\) Again, land had been set aside for them, allowing them to live in segregated communities, and they again set up villages similar to their Russian villages, including putting the house and barn under one roof. Many Old Colonists remained in Manitoba.

Pressures soon mounted, mainly over education, in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Private German schools, with their own curriculum, were preferred by the Old Colony group in both provinces. For a time these were allowed. Some other Mennonites, including the Manitoba Bergthalers, wanted public schools, and, in 1889, formed a school association and
opened a normal school. 42

The movement from freedom of having their own private German schools to public schools, where English was taught, was gradual but irreversible, and led to a crisis by the end of World War I. Not all Mennonite schools were seen as being substandard, 43 although there had been some deterioration in the quality of the education, particularly among the Old Colonists. Rather, objections to the schools were often due to the German curriculum. Meanwhile, the conservative church leaders were opposed to learning English as they feared this would mean a breakdown of the barrier between themselves and the world.

Many new settlers, including English Protestants from Ontario, wanted to spread British culture and the English language, using the schools to accomplish this. 44 They were not sympathetic to the Old Colony group wanting to live their separate lives in colonies. One Saskatchewan official, E.H. Oliver, said: “I venture to state that the function of our schools must not be to make Mennonites, nor Protestants, nor Roman Catholics, but Canadian citizens.” 45 The children were thought of as children of the state. The Old Colony, on the other hand, owed their loyalty to their religion and their closed society, rejecting this Canadian vision of life for them. Unlike the French, they had insignificant political power and “... were not legally recognized as corporate bodies; they had no historical claim; and their assimilation appeared eminently desirable, not only in order to facilitate administration and safeguard national unity, but also in order to strengthen the Anglo-Saxon element in its struggle for dominance over the French Canadians.” 46

In Saskatchewan, as in Manitoba, the issue heated up. Premier Scott was ambivalent about the use of force with the Mennonites on the education issue, but, as in Manitoba, the trend was towards greater firmness. Scott’s successor, Premier Martin, was considerably firmer. In 1917, “The first plank of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party platform ... dealt with education, and was concerned especially that every child obtain a thorough knowledge of the English language.” 47 By 1918, in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the private Mennonite schools were no longer allowed to function as the Old Colonists wanted, and often they were to be replaced by public schools.

In 1919, Manitoba Mennonites, who had not forgotten the 1873 government promises, appealed but lost two test cases decided by the Manitoba Court of Appeal. The court ruled that Manitoba’s law regarding education overrode the federal promises to the
Mennonites. The federal government had gone beyond its legitimate authority when making the promises in the 1870s. Petitions directed to the provincial administration and legislature were fruitless and the Privy Council in London refused to hear their appeal.48

In Saskatchewan, Premier Martin made a political decision to set aside the 1873 promise. He said: “It was unfortunate that these people came here deceived by some document that they had from the Dominion government ...”49 At issue were two concepts of religious freedom: “... a narrow one referring to an individual’s freedom in matters of belief and worship and a broader one referring to the freedom of a group to pursue a particular way of life.”50 Premier Martin did not recognize how public school attendance could interfere with religion. Private schools were not necessarily ruled out, but they lost their freedom as they had to follow provincial rules.51

Schools, sometimes the former Mennonite schools, were opened, staffed by “English” teachers, but sometimes no Old Colony children attended.52 Some parents, who used passive resistance and did not send their children to the public schools, were fined and jailed. The Old Colony group was hit particularly hard. At one point, eleven men were in jail, and goods and chattels were seized to pay fines. One family near Swift Current had first “... three horses, a hog and five cured hams ...” taken. When that was not enough to pay the fines, the police took “... five cows, two heifers and two horses.”53 Some families paid more than $700 a year in fines with fines of ten dollars per month per child.54

World War I also added to pressure on the Mennonite schools, as the provinces saw assimilation of their minorities to be necessary. This was part of a national policy of assimilation of ethnic minorities for purposes of national unity and cultural uniformity.55

The governments did not bend in the face of appeals for compromise from within and outside the Mennonite community.56 While some Mennonites yielded to the government demands, the Old Colony leaders did not, feeling that: “To surrender complete freedom of education was to them the equivalent of surrendering freedom of religion.”57

Other issues also put pressures on the Mennonites. World War I brought universal manpower registration58 and an effort by the government to limit the military exemption of the Mennonites.59 In 1917, though, the government reinforced the promise of military exemption.60 Sentiment also was present in Canada against the German-speaking pacifists, and the Mennonites were viewed as undesirables by the public and officials. Mennonites
were uneasy with the growth of nationalistic, pro-British feelings. They were expected to buy war bonds, but the Old Colonists refused and also refused to support the Red Cross.  

The War-Time Elections Act of September 20, 1917 disenfranchised conscientious objectors and persons of German descent, including the Mennonites. Most did not seem to mind much as their churches forbade them to participate in elections anyway. After May 2, 1919, the immigration to Canada of any Mennonites was prohibited. They were also bothered by press censorship in 1919, when the publication of their official periodicals was suspended, and it was difficult to circulate church liturgical and educational materials.

Reluctantly, the Old Colonists decided to leave Canada and their farms, not long cleared of prairie wool and bush. Leaving split the church, communities, and families.

While there were other problems, the primary reason for the Old Colonists deciding to leave Canada was the educational issue. Years later, when Bishop Isaak Dyck was asked why they left Canada, he gave as a reason that they could no longer have freedom of schools. Religion and belief were still free but: “... when the school, as the first planting place in man’s heart, was held in common with the world, then the church also couldn’t remain free therefrom.” The school issue, which represented the attack of the world on the Old Colony, clearly showed the faithful that they had to leave: “... the voice from above was clear to them. If the church is to be kept faithful to the teaching of the gospel, she will once again have to live among the heathen people and begin anew.”

The Old Colonists and the governments agreed on the crucial role of education for the fulfilment of their very different visions. The emphasis of the Old Colonists, then and now, on transmitting their values to their young cannot be overemphasized in a search to understand the motives for their actions, including the various migrations.

The emphasis on the preservation of the physically separate colony way of life was also clear. Not only did schools need to be controlled by the Old Colony leadership, but they wanted to have control over many other aspects of community life, which could only occur with physical separation from the larger society. Most other Mennonite groups in Canada did not agree with the Old Colony’s assessment of the situation, and were willing to continue living in Canada, even if it meant accepting more aspects of Canadian culture.

For some, economic motivations also may have played a part in the move. Those who left asked about seventy-five dollars an acre for their land in Canada and paid $8.25 an acre
in Mexico, although a post war economic slump sharply reduced Canadian land prices and any potential profit. 68

Tradition also may have played a role in the decision to emigrate. 69 There were the daily traditions that needed to be preserved, and added to this was the historical tradition of the previous migrations in Mennonite history. There are parallels with the movement from Russia in the 1870s, which many remembered well. Pressure for change was applied from outside, rights were removed, and internal splits took place in the group.

One other explanation has been offered for the migration from Canada. Abraham Schmitt, a dyslexic scholar of Old Colony descent, suggested that the reason for the move was dyslexia among the Old Colony male leadership. Fear of exposure of this condition, and of subsequent exposure as being inferior to the women, may have made them flee Canada and its educational demands. 70 Research to this point, including various interviews with leaders and educators of the Old Colony, has not confirmed this hypothesis.

Old Colony people believe that: “... the exodus from Canada was tantamount to expulsion ...” 71 For them, the move from Canada became part of the much longer story of persecution of the Old Colony church. Elder Dyck, in his later writings about the circumstances and process of leaving Canada, viewed what happened as persecution. 72

Evidence shows that the Canadian government considered most of the emigrants not to be Canadians, but to be mostly German, Russian, and American. Officially, the government seemed unconcerned about the Mennonites leaving. 73 Given the sentiments of the time, many Canadians did not consider losing the Mennonites to be a big loss.

Some thought the Old Colonists were bluffing when they spoke of leaving Canada. In August of 1920, the Manitoba Free Press doubted “... whether any substantial number even of the Old Colony Mennonites are prepared to join the exodus from the pleasant and fruitful lands of Manitoba.” 74 In October 1920, the Free Press said that the bishops “... have acquired considerable proficiency in one of the characteristic arts of the North American continent- that of making a strong bluff on a poor hand.” 75

In 1919, Old Colony delegates began to search for a new home. 76 Although Mississippi, Minnesota, and Quebec were considered, 77 a move to one of these areas might have been unwise. The Old Colony Mennonites likely needed to find a country with greater cultural differences and a lower standard of living so that the ban would again become
effective by removing alternatives for the people to the closed way of life. Freedom to set up physically isolated colonies also was sought.

Delegations also explored Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, and later Mexico, which proved to be more promising than South America. In February 1921, another delegation went to Mexico and obtained a Privilegium from President Obregón. It included freedom from military service, freedom from swearing of oaths, religious freedom, educational freedom, and internal freedom of property and of their economic system. These concessions facilitated the establishment of separate, self-controlled colonies.

The Old Colony Mennonites purchased land in three locations in Mexico. Two of these were near San Antonio de los Arenales, later to become Cuauhtémoc, in the state of Chihuahua. These colonies were called Manitoba colony and Swift Current colony. The Manitoba group bought 62,728 hectares (155,000 acres) and the Swift Current group 29,998 hectares (74,125 acres) from Don Carlos Zuloaga, a large landowner who was concerned about losing land to the agraristas, peasants seeking land. The land was in a semiarid high plateau, known as the Bustillos Valley, surrounded by low mountains. Twenty-four villages were originally established in the Manitoba colony and ten in the Swift Current colony. Farther south, in Durango state, near Patos, later named Nuevo Ideal, the Hague group purchased about 14,165 hectares (35,000 acres) in what is variously known as Hague, Patos, Nuevo Ideal, or, most commonly, Durango colony. About 1,000 Sommerfelder also emigrated to Mexico at that time, buying about 6,120 hectares (15,125 acres) in the Santa Clara valley northwest of Cuauhtémoc. Their colony, of three villages originally, would be known as the Santa Clara colony.

Estimates are that approximately 3,200 Old Colony people left Manitoba, 800 to 950 left the Hague-Osler area, and 1,200 to 1,500 left the Swift Current area. In all, about 5,500 Old Colony Mennonites moved to Mexico, which was about one-half of their population. The participation rate in the migration was lower from Saskatchewan than Manitoba, possibly due to less resistance in Saskatchewan to the government attempts at assimilation and to greater difficulties in selling their land. In many cases, it was the poorer people who were left behind. All of the bishops and ministers, except two from the Hague area, made the move south, leaving those who stayed behind leaderless and without a church. Those who left also took all the church documents with them. The attitude was that the faithful should
leave and that official ties would be cut with those remaining behind. The break between the two groups was not abrupt though, as elders and preachers returned to Canada each year until 1926 and served communion to those who had remained behind, until it looked as if the movement to Mexico was complete. Many more would have moved if they would have had the money to do so. In the case of the Hague group, some did not leave Saskatchewan when they saw the difficulties the new settlers in Mexico had. The Mexican leadership again sent ministers back to Manitoba in the late 1920s to try to persuade more to move to Mexico. Those left behind were in disarray and abandoned, having been told that they could no longer be part of the church.

Many of those who stayed in Canada conformed with government wishes, moving towards assimilation. Two ministers, Johan Löppky and Abram Wall, who had remained in the Hague area, helped reorganize a church in 1930, but it was not until 1936 that the Old Colony church in Manitoba officially reorganized. The new church in both provinces was called the Altkolonier Mennonitengemeinde. New bishops were chosen in Hague-Osler and in the West Reserve but not in Swift Current, as it had disintegrated too far to reorganize. New membership registers had to be made, as the old ones were in Mexico.

A contradiction in Mennonite philosophy has shown itself repeatedly in Mennonite history. Unquestionably, of primary importance to Mennonites is passing on their beliefs to the coming generations. Yet, when leaving Russia, Canada, and in later moves within and from Mexico, moves undertaken for the stated purpose of preserving their beliefs, the community did not help many of its financially weaker members. Even though they were close relatives, they were abandoned to the “world.” These actions show that financial and other motives often have worked against the more noble goals which they espoused.

The Old Colonists encountered difficulties with some business aspects of the move. The leadership wanted to sell the land in Canada as a block and to buy the new land in Mexico in a block. While the Old Colonists were not communal, the leadership and the community wished make the move as a community and to control the land ownership within their settlements. Difficulties and controversies were encountered in regards to the planned block sales of land in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and eventually individual land sales became common. Hoped for block sales did not materialize, and difficulties were encountered in getting a good price for much of the land. Although block purchases of the
land in Mexico did go ahead, these possibly could have been handled more skilfully. The Old Colonists could have had more than three times as much land in the Cuauhtémoc area as they bought, for no additional charge. They rejected range and mountainous land that later would have been very useful.

Although many Mennonites stayed behind for financial reasons, some stayed because they were not as strongly opposed to the changes in Canada. Similarly to what happened after the conservatives left Russia, the movement to Mexico had a liberalizing effect on the remaining communities. Much of the land vacated by those who left was bought by a new group of Mennonites, commonly referred to as Russländer, who arrived in Canada in the mid-twenties, also liberalizing the remaining Old Colony people.

The Mennonites took advantage of north-south rail lines that connected Canada with Mexico, paying up to $30,000 per chartered train to Chihuahua. About one million dollars were spent on the movement. Some emigrants made sure that they had Canadian citizenship and left large deposits in Canadian banks, allowing themselves a way to return to Canada. The first train left Plum Coulee, Manitoba on March 1, 1922, and the second left the next day from Haskett, Manitoba, heading for San Antonio de los Arenales. In all, about thirty-six trains carried the settlers from Swift Current and Manitoba in the period from 1922 to 1924. The Hague group did not begin its move until 1924. On June 15, 1924, the first train of twenty-three families from the Hague and Osler area arrived in Durango. Some of the Durango settlers used trucks to make the move.

There also were some separate or later movements to Mexico. In 1924, several Kleine Gemeinde families from Kansas settled near the Chihuahua Old Colony settlements. They eventually became part of the Manitoba colony Old Colony group. Stragglers also kept arriving from Canada, compelled possibly by the Canadian school issue, loneliness for friends and relatives in Mexico, and guilt over not following the church.

Some Russian Mennonites, unable to enter Canada or the United States, also arrived in the Cuauhtémoc area in the 1920s. Due in part to the Old Colony’s refusal to accept them into their group, these less conservative Mennonites eventually became affiliated with the General Conference Mennonites of the United States and Canada.

World War II and its demands on the Mennonites to provide alternate service caused dissatisfaction among conservative Mennonite groups in Canada, including the
Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, Kleine Gemeinde, and the Old Colony. The Family Allowance Act, implemented on July 1, 1945, caused concern by putting pressure on them to keep their children in school several years longer than they preferred, as the payments were available for students up to age sixteen. It also was seen as a threat to the patriarchal family, as the cheques were directed to the mother. These events renewed interest among conservative Mennonites in moving to Latin America in the 1940s.

In 1948, Elder Johann Loeppky of Osler led thirty-eight families or 246 persons to Mexico. All but a few of them, however, soon returned to Canada. They had participated as a separate group with the Kleine Gemeinde emigration to Mexico to the Quellenkolonie, north of Cuauhtemoc. Lack of financing was given as a reason for the failure. This group used vehicles for the trip to Mexico, which created problems with their being accepted by the Old Colony. When Elder Loeppky returned to Canada, the Mennonites in Mexico whitewashed the walls of the churches where he had preached.

There then were in Mexico three conservative Mennonite groups: the Old Colony, the Sommerfelder, and the Kleine Gemeinde, all there primarily because of the freedom in Mexico to live isolated lives. These groups, for a time, lived independent lives, largely free from each other's influences. In addition, General Conference Mennonites were there, and other Mennonite groups also arrived later on, often coming primarily to help their more conservative brethren in the areas of spiritual, economic, and cultural change.

The first ten years in Mexico were very difficult for the Old Colony settlers. Although the Mexican Revolution was officially over, civil order was disrupted as marauding remnants of Pancho Villa's army created problems for the Chihuahua colonies, and break-ins were also common. Although Mennonites were taught that it was better to suffer physical harm than to suffer harm to the soul, some protected themselves and shot at Mexicans in the night, making the situation worse when the Mexicans went to the next village for revenge. Over the years a number of the Mennonites were killed by Mexican attackers, and some regretted leaving Canada and wanted to return. The crime did ease at times, only to start again later on. In 1929, soldiers helped with the situation in Chihuahua. In Durango, robberies and attacks led to the Mennonites building a barracks for the soldiers, and after 1944 they shared the maintenance expense of the police force. At night, soldiers protected the villages and their inhabitants. Summary executions on both the Swift Current and
Durango colonies led to a large reduction in crime.\textsuperscript{112}

Threats also came from the government, as the decades following the Revolution saw the implementation of various policies that would affect the Mennonites. The most notable were in the areas of land reform and educational and religious freedom.

The presence of Mexican squatters on Mennonite land near Cuauhtémoc resulted in a drawn-out dispute over the land and in a commission from Mexico City coming to investigate. The President of Mexico and the Governor of Chihuahua were involved, and the matter was eventually settled to the Mennonites' satisfaction.\textsuperscript{113} Land disputes would recur throughout much of the century, with Mexico's land redistribution to the landless.

Although religious services were restricted in much of Mexico, the Mennonites were allowed religious freedom. A 1927 law allowing only those born in Mexico to preach was not enforced among the Mennonites,\textsuperscript{114} as most of the antireligious sentiment was directed at the Catholic church. The \textit{Waisenamt}, a trust fund for widows and orphans, was attacked, and for a time, there was danger that it would be treated as a bank. The Mexican system had difficulty differentiating between the large Mennonite land holdings and institutions, which in fact were owned by many, and the large individual holdings of those the revolution was to dispossess. In the end, the Mennonites usually were recognized as distinct from the large landowners, but often not without many difficulties.

In 1927, the Governor of Chihuahua "... pointed out that the Constitution, in Article 3, prohibited both the teaching of religious doctrine in elementary schools and the involvement of a 'religious corporation' in the operation of such schools."\textsuperscript{115} No action was taken at that time, but uncertainty was created. Then, in 1935, the Mennonites had to face their most serious challenge when the Mexican government closed their schools. A large scale return to Canada was considered and explored. On December 18, 1935, the Mennonites of Chihuahua issued an ultimatum to the Mexican government threatening to leave Mexico, and by December 20, the officials gave in to the Mennonites.\textsuperscript{116} In 1936 the Mennonite schools were reopened,\textsuperscript{117} and interest in leaving Mexico waned.

Other problems also occurred in the early years in Mexico. Malaria or typhus took many lives.\textsuperscript{118} Mennonite funeral practices, which delayed burial for several days, also caused problems with the government, as did the Mennonites' large number of graveyards. A Mexican tax imposed on all vehicles, including wagons, was resolved after negotiations.\textsuperscript{119}
Identity documents required of the Mennonites, which involved the taking of photographs, were resisted due to their prohibition against graven images.

The climate and soil were strange to them and crop failures occurred until the Mennonites adjusted their farming practices to the new environment. Bishop Dyck later said that the strangest thing in Mexico was the climate. At times there was drought and at other times good rainfall, and it was not as warm as had been expected. Supplies were scarce and a prairie fire destroyed much livestock feed. The lack of markets for their agricultural products, the depression, and a number of bank failures, leading to the loss of possibly close to one-half million dollars, also caused many difficulties.

During the difficulties before leaving Canada and after arriving in Mexico, the Old Colony leadership found its capabilities strained, as they were required to do many things to which they were unaccustomed and for which they had little experience or training. Their optimism and faith in the help of God were greater than was their knowledge of Mexican government, business, agriculture, and markets. If there were shortcomings in the leadership and its abilities, these for the most part were not recognized. They proceeded as best they could, relying largely on the strength of their vision and on God.

Several German-speaking people in the Cuauhtémoc area helped the Old Colony, as they had difficulty dealing with the Mexican authorities due to a lack of familiarity with the language and of the procedures for settling difficulties. Their most notable benefactor likely was Walter Schmiedehaus, the German consul in Chihuahua state, who was involved in numerous negotiations, including the agrarista issue, with the Mexican government on behalf of the Mennonites. He also wrote extensively about the history of the Old Colony Mennonites. A Russländer Mennonite, Cornelius Klassen of Cuauhtémoc, also was helpful to the Old Colony Mennonites, helping them accept the required identity photographs and in moving money from Mexico to El Paso banks.

The Old Colony group survived the difficult early time in Mexico, and successfully established the isolated, separate society they and their ancestors valued. Any deficiencies that existed in the Mexican environment and within the leadership and people of the Old Colony group were more than compensated by the freedom they found to live as they wanted. In their isolated colonies, they were able to successfully fashion their society.
MAP SHOWING THE LOCATION OF THE ORIGINAL COLONIES IN MEXICO

Settlements in Mexico

1- Manitoba colony (Old Colony)- 1922.
2- Swift Current colony (Old Colony)- 1922.
3- Santa Clara (Sommerfelder)- 1922.
4- Durango- Patos (Old Colony)- 1924.
Chapter 2- Life in Mexico: the vision becomes reality.

Memories of Canada were still strong, after arriving in the unfamiliar Mexican environment. Canada also continued to play a role, as immigration from Canada continued sporadically, and some of the disillusioned returned to Canada. A gradual adjustment to the new environment took place, and Canada’s influence faded, at least for several decades.

Unlike some utopian enterprises, the commitment of the overwhelming majority of the leaders and the people to the principle of separate religious communities was strong. No sacrifice was too great, as long as the corporate community had freedom. With reasonable skill, communities, with their physical, structural, and cultural elements, were built.

The adjustment period included coming to terms with the economic reality of Mexico. This was not the Canadian prairie, with its fertile soils and generally adequate rains. As the soils often were poorer and the climate was hotter and drier, crop yields could not equal those of Canada, as long as dryland farming techniques were used. Consequently, economic expectations were lowered from what they had been in Canada. Colony size limits meant that most farmers had to content themselves with small farms, which, even with the best of crops, would not lead to economic riches. However, the difficult economic times of the North American economy during the 1930s soon made the economic disparity between the Mexican farms and those farther north less obvious, and World War II made the advantages of the isolation in Mexico even clearer.

The initial time period not only saw a lowering of economic expectations but a change in expectations about the nature of relationships to the surrounding society. Poverty, landlessness, crime, bureaucratic corruption, and a lack of health care facilities were all part of the Mexican landscape. In some respects, life would have been easier had they remained in Canada. Mexico was a poor country and was still experiencing some effects of the political instability that had characterized its recent history. They now were residents of that country, dependent on it and its economic and political systems for their survival. However, any limitations imposed by the Mexican environment were compensated by their ability to
live in their communities, relatively free from interference. They were willing to pay the economic price, as they were able to follow their beliefs.

The relationship between the pioneering Mennonites in Mexico and the Mexican state was not much different, in some respects, from what it had been in Poland, Russia, or Canada. There, as in Mexico, they had exchanged their expertise, primarily in agricultural methods, for political and religious concessions.

After the initial adjustment to Mexico, including an overall lowering of expectations, there were relatively good economic times, when the rains came, crops were bountiful, and markets for the crops were good. Economic prosperity has been elusive, though, as it depended on rains, markets, and population pressures. Relative prosperity was present in the Cuauhtémoc area colonies in 1996 but not in many other areas.

Economic crises also have been part of the Old Colony experience. Crises occurred as a result of the droughts of the 1950s and 1990s and various market problems, including those resulting from NAFTA in the 1990s. Fretz in the 1940s, Redekop in the 1960s, and Sawatzky in the 1980s, all described economic problems or crises in the Old Colony society. Both success and crisis have been part of this group’s history in Mexico.

One problem with this type of analysis, besides being vague and imprecise, is that it is largely economic. Judging a basically religious enterprise by economic standards is likely to show that the religious enterprise was not good business, and that certainly is supported by any economic analysis of the Mexican Old Colony. It also is judging the Old Colony by an outside standard which the Old Colony group has rejected repeatedly.

Looking at economics also leads to dwelling on the negative aspects of the Old Colony experience in Mexico. In fact, many have lived happy, fulfilling lives there, and, for them, the vision of the leaders who left Canada became reality. This was particularly true until the 1960s, when various pressures, often not directly economic, erupted into the open. These pressures have increased and waned, but overall, the Old Colony vision in Mexico has been increasingly under siege, or in crisis, since the 1960s.

To understand the dynamics of Old Colony history in Mexico, it is necessary to know more about the colonies, including their organization, leadership, and culture. The society they built is more than a quaint remnant of another age. It is the result of a deliberate design to create a society separate from the larger world. The Old Colony group, with
unprecedented freedom, backed by their *Privilegium*, and with sufficient geographic and cultural isolation to support them, set out to create the kingdom of God’s people on earth. Their unique systems of leadership, social control, religious practice, education, and other aspects of culture are directed largely by their philosophy. While tradition governs this group, many of the traditions were established, consciously and purposely, to maintain barriers between themselves and the world.

The powerful Old Colony leadership directed the implementation of their visions. While the leadership’s position had been challenged in Canada by the infringing Canadian society, in Mexico the leadership was greatly strengthened, and again able to control many things. This was not necessarily negative though as: “Among the Old Colony Mennonites . . . the contractual elements are clearly stipulated . . . yet there is an atmosphere of common purpose and unity which mitigates the severity of the objective and bureaucratic rules.”

Old Colony leadership is divided into religious and secular leadership, with the religious leadership, or *Lehrdienst*, above and in control of the secular, forming a theocracy. Old Colony leaders are elected, theoretically meaning that the will of the people is done, although only male landowners have the right to vote for civil positions and only male church members can participate in the religious elections. This effectively disenfranchises women. There is little or no open questioning of this among the women of the colonies and no disputes over this have been documented. The system also limits the participation of poorer or younger men who do not own land and of men who are not church members.

Most colonies have one bishop or elder, the head of the colony, although the Manitoba colony has had two bishops for the past several decades. The bishop and the ministers are elected for life. Even though some spend up to 75 percent of their time on church work, as with the civil positions, they receive no pay.

Maintaining the old ways has been taken particularly seriously by the bishops who have made vows to their predecessors that they would not allow changes. Some observers, unsympathetic to the goals of the leaders, have seen this dedication to tradition as a desire to keep the people ignorant and under control, and have described the leaders as arrogant.

Deacons are elected to look after the material and social welfare of the members, and are responsible for the Armenkasse, which distributes money to those who cannot meet their own financial needs. Also elected in the religious realm are the *Vorsänger* or song leaders,
usually six to eight of these men per church.

The civil side of the colonies has been uncontroversial compared to the religious side. The Vorsteher, the official in charge of the whole colony, is often elected for a longer period of time, to allow for continuity in this important position. A large colony, like Manitoba colony, has two Vorsteher. Below the Vorsteher, each village has a Schult, the village chief, who sees that roads are maintained and looks after various other village matters. A number of other officials also serve in the administration of the colonies.8

Both sides of the administration have worked together in planning for expansion of the colonies, either to purchase land in the area or to establish daughter colonies. The ultimate responsibility for the planning rests with the religious arm but the secular arm looks after much of the work involved, including negotiations with the government.9

The Old Colony is a theocracy, giving the final say over the secular to the church leaders. While it could be argued that this violates one of the early Anabaptist principles, that of separation of the church and state, this Mennonite belief can be seen in the separate organization of individual colonies and in the absence of a structure tying the various colonies together.10 The political organization present also is minimal in most respects.

People have various reasons for following the theocracy’s rules, including community pressure, excommunication, and fear of punishment from above. The belief that God will punish with crop failures, lightning strikes, illnesses, and accidents has been reinforced by numerous calamities that have happened to them. The emphasis on the Old Testament also reinforces this attitude.11 Rules not only are followed because of fear or community control. There is a genuine belief among many that they are a community chosen by God and that the dictates of their leaders and community are right and proper.

Although for much of the history of the Old Colony group in Mexico, the people willingly followed the rules, there has been an increasing defiance of authority in some colonies since the 1960s. Violations of the rules are still dealt with, although what constitutes a breach of the rules and how these violations are handled varies a lot. Offenders are usually dealt with either at Donnadach, meetings on Thursday, or at Nachkirche, meetings after church on Sundays.

Once something has been decided by the Lehrdienst and sealed with prayer, it cannot be changed. When a new bishop takes office, he must agree to keep things as they have been
in the past, and when change comes, they often do not change the rule, but only stop punishing the offenders. This is not necessarily a veneration of the old for the sake of the old but a respect for the wisdom of past decisions, reached between God and man.

If the transgression is not too serious, the trespasser is asked to correct the behaviour. If it is more serious or of a repetitive nature, and if the offender refuses to comply, he is excommunicated, with the ban only being lifted when the fault is admitted by the offender and when he promises to follow the rules in the future. The term “he” is used here as it is almost without exception the man who is banned, as his wife and family are thought to follow the husband in disobedience or obedience, one way or the other.  

Excommunication, a tool already used by Mennonites in Europe, has been a key aspect of Old Colony history in Mexico. It has been the last recourse to keep control and force conformity within the colonies. Excommunications have sometimes not made sense, but even when the reason has not been understood, it could be justified by the leaders as being necessary to maintain boundaries between their community and the outside world. The excommunicated are not allowed to attend church services, to take communion, and sometimes cannot attend weddings or funerals. Most importantly though, they not only are separated from their community on earth but also are excluded from heaven. This is based on the bishops’ authority from Matthew 16: 19: “And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever doors you lock on earth shall be locked in heaven; and whatever doors you open on earth shall be open in heaven!” Many have modified their behaviour out of fear of excommunication, even when they did not agree with the rules.

It often happened that persons were excommunicated for an action that later was accepted, but they remained excommunicated unless they came to the Lehrdienst and admitted they were wrong. As Bishop Banman recently said, the offence was not the rubber tires or the cars but the disobedience. It was the disobedience, the threat to the solidarity of the community, that they needed to clear up with the church. Some have settled matters with the church even if they did not want to attend the church and were joining another church instead. On the other hand, some tough persons have lived with excommunication for decades, following their own ideas about right and wrong.

It has long been known that excommunication loses its force when there is a large group of excommunicated who can form another community or when there is an alternate
community the excommunicated can go to. Mennonites already knew this in Canada and Russia. The Old Colony leaders know that excommunication needs to be used with care, although at times it does not look that way when large numbers are banned.\textsuperscript{17}

Some of the most serious challenges to the Mexican Old Colony leadership's authority have been over technological prohibitions.\textsuperscript{18} The technological prohibitions of the Old Colonists often look ridiculous to outsiders and to some insiders as the justification cannot easily be seen. However, most prohibitions make sense when viewed from the point of view of their society and not from that of the rest of the world.

While some prohibitions, technological and otherwise, were well planned and the result of the leaders' wisdom, it is possible in hindsight to use logic and reason to explain and justify the actions of the Old Colonists, giving them credit for foresight and wisdom that did not exist. Their actions can be intellectually whitewashed covering up the flaws in their logic and actions. In truth, the technological prohibitions often were put in place before the implications of the technology were fully known and developed. Sometimes the reasons were illogical and some prohibitions have done more harm than good. On the other hand, it should be realized that, to a great degree, Old Colony society is the result of deliberate planning and not the result of haphazard development, likely to a far greater extent than most societies are. Overall, the prohibitions on some technology have been thought out and effective in helping create a barrier to the outside world.

It would be wrong to say that the only purpose of the prohibitions was to ensure that the Old Colonists' lifestyles would be different from the lifestyles of the world, thereby creating a barrier. The prohibitions and the barrier were put in place to protect specific aspects of their communities from the perceived dangers.

The first thing the Old Colonists have sought to protect is their religious beliefs. They believe their Christian beliefs are largely different from those of the rest of the world. The concept of a community where all aspects of life are based on the Bible's teachings, particularly on the teachings of Christ, sets them apart, in their minds at least, from others who call themselves Christians. The distance they see between their lives and beliefs and those of the rest of the world is like the distance between heaven and hell.

Secondly, the barriers are there to protect the Old Colonists' unique communities and the importance of these communities in their lives. Their religious beliefs have led to their
-communities being substantially different from the world around them. The will and interests of the individual must submit to the will and interests of God and of the community. The maintenance of close community, family, and friendship ties is important, while following disruptive personal goals and self fulfilment is to be avoided. Simplicity and function are valued, while ostentatious displays of wealth are rejected. Humility is desirable and pride is wrong.

Thirdly, technological and other prohibitions serve to keep out sinful and disruptive influences. Many things the world embraces are considered to be wrong by the Old Colonists. Violations of various behavioural norms, including in the areas of sexuality and violence, are seen as being wrong and disruptive to the community.

The walls the Old Colonists built clearly are protecting something that to them is important. Without the various barriers, much of what has been protected would be lost.

Three issues, rubber tires, vehicles, and electrical power, stand out in importance, when the history of battles over technology are examined. Contrary to appearances, the Old Colony Mennonites are not in principle against technology. Their field work has been mechanized for many decades, and tractors, combines, and other machines are used.

Already in Manitoba, the “Brotherhood” decided not to use cars, and when tractors with rubber tires came along, these were judged to fit the definition of what was a car and consequently could not be used. Tractors were allowed but only with steel wheels. As rubber tired tractors offered the potential for rapid transportation to the nearby Mexican towns and their corrupting influences, the justification for the leaders’ decision not to allow the Old Colonists to own a means of rapid transportation is clear. This restriction also likely has kept farm size smaller, as the lower speed of the steel wheeled tractors limits the amount of land a farmer can work. This is positive for the community, as it helps prevent the rise of a class of large landowners. It is not known if this goal was part of the rationale of the leaders when they established the rule, but it has had this effect.

Many did not agree with the rule though. Tractors with steel wheels used more fuel, had higher repair bills, were more uncomfortable for the operator, and made it nearly impossible to work far away land, sometimes necessary for the expansion of overcrowded colonies. Rubber tires were used by some disobedient persons in the 1940s, and by the early 1960s nearly everyone in two entire villages in the Manitoba colony was excommunicated.
A third village sent back the excommunication letter, and after that no one was excommunicated for rubber tires there.

The introduction of rubber tires led to major splits, first within the colony and then between the Manitoba colony and the other colonies.\textsuperscript{21} This issue ended the close relationship, which had included preaching in each other’s churches, between the Manitoba colony and the more conservative colonies. Manitoba colony ministers were shunned until the ministers and many other people from Swift Current, Nord, and Santa Rita colonies left for Bolivia in the late 1960s, largely because of the rubber tire issue. Originally the Durango colony was not opposed to rubber tired tractors but had followed the lead of the Chihuahua colonies for the sake of unity.\textsuperscript{22} In 1996, Durango still had more tractors on steel than on rubber, although the battle was heating up.

Rubber tractor tires have had far reaching effects on Old Colony history, helping to split many communities. They contributed to movements to new colonies including El Capulin and Buenos Aires in northern Chihuahua, La Batea in Zacatecas state, and to South America. They also may have contributed to the residents of Yermo colony being abandoned by Manitoba colony, allowing the Kleine Gemeinde to gain a foothold in the Old Colony group.\textsuperscript{23}

In many colonies, it is still common to see tractors, new and old, on narrow, shop built steel wheels. The rubber tires are often put away in case they will be legal some day. In spite of the disobedience and disunity that has accompanied the rubber tire issue, the residents of many colonies continue to accept that the use of steel wheels is necessary to maintain the vision and essence of their community.

The second technological cause for excommunication and disunity has been motor vehicles. The ownership and driving of cars and trucks were prohibited, although hiring and riding in these vehicles was allowed. Ideally, the Old Colony leaders likely would have banned not only the ownership but also the use of motor vehicles. This was not practical though, given their reliance on the outside world, particularly in economic matters. As a concession to pressing necessity, the use of vehicles was not prohibited, but their use as a daily convenience was banned. Vehicle ownership would have removed much of the isolation of the colonies. It also would have introduced an element where people could show off their wealth and status, although that also is possible to some extent with owning a fast
horse and a well-cared-for buggy. The lifestyle made possible by car ownership was in many ways contrary to the values and goals of the Old Colonists. The prohibition against car ownership makes complete sense when their goals are considered.

The battle over cars was fought in the Cuauhtémoc area colonies in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, but was only clearly lost by the leadership in the eighties. In the early 1970s, the church was increasingly powerless to do much against the growing use of motor vehicles. When the battle appeared lost, the second wave of migration to South America took place in the 1970s. In the more conservative colonies, pickups and cars still are not accepted, and excommunications still take place for owning them.

A third technological issue that has split the Old Colony communities is electric power. The resistance to electricity already existed prior to the availability of today's vast array of electrically powered appliances. The objection to electricity appears to have been partly due to the electric lines' obvious physical link to the "world." Electricity and its uses also challenged the simple life valued by the Old Colonists. The leaders likely acted wisely when they banned most uses of electricity, rather than having to deal with each specific use of electricity as new gadgets were invented. The latter course would have led to endless debates and problems. There is no question that television, videos, and the Internet, to mention only a few uses of electricity, are incompatible with the Old Colonists' vision of separate religious communities. Banning electricity has proven to be an effective decision for keeping a distance from the world, as the world has increasingly relied on electricity.

Electricity already was an issue in the 1950s, although the Old Colony presented a fairly united front against it. Gradually electricity was allowed, providing that it was generated on the farm and only used to power tools and to light the barn. As with tractors and motor vehicles, the Old Colonists negotiated the use of electricity, controlled its use, and limited its negative effects. Although some wired their houses for the day when power might be allowed there, coal oil and gas lamps still light many houses and numerous women do not use electric appliances. The main exception is the Cuauhtémoc area colonies, where, by the 1990s, microwave ovens and other electrical devices were common, although some, including Bishop Banman, still did not use electric light in the house.

In some cases it appears that greater mechanization has been allowed in the men's world than in the women's world. Field work is mechanized and electric lights are allowed
in the barn, while the household realm often has fewer modern conveniences. However, the technology used by the men is also severely limited in many cases, while increases in the technology used by women can also be seen. For example, the technological level of the gas powered washing machines used by some women may be similar to that of tractors on steel wheels. As well, women and men often share the chores in the barn, with both benefiting from the use of the electric lights there. Both men and women are affected by many of the technological restrictions, including the limits on the use of electricity and of vehicles. There also is a strong correlation between the level of technology allowed by families and communities in the production of farm products and in the household realm.

The Old Colony also has had prohibitions against other technology, including telephones, radios, bicycles, and musical instruments. The reasons for these prohibitions are similar to those already examined. Some technology is an unwanted direct link to the world, some has the potential of working against goals of church, community, and family solidarity, and some is seen as being sinful or as making it easier to sin.

While not the cause of mass excommunications, many have challenged various prohibitions. By 1986, two-meter two-way radios, usually unregistered, were in use in the Cuauhtémoc area. Many Mennonites rapidly came to use this technology, and by 1991, two-meter radios also were at Las Virginias and La Honda. Telephone service came to villages in the Cuauhtémoc area in 1990. Two-way radios and telephones represented another tie to the outside world and replaced personal interaction with speaking into a plastic receiver, possibly endangering the community. In what may have been a form of compromise or concession to economic necessity, telephones, called Casetas, were installed in some businesses and houses for general public use. In the more conservative colonies, two-way radios and telephones were still kept hidden in the 1990s.

Much used farm machinery has been brought from Canada and the United States. Fifty-year-old tractors, and mowers, binders, and threshing machines that may be seventy years or more in age, are still in common use. Horses are also commonly used for many tasks. The use of horses and of the older and smaller machinery supports the close-knit communities and families by limiting farm size and requiring group labour. As an example, a task such as threshing grain, that could be performed by one man with a combine, requires a large crew when a mower, a binder, a threshing machine, and horse teams and hay racks are
used. The high labour requirements imposed by the small machinery are often met by the extended family.

There also are new tractors and large equipment. In the 1990s, the Cuauhtémoc area colonies are very mechanized compared to most other colonies. The increasing use of large farm machinery also can contribute to an increased economic and social distance between the rich and the poor by increasing inequities and reducing interdependence.

Old Colony philosophy has not opposed technology itself, but has recognized that “... urbanization, industrialization, commercialization, communication, and interaction with the outside will lead to the breakdown of a system...” They have been willing to accept technology, but on their terms, evaluating and then choosing that which is not harmful to their goals, as much as economic realities will allow choice.

Some resistance to change has helped maintain community boundaries. Some of this has been unconscious. Even if the present generation does not understand the reason for not changing things, a blind following of their ancestors' maxim not to change helps maintain the barriers and that which the barriers are protecting. On the other hand, they have shown they are not against controlled change by accepting a limited range of new technology and new climates and countries. Some critics have seen the Old Colonists as having a pointless and stubborn resistance to change, failing to recognize the validity of their boundary maintenance actions. Often they have seen only the quaintness and not the reasons, conscious or unconscious, for it.

Technological issues often have been negotiable in the colonies. Pressing economic necessity has meant some boundaries have had to be changed. Even though a boundary is relaxed, does not mean that it cannot still be different from the world. Technology also can be accepted in a limited way, using the technology to help the community and its vision survive, rather than tearing down the walls. A limited acceptance of technology also does not mean that the Old Colonists and the world are coming closer together, as the world is continually accepting new technology, ensuring that the technological gap and barrier between the two remains as large as it ever was.

In addition to the technological area, other issues of control and discipline exist. These include sexual immorality, defiance of authority, and pride or haughtiness. Humility is also stressed, as can be seen by the popularity of books on pride and humility.
The theocratic and powerful Old Colony leadership and their dedicated followers successfully established colonies in Mexico. They had greater freedom to design and implement their vision than their forefathers did in Europe or in Canada. The use of excommunication and restrictions on technology, along with the physical isolation afforded by the Mexican environment, helped protect the enterprise. Other tools that were used to repel outside threats include language, education, and their entire culture.

The design of many elements of the colonies was not new, but a renewal of the old design that was threatened first in Russia and then in Canada. However, various aspects of their society, that had not previously performed a defensive function, now came to serve as barriers to the world around them. Their society became increasingly anachronistic, with the anachronisms acting as part of the barrier to the world.

An understanding of the details of the environment and of the life these people built in Mexico is essential to understanding their history. Most Mennonite colonies in northern Mexico are located in previously sparsely populated valleys, surrounded by low mountains. Many colonies are at high elevations, between 6,500 and 8,500 feet, on semiarid land with most precipitation occurring from June to October. The colonies are divided into villages often designated by both a name and a “Campo” number. The village names are mainly the German names of Mennonite villages in Canada and in Russia before that. Particularly older colonies were laid out in the Strassendorf and Gewannflur system, “... a linear one-street village with its surrounding fields and pasture ...” This system of village layout had been used by the Mennonites first in Russia and again in Canada. The villages were made up of ten to thirty farms of an average of 160 acres each. Some land was used for common purposes such as churches, schools, cheese factories, roads, and for a common pasture.

Some newer villages only have farms on one side of the street, with pasture land behind the house and farm land across the street, although some newer colonies, including Sabinal and Villa Ahumada, still are laid out in the traditional form. Also, with many colonies adding neighbouring land, diversity developed in the shape and size of individual pieces of land. Most farms have become smaller and some farming is more intensive. The number of landless also has risen, but in contrast, some farms have become larger.

As a defence mechanism, the land originally was not registered in the names of the individual owners, mainly so that the colony could control the sale of land. Disgruntled
individuals theoretically could not sell land to Mexicans or other outsiders. Over time, much of the colony control over the land has been eroded resulting in non-Old Colonists owning land in some colonies. Some loss of control has taken place within the old system when former members have left the church. Some also have obtained individual titles to the land, particularly where alternatives to the Old Colony church exist and in communities where the Old Colony church no longer has a strong presence.

As of 1993, government subsidy programs required maps of the villages to be drawn, showing who farmed the land. So far individual titles have not been required by the Mexican government, although some newer colonies have been forced to purchase their land under numerous titles, which still often do not correspond with actual land ownership, in order that the community can control who owns land in the colony.

Mexico has had land titles and Certificados de Inafectibilidad. While land titles were useful for borrowing money, they were not always secure from the demands of the agraristas. A Certificado de Inafectibilidad, guaranteeing security of land holding, was only issued if the landowner did not own more land than the maximum allowed.

Land ownership has been more secure since Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which regulated land claims and ejidos, was repealed in the 1990s during the Presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. This removed much of the threat from the agraristas, present in Mexico since the 1920s. Since the repeal, titles can be obtained for ejido land, which then can be rented or sold, opening new possibilities of land expansion to the Mennonites. The term ejido refers to the land used by some Mexican communities. It often was previously the property of large landowners. This land redistribution came about through land reforms introduced following the Mexican Revolution.

There has been no set pattern for transferring land and other assets to succeeding generations. As farms are rarely large enough to support all the children, often one son or daughter ends up with the farm when the parents retire or die. At other times, the farm is sold to someone outside the family. Generally daughters and sons receive equal shares of their parents’ estate, and the Waisenamt often is involved in settling the estate.

When the Mennonites came to Mexico, they brought with them the wood frame European Wohnstatthaus style, which put the house and barn under one roof. Most houses no longer are connected to the barn. A shift also occurred, first to adobe houses, with lower
slope caliche covered roofs, and then to concrete buildings with metal roofing. Most houses look bleak, as they are not painted outside, and although the interiors are austere, they are functional and comfortable enough. The architecture, although it has adapted to the Mexican environment, is clearly distinct from that of the Mexicans.

Most households are responsible for their own water and sewage systems. In the unmodern colonies, windmills, which can pump water from wells up to 250 feet deep, are used. Wealthier families may have running water gravity fed from elevated cisterns and water heaters. Many others carry water into the house by hand as needed.

As with the distinctive land ownership, village design, and architecture, church practices have been part of the barrier to the outside world. Many aspects of the Old Colony practices and rituals are unique and are strictly followed.

The churches, usually one for every three or four villages, are plain inside and out, and generally unpainted. Men and women use separate entrances and sit on separate sides of the church on backless benches. Children do not attend. At the front is a raised platform with a pulpit in the middle, with the ministers sitting on one side and the Vorsänger on the other. Most men wear dark coloured shirts and suits, but no ties, and the women wear head coverings and long dark pleated dresses.

Ministers rotate between the churches within the colony, as does the bishop. Their tall black boots and long black jackets command respect. Communion is given twice a year. Baptism, which marks admission to the church community, normally takes place in the spring shortly before the marriage season, as the church will not marry anyone who is not baptized. Membership also is closed to anyone from outside the community.

Two or three songs are sung during the service, led by the Vorsänger. No musical instruments are used and the singing is in the Langeweise, a chantlike ornamented style.

The Mennonites transformed the northern Mexican wilderness from desert and grazing land to productive fields, also impacting Mexican farming production and methods. However, particularly Sawatzky has criticized the Mennonites for not using conservation but exploitation techniques on the weak Mexican soils. Better adjustment to the land and conditions in newer colonies, using new techniques, has been noted.

Most income in most colonies comes from selling milk to the cheese factories, and most crops are used for feeding the milk cows. The cheese industry has allowed the Old
Colonists to produce a product that can be sold outside the colonies, providing essential income, while minimizing interaction with the world. While milk production is low, with daily production of ten to fifteen litres per cow being common, this seems to be acceptable for many as they can get by financially. Some have only one cow, and, selling most of the milk from it, live from that income. Others commonly milk five to twenty cows.

Some cheese factories are cooperatives, as in the Durango colony, where the cooperative, founded in 1946, has three factories with about 600 members. In 1996, Durango colony had twenty-four cheese factories, mostly small, unmodern, family-owned operations. In contrast, some were large and modern, as in Swift Current colony, where the largest cheese factory in the colonies, Queseria Dos Lagunas, handled 60,000 litres of milk per day and made twelve to thirteen tons of five types of cheese. Many factories do not pasteurize the milk and do not use chemicals to make the cheese. The market for cheese fluctuates greatly, although recently the demand for cheese has been strong, and the factories could sell all they made, at good prices.

Many crops, other than fodder for the cows, have been grown. Apple trees increasingly are being planted, particularly in the Cuauhtémoc area colonies. Irrigation is essential, and some orchards have efficient systems delivering water individually to each tree. Orchards are labour intensive, providing a lot of employment on relatively little land compared to traditional crops.

At first, Canadian varieties of wheat, oats, and corn were tried but did not do well. They were replaced by more suitable varieties. Growing wheat was particularly difficult, but it did make a comeback in the late 1950s. The Mennonites have produced most of Mexico’s oats for many years. Before 1965, no chemical fertilizer was used, but ten years later, about 50 percent used commercial fertilizer. In the Cuauhtémoc area, the three main crops in the 1990s are corn, beans, and oats. The primary crops in Durango colony are oats, kaffir, and sorghum, although some apples are also grown. Farming practices there are generally less advanced and less mechanized than at Cuauhtémoc.

Although there have been good periods, there have been numerous droughts in the northern colonies, with possibly the two most serious occurring in the early 1950s and in the 1990s. The droughts and generally dry conditions have led to increased irrigation. By 1996, in the Cuauhtémoc area, about 10 percent of the land was irrigated, with the Manitoba colony
irrigating the most at about 15 percent. Durango colony also has some irrigation, although the percentage of land irrigated is lower than in the Cuauhtémoc area colonies. In 1996, total irrigated land there was only about 1,000 hectares, and the irrigation technology in use was generally backwards. Although the rainfall was more reliable there, many years there was not enough rainfall to grow a crop. Other colonies use varying amounts of irrigation, although it is almost indispensable for crop production in the Nuevo Casas Grandes area.

Contact with the Mexican environment has been necessary to market crops. Many are sold through the government’s CONASUPO (Compania Nacional de Subsistencia Populares), while others are sold privately to Mexican buyers. Some isolated colonies, such as La Batea, are far from markets, making marketing of surpluses more difficult.

The Mennonite agricultural system has been well suited to maintaining separation from the world. It often has been critically said that the Old Colony considered farming to be the only acceptable vocation. In 1970, the bishop of the Manitoba colony, Abraham Dyck, was quoted as saying: “We are farmers . . . if my children have a big education they will not want to milk cows or work in the fields. And we want our children to remain in the country.” Already in the 1940s, J. Winfield Fretz critically observed: “As long as the Old Colony Mennonites prohibit their members from entering business and industry, it is obvious that Mennonites in that country will never become industrial leaders.”

While farming was favoured, there always were some alternatives, including those of storekeepers and schoolteachers. The cheese factories also soon began to operate, and other occupations met other needs within the colonies. Some occupational diversification, including the cheese factories and some other occupational pursuits, helped support the self-sufficiency of the colonies.

Most notably in the Manitoba colony, the emphasis on farming has diminished. Away from the highway, in the numerous Old Colony villages, farming remains the principal activity as it does in most colonies outside the Cuauhtémoc area. Where large occupational diversity is present, the barriers to the world also are disappearing, which points out the primary reason for the emphasis on farming. Farming is conducive to maintaining the separate communities, lifestyle, and values of the Old Colony group.

Several additional reasons can be cited for the preference for farming. Farming is
honest and moral work, in keeping with the religious principles of the group. Wage earners also have very low status within the Old Colony community and are thought of as servants, which is lower than the status of a landless person.\textsuperscript{70} A spiritual justification for being farmers also exists in 1 Corinthians 7:20: “Usually a person should keep on with the work he was doing when God called him.”\textsuperscript{71} In the case of the Old Colony, this means they are to remain as farmers.\textsuperscript{72} The Old Colony also has said that the status of their Privilegium depends on their remaining farmers.

Traditionally, the leaders prohibited working outside the colony, although in the larger colonies this has become more common. Good wage-earning opportunities are few though, and competition from Mexicans is intense for low-paying jobs. \textit{Maquiladoras}, or foreign factories, have also begun to appear in the Cuauhtémoc area. As many colonies are very isolated, the threat to the community that off-colony employment represents has not been severe everywhere.

While critics have attacked the Old Colony group for its emphasis on farming, they likely either have not understood or agreed with the goal of physical separation from the world. The Old Colony leadership may be correct in its assessment that an agricultural lifestyle is best suited for maintenance of separation. They have not denied that this choice has a price. Their design in this area, as in others, has been planned and often effective.

Language and education have been among the strongest barriers created by the Old Colony group, and have been key aspects of the Old Colony leadership strategy to maintain their vision. Other Mennonite groups also have used language and education as barriers, but, except for the most conservative groups, most no longer do so. Many other Mennonites now view the Old Colony educational system as a symptom of what is wrong with the Old Colony group, rather than as the powerful tool that it is.

Old Colony Mennonite society, in Russia, Canada, and now Mexico, has been trilingual, utilizing Low German, or \textit{Dietsch}, as the everyday language, High German as the language of church and school, and a third language, first Russian, then English, and now Spanish, to relate to the world around them. Everyone in the community has been fluent in Low German while fluency in the other languages has varied.

Low German already was the language of many Mennonites in the early 1500s, when they spoke Nether Saxon Low German,\textsuperscript{73} and used Dutch as the written language. On moving
east to the Danzig area, Dutch remained as the written language, while the spoken language changed to the Eastern Low German spoken in the area, although the Mennonites modified it with additions they brought with them. As time went on, High German increasingly was used as the written language, but the Flemish group, from which the Old Colony largely is descended, did not change their church or written language from Dutch to High German until 1783-1784, later than the Frisian Mennonites in the area.

During the years the Old Colony's forefathers spent in Russia, their Low German was modified, as some words of Russian and Ukrainian origin were added. Later, a heavy sprinkling of both English and Spanish words was added in the Americas. The result is a Low German that has distinct differences from the Western European Low German.

The High German, preserved by the Mexican Mennonites for use in church and school, is an older form of the High German used in Europe today. Although it has not incorporated many changes and additions made during the past centuries in Europe, this is not normally a problem for the Mexican Mennonites, as they rarely need to relate to the European German environment.

Keeping High German unchanged has been important to the Old Colony, and those wanting to change it have been thought of as being proud by the conservatives. While there have been battles over High German, it is likely an exaggeration to portray these as battles between those who wanted to improve the language and those who did not want to.

The most notorious battle flared up over the pronunciation of the “proud a” in the 1940s and again in the 1960s. Most Old Colonists, when they speak High German, incorrectly pronounce the “a” as “au,” as it is pronounced in Low German. In the Manitoba colony, the teachers at Blumenau and Blumenort began teaching the “a” pronunciation in school and were sporadically joined by other teachers. This turned into a conflict that resulted in people being excommunicated when some, who promoted the “a,” resolutely refused to change their minds and speech. Years later, Bishop Banman said that the sin was not in saying “a” but in thinking one was better because one used the “a.” Although the controversy has died down, the “au” continues in dominant use. This was not a controversy about whether to change the language as much as it was a symbolic battle between those who wanted to hold the status quo on various fronts and those who wanted to embrace alternatives. It was a battle between maintaining the barriers, including the old ways, and
allowing in the new, of which the “a” was only one small part.

Learning High German is like learning a foreign language for the Old Colonists, as they usually do not learn High German until they start school. Many do not know much High German when they leave school either, even though most of the instruction is in High German. Many Old Colony people, including some teachers, cannot converse well in High German, although some are anxious to practice. This raises questions about what these people gain from the time spent in school and in church listening to High German. The Mexican Old Colony church language often is unintelligible to the ordinary person, not unlike the situation at the time of the Reformation when the Latin Catholic services were not understood by their forefathers. Even many ministers and bishops, who conduct the German services, are not able to converse well in High German.

Most Old Colony reading materials, including school books, newspapers, the Bible, and the Gesangbuch, are written in High German. Other than school and church, reading is the main source of learning German in the colonies, but many read little or not at all.

High German is accepted as the mother tongue and valued more than Low German, as they think of Low German as an inferior variant of German and give it less respect than High German. It is thought to be lesser than High German, English, or Spanish, incomplete and not finished. Yet, there is an intense love for their expressive and colourful Low German.

During this century, Low German has been increasingly written, mainly outside the Old Colony, often by Canadian Mennonites. The New Testament is available in Low German, and Die Mennonitische Post has some Low German articles. Other Mennonites have heavily promoted the Low German repertoire of literature among the Old Colonists.

Some outsiders have suggested that Low German should take the place of High German and possibly Spanish in the colonies. Carsten Brandt, a German who taught in Mexico, favoured developing Low German into a more versatile, self-sufficient language. High German could remain as the church language but Low German would fill many of the other roles presently occupied by High German and Spanish in the written realm. More recently, MCC workers have promoted Low German literacy, offering classes. This promotion of Low German, although of doubtful effectiveness in causing changes to the language patterns, is likely nonthreatening to the barriers erected by the Old Colony.
Many know more Spanish than High German, although their oral skills usually surpass their written skills. The men speak more Spanish than do the women, who are largely protected from Mexican society. Some women though have learned Spanish, from the radio, from their husbands and children, and at Spanish lessons.\textsuperscript{81} Spanish is not taught in the Old Colony schools, although some other Mennonite groups do teach it in school.

Many Mexican Mennonites know some English from time spent in Canada, and English proficiency carries more prestige than knowledge of Spanish does. In the Cuauhtémoc area, English is not opposed openly or preached against by the ministers, and is seen as helping to obtain better paying work in Canada.\textsuperscript{82} This may not be true in some other areas where there still is more sentiment opposing the movement to Canada and the English that comes with it.\textsuperscript{83}

Although High German is likely in third place, behind Low German and Spanish, as the language of everyday usage, it has not been abandoned by the Old Colony. This is the language they protected when they left Russia and again when they left Canada. Even though a higher percentage of the community was fluent in High German then than now, the language still plays a vital role, along with Low German, in maintaining isolation.

Outside the Old Colony, in the schools and churches of the other Mennonites in Mexico, language use is undergoing more rapid change. Within Old Colony society though, there has been little effort to change the use of High German and Low German, and there is no major movement to remove High German as the language of church and school. It is unlikely that the Old Colony would easily change the formal position of High German in their society, but on the other hand this is not an issue. Major battles have not been fought over the respective roles of High German, Low German, and Spanish.

True, there are changes in the respective roles of the languages. Low German is written increasingly, mainly by outsiders, and is used in religious radio broadcasts and literature directed at the Old Colony. The ministers and bishops themselves are changing some of the traditional uses of language. They sometimes mix Low German commentary with their High German sermons in church,\textsuperscript{84} and may easily fall into Spanish conversations. However, Spanish is not about to enter the church or school spheres. Language is not the last, or even the primary, battleground in Old Colony society. Rather, the traditional uses are undergoing evolution. Kelly Hedges rightly has said that language use is not negotiable,
including the roles played by High and Low German. On the other hand, few have made an issue of renegotiating language in the Old Colony.

For more than 200 years, the primary language of this group has been different from the language of the countries they have lived in. This language barrier still is effective in helping keep a sense of identity and community, although the opposition to learning both English and Spanish has lessened as the Old Colony barriers have been weakened.

Closely related to the subject of language is that of schools and education. It has been said in the colonies: “As the school so the Church.” If the school fails, so will the community and its vision. Education has been one of the areas the Old Colony group has not been willing to negotiate with the outside world, as they showed already in Canada.

The Old Colony people are concerned that too much education will interfere with their salvation. Education can make people question their religion and the system they are living in, resulting in the loss of the individual and endangering the colonies. Education is synonymous with knowing that alternatives to their beliefs and isolated life style exist. “High learning does not make Christians.” Yet, Menno Simons and other early Mennonites were well-educated and stressed the importance of education. By the time they lived in Poland, in what could be a description of Old Colony education today, education was not promoted and reading material was limited to the Bible and approved texts. Competition was discouraged, as it was seen to be a manifestation of pride, and children were not graded and were not to exceed a certain level of competence. “In school, children were overseen, guided, and disciplined rather than instructed or taught.” Teachers also were of little standing in the community.

The later conflict in Russia between the educational progressives, led by Johann Cornies, and the forefathers of today’s Old Colony, also may account for many of the educational conflicts that have taken place in Mexico and in Canada before that. The Old Colony group as well as some who have offered educational alternatives to them in Mexico have been aware of the history of the dispute. It is an old and important battle.

The Lehrdienst has watched the schools to control what was taught and how it was taught. They have been very aware of the crucial importance of the school in maintaining a barrier to the outside world and of the role of their education system in preserving their uniqueness. The school has prepared them for life in their world, and not in the world.
outside. It also has been considered to be important not to teach things that take away from the spiritual dedication and nature of the colonies.

Hedges says that the school’s role has not been to teach skills that will help “. . . attain goals of public service or upward economic mobility or higher social status. Instead, teaching a child to read and write in High German and in a script used by few others in the world reinforces the boundary between the Jemeent and the Welt and the uniqueness of the internal structure of the Jemeent.” 91 The school is to prepare children for life in the church, largely for their baptismal day, when they will recite the catechism in front of the church.

Most villages have a one room school, with one male teacher, who lives at the school with his family. Sometimes, his wife assists him with the teaching. The teachers are untrained, and some students have known more than the teachers. The teacher often has been the person most in need of a job and of a roof, often a landless and poor man.

The schools look much like the other buildings in the village. Although there are separate doors for the girls and the boys, all children sit in the same classroom, with the girls on one side and the boys on the other. Sometimes there are up to seventy, eighty, or one hundred children in a one-room school. Beginning at age seven, children first study the Fibel, a German reading book, and then the Catechism, the New Testament, and the Bible. 92 Boys go to school for seven years and girls for six years. Various explanations have been offered for this difference, but the most common is that the boys need more education for farming and their other activities than girls do for being housewives and mothers. 93 There is no homework and no exams are given when school is completed, as noncompetitiveness is stressed. The school year is often six months long, and is scheduled so that the children are available to help at the busy times of the farm schedule.

The students are taught reading, writing, recitation, and basic arithmetic. They also sing and pray and learn morals, hygiene, and cleanliness, but do not study art, music, history, or gym. 94 Critical or creative thinking does not seem to be encouraged, 95 and the teaching materials are primarily of a religious nature. Reading is taught using a system known as Buchstabieren, which was used in various parts of the world in the nineteenth century. 96 Memory work is also stressed, although the High German words may be memorized without knowing what they mean. The primary script in use is the Gothic script, and the Latin script used in the western world is not commonly taught. 97
Many outsiders have thought that the Old Colony educational resources were too limited. In the 1950s, Walter Schmiedehaus obtained hundreds of books for the schools through the German Embassy in Mexico City. Problems with these being accepted were not noted, possibly because of trust between him and the Old Colony people. More recent attempts by other Mennonite groups to introduce new materials have met firm resistance.

When asked how their schools are, the leaders’ usual answer is: “they are a bit weak.” When asked to elaborate, they say that the system is good but it could work better if parents helped the children more with learning and teachers and students worked harder. Surprisingly, it was reported in March 1997 that the Manitoba colony planned to reform its education system. A 1 percent levy was to be introduced on incomes, part of which was to be used for education reform. A school committee was to visit the schools with a view to improving the teaching. What this means remains to be seen, although it has to be remembered that this is one of the most liberal colonies.

Old Colonists and outsiders agree that education has deteriorated. It is said that Old Colony parents and leaders do not want the children to know more than they do. Unlike other groups, where children know more than their parents, in the colonies it is reversed, with a long term deterioration in language skills and education.

The Old Colony group has produced some well-educated people, in spite of the system, as most colonies have individuals whose literacy and knowledge stand out. These people often are singled out to perform various tasks, including record keeping, filling out applications for government programs, and helping people with immigration documentation. Contrary to what is often heard, there also are many, leaders and others, who are knowledgeable about and interested in Mennonite and Mexican history.

The Old Colony educational system differs from that of the other Mennonite churches in Mexico. While the Kleine Gemeinde teachers may not be university trained, some have some secondary school. Many EMMC and General Conference teachers are trained and qualified teachers. General Conference schools are government accredited and their teachers are trained in teachers colleges. The non-Old Colony teachers also have not had the restrictions on curriculum of the Old Colony system.

The Old Colony educational system has led to a high rate of illiteracy, by outside standards. A recent estimate of the illiteracy was that 90 percent of the adults were
illiterate. An often repeated phrase is: “The Old Colony is illiterate in four languages.”

The Old Colonists rely heavily on oral communication, and many communications and records, that in other societies take place in writing, are handled orally. Hedges has argued that the Old Colony is not illiterate, at least not by their own standard, which includes reciting the catechism before the whole church prior to baptism. Critics from outside the colonies have been accused of applying an outside standard of literacy to the Old Colonists. Hedges admits that most cannot read or write well in German, or any other language, but says: “... reading and writing have particular meanings for the Old Colonists other than the ability to encode and decode spoken language into a written form.” Just because the Old Colonists cannot read or write as the outside world does, does not mean they are illiterate. Rather, they have developed communication methods appropriate to their communities. Hedges does appear to be right to a point. It has too often been assumed that the Old Colonists’ attempt to continue in their separate agrarian communities, far from the twentieth century, is not realistic. While this assumption may be true for the colonies of the Cuauhtémoc area, it is not true of many of the other colonies.

For the most part, the Old Colonists in Mexico can learn well. They are inventive and skilled workers in many trades, often needing only to watch something done once before knowing how to do it themselves. The lack of education and knowledge means though that they may be unaware of solutions to problems encountered.

In summary, whether the Old Colony people are considered to be illiterate or not depends largely on whether it is thought that they can continue to live in their closed communities. The Cuauhtémoc area Mennonites and the Mennonites who emigrate to Canada are being correctly diagnosed as illiterate as they move into the larger society around them. On the other hand, by this definition, the Mennonites of La Batea and numerous other colonies are literate, as their literacy suffices for their environment. It may be wrong to say that these people have to improve their literacy skills, as the Old Colonists for decades have proven those wrong who said they could not survive in their closed communities. Their education system, for the most part, has prepared the children for their adult lives, and changes in the education system could endanger the important religious and cultural goals of these Old Colony communities.

Social activities are severely restricted by tradition and community opinion, and the
desire to control colony boundaries also can be clearly seen here. Prior to marriage, in their primary social activity, especially in evenings and on Sunday afternoons, separate groups of girls and boys walk up and down the village street. Adults also enjoy visiting friends and relatives, particularly on Sunday, the day of rest. Auction sales, held to sell land and goods when people die or move away, are also a social activity.

Most competitive sports and games have been considered as being of the world and of the devil, and even owning a ball has led to criticism from the Lehrdienst. Crokinole and checkers “... are considered cultural and don’t fall into the ‘dangerous’ category.” In some colonies, change has occurred in this area, as, by 1994, Frisbees were allowed in Buenos Aires colony and there were reports of volleyball being played. In the changing Manitoba colony, there were at least seven baseball teams in 1996, and in 1997 Abram Siemens planned the first meeting of the new Deutsche Baseball Verein. In a more conservative colony, a man who wanted to jog only ran at night out of fear of social disapproval. He stopped running after injuring his foot in the dark.

All musical instruments and most music other than hymns are prohibited, although many do listen to worldly music, given the opportunity. Radios, televisions, movies, theatre, and most books and magazines are prohibited, although these rules are also not always kept. The Bible, the Catechism, and the Martyr’s Mirror are among the few books in many homes. Catalogues are allowed though, presumably due to their practical function. Die Mennonitische Post is distributed widely, although it at times has crossed the line of acceptability, and other reading material is also increasingly entering from the “world.” While photographs have been prohibited, some, often taken by outsiders, are present. Although pictures are not allowed on the walls, picture calendars are. This explains the large demand for calendars, which is met in part by a calendar print shop on the Manitoba colony. Christmas trees are not allowed, as their origin is thought to be pagan.

The existence of a multitude of prohibitions means that many things are temptations. As many give in to these, there is much deviant behaviour. The view from inside the communities can be quite different than from outside. An outsider will see an orthodox, conservative community while the insider will be aware of hidden telephones, mouth organs, and pickups, which create tensions and hurt community solidarity. As contact with the world increases, rules are increasingly challenged and broken.

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The Old Colonists are very family oriented, as were their ancestors. The level of respect and obedience teenagers and young adults show for their parents is surprising. The Old Colony does not share the western world's preoccupation with a culture of youth, and old age, and its wisdom, often is respected, particularly in the more isolated communities.

The traditional gender roles have changed little in Mexico. In 1951, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs wrote: "The patriarchal system still prevails rigidly among them and they are still, from the male standpoint, in the enviable position that their womenfolk know nothing about emancipation." Women have not openly demanded the right to vote in church or colony affairs. Public questioning of their roles is not evident. Men, as household heads, appear to expect and to receive obedience and respect from their wives and children.

Most marry quite young, often in their late teens or early twenties, and almost always within the group. This is another important regulation for maintaining the integrity of their society. Weddings usually follow shortly after the baptism of the bride and groom. Marriages seldom end through divorce or separation, due to strong religious prohibitions. Divorce would result in excommunication and ostracism, and most household economies need both husband and wife. Those who divorce are likely to leave for Canada.

The Mennonite population over the centuries has been sufficiently large that the effects of random inbreeding have been small. In the smaller Old Colony gene pool though, marriage of distant relatives is more common, although marriage of close relatives is forbidden. Very few physical or mental disorders are evident as a result of intermarriage. However, evidence shows that, because of the closed genetic pool for 400 years, some diseases have become concentrated in this group due to phenomena known as genetic drift or founder effect. There also are the unsubstantiated speculations of large-scale dyslexia in the Old Colony by Dr. Abraham Schmidt.

People often help each other reciprocally, particularly in the traditional colonies, reducing dependence on the outside world. Due to the lack of refrigeration, many families have shared butchered meat, and people often have shared farm machinery and tools.

A common misconception about the Old Colony Mennonites is that they are communal. There is some institutional mutual aid, dating back to Europe, including the Waisenamt, the Armenkasse, and a fire insurance program. The Waisenamt acts as a trust
company, caring for the funds of widows and orphans, administering estates, and lending money. The Armenkasse sometimes helps those unable to meet their own needs, and is replenished by donations from community members. Medical needs more commonly are met by this fund than are living expenses. When possible, ill people, including the seriously ill and dying, are cared for in the home, in a warm community environment. In these areas, the desire for self-sufficiency and for separation from the world also is seen.

The Cuauhtémoc area colonies have some trained medical personnel, some who are Mennonites from Canada. Professional medical care often is not used, as it is costly and some colonies are isolated. Some colonies have untrained doctors, dentists, and midwives. Untrained doctors and dentists have been attacked by trained Mexican practitioners, but in spite of arrests and harassment some still operate. Home remedies are commonly used and doctors often are not seen until an illness is advanced.

Infant mortality has been and continues to be high compared to most of North America. Old Colonists have opposed immunization of children, but, due to strong government pressure, immunizations usually now are accepted. Many Old Colonists have poor dental hygiene and many dental problems are evident. They also have been criticized for poor hygiene and health practices. Cigarette smoking is common among the Mennonites, and some are not knowledgeable about the health risks of smoking.

Old Colonists often have seen mental health problems and mental disorders as not needing outside treatment, as the “world’s” solutions are rejected here also. Redekop has suggested that the sectarian view is that: “Christ is the answer to all men’s needs.”

Traditionally, physically or mentally handicapped persons were cared for by their families, although Canada’s programs also were used by some. In the 1990s, a home for the handicapped was opened at Strassbourg Platz on the Manitoba colony.

Prior to the 1986 opening of the Altenheim at Strassbourg Platz on the Manitoba colony, there was no institution for seniors. Most people have been cared for by their families, as first the parents helped their children and then the children helped their parents. While this arrangement was good for many, it did not work for all. As the church had argued that a seniors home “... would allow families to shirk their own responsibilities,” the impetus for the new home came from other groups. Most colonies still follow the self-sufficient traditions in this area also.
The Mennonites usually looked after their own funerals. The deceased is dressed in white, as the Bible says “... and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”

Old Colony discipline often has been seen as being harsh. Corporal punishment generally is accepted as being Biblical and necessary, and few question the adage “spare the rod and spoil the child.” It has happened that discipline has ended in the death of the child disciplined. Some fathers, the disciplinarians, extend the use of force to their wives, as some think it is their duty to reform their wives if they do not fit the desired norm.

Accidents have been common among the Mennonites. In one twelve-month period, from December 15, 1992 to December 15, 1993, at least fifteen persons died and sixty-three were injured from traffic accidents on the paved highways in the Cuauhtémoc area colonies. Not all were Mennonites. Wagons and buggies also have been hit frequently by motor vehicles. Other types of accidents, particularly lightning strikes, are common.

Old Colony people stand out from the Mexican environment because of their fair skin and their attire. Men wear blue bib overalls (Schlaubekjisse) and button shirts. Straw cowboy hats, particularly white ones, are commonly worn, although some wear caps. T-shirts, belts, white collars, ties, beards, and rings are forbidden, although some of these prohibitions are breaking down. In the Cuauhtémoc area, many younger men have replaced the overalls with jeans, and wear pointed cowboy boots. They, in their fast short-box pickups, do not fit the Old Colony stereotype and are no longer separated from the world around them by their dress and many other customs.

Old Colony women’s clothing is to be modest, covering up both physical shortcomings and attractiveness. Their dark dresses once covered the ankles but now just cover their knees. The women do not cut their hair, wearing it braided and tightly tied to their heads. Their hair, parted in the middle, is carefully combed down onto the forehead on both sides. It should not be combed down too far though, as that shows pride. Married women wear black kerchiefs, while unmarried women wear white or coloured kerchiefs. They often wear straw hats over these.

While the Old Colonists’ dress and style code appears odd, it is no more so than that of other societies, which use many peculiar or nonfunctional items of attire or decoration. One substantial difference is the Old Colonists’ emphasis on plainness and modesty.

Some aspects of Old Colony society play an intentional role in maintaining
boundaries with the world. Others appear to be odd cultural survivals. Yet, these also perform a role, even if not always by design, as their distinct culture and the prohibitions against changing it have created a wall between them and the outside world, much as Hutterite and Amish cultural peculiarities also create effective barriers to the larger society. These cultural barriers are not easily broken down, as they have become part of the moral code. The effectiveness and importance of these items should not be underestimated.

The Old Colony group has been motivated largely by their desire to preserve their religion and culture, and not primarily by money or material goods, as many of their choices have carried a high economic price. As long as they can get by, as long as “es geht noch,” these material sacrifices are a price they have been willing to pay.

The problems the Old Colonists have made for themselves with their stands are also clear. The hard line taken on technological innovations, excommunication, education, and population control have contributed to making what might have been a comfortable material existence into a decades long financial and community crisis. The Mennonites likely know this better than anyone else though, as the decisions made were conscious and deliberate. Had a firm stand not been taken against innovations, the barriers to the world would have broken down much more than they have. Had excommunication not been used to enforce these rules, the communities may not have been as split, but again, barriers to the world would have broken down. Many Old Colony people believe they had no choice but to follow the path they did, unless they were willing to betray their professed beliefs.

In addition to establishing an effective theocracy and a system of internal control, the Old Colonists successfully designed and established the physical, religious, and social aspects of their new society. Numerous defence mechanisms were put in place to protect what they built. Mexico allowed them to follow their vision and live according to their beliefs to a far greater extent than would have been possible in Canada. The leadership and the people deserve credit for seeing their vision through successfully, in spite of much adversity. Unfortunately for the Old Colonists, what they built could as easily be torn down. The leadership and the system they designed and implemented cannot be blamed for subsequent problems in the colonies, without also taking into account the effect of other factors, including population explosion, economic problems, and outside influences.
Map Number 3- MENNONITE COLONIES OF MEXICO

CODE TO COLONIES- with approximate founding dates.
(A partial listing of past and present Old Colony and other Mennonite settlements)

1- Manitoba- 1922
2- Swift Current- 1922
3- Nord (Ojo de la Yegua)- 1946
4- Santa Rita- 1962
5- Santa Clara- 1922
6- Quellenkolonie (Los Jagueyes)- 1947
7- Las Virginias- 1980
8- Buenos Aires- 1958
9- El Cuervo- 1979
10- Buena Vista- 1985
11- El Capulin- 1962
12- Sahinal- 1990
13- Villa Ahumada- 1992
14- Monclova- 1974
15- Nueva Padilla- 1983
16- Villa de Casas- 1981
17- Gonzalez- 1951
18- Durango- 1924
19- Yermo- 1950
20- La Honda- 1964
21- La Batca- 1961
22- Yalnon- 1983
23- Chavi- 1986
24- Nuevo Progresso- 1987
25- El Temporal- 1995
Chapter 3- Population pressures and daughter colonies.

The establishment of successful Old Colony settlements in Mexico was largely possible because of adequate leadership and an economic system that was capable of meeting most of their needs. The colonies never would have been successfully established nor would they have survived for seventy-five years if the enterprise had not been in large part skilfully designed and implemented.

One of the Old Colonists' largest problems has been population control. It is not fair to blame only the leadership for this problem, as the many and varied leaders were elected by the people, and came from among the people. Therefore, to blame the leaders is to blame the people. From the Old Colonists' point of view, they are not to blame for the population problem, as they sincerely tried to follow God's will in this, as in other areas.

Their population growth, among the highest in the western world, has caused problems for the Old Colonists for decades. It is difficult to obtain accurate population numbers for the Mexican Mennonites, as Mexican census figures do not provide separate numbers for the Mennonites, and the Mennonites do not have a central registry, but village records in which the baptized members are entered. Once a year, at New Years, some colonies do announce year-end membership, population, birth, and death statistics.

By 1996, the descendants of the original 6,000 to 7,000 Mennonites, who went to Mexico in the 1920s, likely totalled between 120,000 and 150,000. An estimated 50,000 or more were in Mexico, 35,000 or more in Canada, 28,000 in Bolivia, 10,000 in the United States, and thousands more in Belize, Paraguay, and Argentina. A doubling of the population is said to take place approximately every fifteen years, although in some colonies this doubling likely occurs even more quickly.

To understand this remarkable growth, it is necessary to look at Old Colonist attitudes to fertility and birth control. In the 1990s, as in the 1920s, very little birth control was used, and average family size was likely between six and nine children per family. Many believe that having numerous children makes them fortunate and wealthy, although not in a material
sense, and those with only a few children are pitied. The position of the church long has been that birth control is not allowed. It was forbidden by a bishop in the past even when another pregnancy would endanger the woman's life. Religious leaders and others sincerely believe they should have as many children as God gives them. Not all follow this belief though, as it is rumoured that some do use various forms of birth control. The Mexican government has encouraged Mexicans to have smaller families and Mexican doctors have strongly encouraged Mennonite women to have fewer children.

As a result of the birth rate, population density has risen greatly in some colonies. Already in 1957, the population of the colonies was expanding at a rate of 200 families per year, which meant that ten new villages of twenty families needed to be started each year to accommodate the increase. The excess of births over deaths also can be seen in statistics. Figures for some colonies for the year 1986 show 1,507 births and 183 deaths, while figures for 1988 show a similar situation, with 1626 births and 221 deaths.

Manitoba and Swift Current colonies originally bought enough land to allow for expansion and so did not need more land for some time. Durango and the Sommerfelder, however, had not bought much surplus land and soon needed more. Even in the Manitoba colony, by 1938 there were signs of a land shortage in the well-watered areas, which led to the less desirable areas then being settled. In 1947, J. Winfield Fretz commented: "The problem of a developing landless class is a perennial one. In each village one can find from two to a dozen heads of families who do not own land but who work for others. When a sufficient number of this landless class develops, a pressure is exerted to seek for new land." The Cuauhtémoc area colonies also rented land from Mexicans, in spite of laws not allowing rental of ejido land for extended periods of time, by setting up arrangements so that the Mennonites were hired to farm the land for the Mexicans.

The Durango colony soon was forced to expand their land area, and by 1930 they bought land for five new villages. Further additions were made to the Durango colony in the 1930s and 1940s, but, since land had to be close by, little further expansion took place. The Durango colony rented land as early as 1935, and by the 1960s rented about one-third of the total land farmed, although by 1980 this amount was reduced sharply due to the ejido laws. By 1980, Durango had the least land per person of the Mexican colonies, a situation that was aggravated by the scarcity of alternate employment. Of the 1,100 families, 350 had no land.
and another seventy-five had less than ten acres. The situation worsened further by 1996, when it was estimated that only about one-half had any land, and only about one-third had enough land to make a living.

Population growth, combined with the Old Colonists' preference for agriculture as an occupation, has led to chronic pressure on their land resources, and searching for new land, near the colonies and in far flung areas of Mexico and Latin America, long has been part of Old Colony life. The movement to Canada also is driven largely by land shortages.

One point often glossed over or ignored in Old Colony history is that the search for land in new areas also has been driven by a desire to remain true to the Old Colony vision of a separate people. Many who have moved to the daughter colonies have done so because of opposition to changes and innovations in their former colonies.

In spite of numerous successful efforts to expand the land base, most communities have had perennial land shortages, as each generation has struggled to find land for its many offspring. Commonly, one or more adult children have lived in the house or on the yard of their parents, even once they have had large families of their own. They often have had a few cows and employment outside the family farm, but have been too poor to go out on their own. Most children have not continued to live on the parents' farm though. If land was available in the village of either the husband or the wife, many stayed there, although many left their home villages. Many also lived as Anwohner on land that once was common pasture, while some owned several acres and others rented a little land and a house.

Moves to new colonies often have been difficult, as they usually meant leaving family and friends behind and pioneering unbroken land. To finance the new venture, they often sold whatever land and other goods they had, using this money for a down payment in the new colony. Parents also often helped pay for the move. Mother colonies often have helped by buying the new land and then selling it to the settlers. Customarily, units of twenty to fifty acres have been sold on credit to the landless, without any down payment. The high birth rate has caused some new settlements to be overfull before they are financially secure and able to finance new settlements, thereby making the founding of new settlements difficult.

In 1986, about two-thirds of the Old Colonists in Mexico lived in the Cuauhtémoc area. Considerable expansion of the land base had taken place there, although potential expansion was limited by the surrounding mountains and by pressure from Mexicans.
competing for the land. Nord and Santa Rita colonies, northeast of the Manitoba colony, are the result of a series of land purchases made by the Manitoba Colony beginning in 1935. Santa Rita colony was separated from the Nord colony in 1962.24

By 1996, there were at least ten newer colonies in northern Chihuahua state, far removed from the original colonies. The Manitoba Old Colony group had established Buenos Aires in 1958 and El Capulin in 1962. These two colonies were conservative, not using rubber tires, vehicles, or electric power, and many who moved there were motivated at least partly by a desire to flee the coming modernizations in their mother colonies.25

Both Buenos Aires and El Capulin were able to alleviate land shortages somewhat by purchasing nearby land, Buenos Aires by buying El Cuervo and El Capulin by buying adjoining land. This reduced the need to emigrate to Canada or other colonies, although empty space in these colonies in 1996 was due mainly to out-migration taking place.

Las Virginias, established in 1980 by the Manitoba colony,26 was free of risk from *agraristas*, as a *Certificado de Inafectabilidad* was obtained.27 From the beginning, rubber tires, but not vehicles, were allowed there.28 It was largely dependent on irrigation, with about 3,500 hectares irrigated in 1992.29

In 1992, the Manitoba and Nord colonies bought previously uncropped land at Villa Ahumada, also in Northern Chihuahua, calling it Nord-Manitoba colony.30 Settlement of this colony was slow though, largely because of water shortages.

Another Old Colony settlement in the northern area is Sabinal, bought in 1990 by La Honda.31 If possible, it is even more isolated than most other colonies in the area.32 Most of its settlers fled change at La Honda, and moved to Sabinal with their leaders.33

Not all of the new settlements are Old Colony. Other Mennonite groups also established new colonies. In 1985, Reinländer from Swift Current colony established Buenavista, near Asención, Chihuahua.34 In 1992, the Sommerfelder began a colony at Pestañas, about thirty kilometres from Galeana, Chihuahua.35 Recently, Kleine Gemeinde people founded a colony south of Nuevo Casas Grandes called Colonia El Valle,36 and by 1996, they also had a colony called Oasis in northern Chihuahua state.37 There also is a group of settlers at Saladas, made up of people from various churches.38 Other settlements also have been established by individuals on their own.

Durango colony formed its daughter colonies farther south in more climatically
hospitable areas. La Batea, in Zacatecas state, was founded in 1961.\textsuperscript{39} As the former landowner likely sold more land than was his to sell, many problems with agraristas resulted. In 1996, La Batea had about 140 families and 800 to 900 people living in four villages. There was a severe land shortage.\textsuperscript{40}

In 1964, Durango founded La Honda colony, also in Zacatecas, making about 20 percent of the land in the colony available to the landless, without any down payment.\textsuperscript{41} By 1978, the colony was already full.\textsuperscript{42} La Honda modernized after a major community split in the late 1980s and early 1990s.\textsuperscript{43} The Zacatecas colonies have suffered drought and other hardships, and particularly La Batea has struggled economically.

Movement also has taken place to the southern state of Campeche. In 1983, Durango founded a daughter colony at Yalnon.\textsuperscript{44} La Batea founded Chavi colony in 1986, and in 1987, La Honda founded Nuevo Progreso.\textsuperscript{45} Buenos Aires and El Cuervo bought almost 5,000 hectares of land in Campeche recently, calling it El Temporal. They borrowed $150,000 for a thirteen-year term from the Beechy Amish in the United States to make the purchase.\textsuperscript{46} All of these Campeche colonies were founded by Old Colonists.

Some colonies were founded in Tamaulipas state, where the Gonzalez colony was begun in 1951 by Sommerfelder.\textsuperscript{47} In the early 1980s, the Gonzalez group founded the Villa de Casas colony. The Nord colony Old Colonists began a colony at Nueva Padilla in 1982.\textsuperscript{48} The Old Colony was reluctant to start more colonies in Tamaulipas due to the small size of potential settlements there and consequent closeness to the world. However, the colonies there have done well financially, possibly the best of all new colonies in Mexico.\textsuperscript{49}

A colony, consisting of various Mennonite groups, was begun at Monclova in Coahuila state in 1974. The colony had unity and financial problems,\textsuperscript{50} and received help from MCC.\textsuperscript{51}

Between 1944 and 1990, of seventeen colonization attempts by the Old Colony people, thirteen were “... at least a qualified success.”\textsuperscript{52} There also were some failures. The first daughter colony of the Cuauhtémoc Old Colony, Agua Nueva, near Saltillo in Coahuila state, failed shortly after being established in 1944, due to the salty nature of the land there. Yermo, in Durango state, was founded by Manitoba colony in 1950, in a dry region where irrigation was needed.\textsuperscript{53} After years of great difficulties due to harsh, dry, environmental conditions and inability to find a way to make a living there, the last settler left in 1974.\textsuperscript{54}
Many did not return to the Old Colony, but instead went to the Kleine Gemeinde’s Quellenkolonie, as the Old Colony had abandoned the settlers. In 1950, Durango colony started a colony near Yermo called Conejos. Only eleven families participated and, by 1952, they gave up due to water shortages, with some joining the settlers at Yermo. In 1952, Durango colony tried a settlement, called Cerro Gordo, between Canatlán and Durango. The land was poor, drought occurred, and it also failed.

These failures left the leadership open to criticism, as some of the problems were due to not examining the land and farming conditions before buying the land, and some ventures were underfinanced. Things also may have gone better in some cases had they turned to the Mexicans for help about new crop varieties and irrigation techniques.

Mexican land reform and claims by the agraristas, to a great degree, cut off avenues of expansion for the Mennonites. While this is true, the Mennonites did not take advantage of Mexican land reform laws that would have allowed them to obtain land, as millions of ejidatarios did. In 1979, the Secretariat for Agrarian Reform offered the Durango colony 38,500 hectares in 100 hectare units in Chiapas state, at no charge. The colony rejected the offer since only usufruct rights were offered, which was all the government could legally offer. Fears the Mennonites had about the security of the land likely were unfounded, as the government dealt well with them in other matters.

Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was a result of the Mexican Revolution, allowing the agraristas to obtain land in ejidos. This article was revoked in the early 1990s while Carlos Salinas de Gortari was president, ending the threat to the Mennonites’ land.

In spite of some missed opportunities, the Old Colony leaders have been extremely active in expanding the land base. Sometimes they also have aided the landless to obtain land through levies, at least sometimes voluntary, on crops or on the milk delivered to the cheese factories, using the money raised for land purchases. The Chihuahua Old Colony began this in 1956, and numerous other colonies have followed this procedure.

While the Old Colony leaders were not real estate agents, but farmers, many have developed substantial knowledge and expertise about real estate in Mexico as a result of almost continuous land searches for many decades. Still, errors continue to be made in purchasing land, as the land often is not investigated well enough prior to its purchase.

Movement to other countries south of Mexico also has taken place. This migration
has been driven primarily by the same two motives as the expansion within Mexico: land shortages and a desire to follow the vision of being God’s separate people. Fleeing the advancing world, often in the form of other Mennonite groups, has been a strong motivation. The leaders often have offered the increasing worldliness of the mother colony as the reason for the move, but some people have gone along primarily to gain much needed land. Even though many were not opposed to the rubber tires and cars, they were willing to make a commitment to maintain the old order in the new home. On the other hand, some have left their community without the support of a mass migration, joining those from other colonies to set up a new conservative colony. The philosophical commitment to separation from the world has been very strong among some. The opposite phenomena, that of wanting to flee conservatism by moving to new liberal colonies, has not been seen often in Mexico.

The first movement out of Mexico took place to British Honduras (later Belize) in 1958, where the Blue Creek and Shipyard colonies were founded. Most emigrants came from the Cuauhtémoc colonies. This migration was driven initially largely by land shortages, although some wanted to escape the growing conflict over rubber tires. There was also a preference for living under an English rather than the Mexican government. The Kleine Gemeinde also bought land in British Honduras. As early difficulties were great, many lost everything. Some returned to Mexico and others went to Canada. By September 1958, twenty-nine people died, as tropical diseases took their toll. In spite of the early difficulties, the settlements survived, and by 1966 more than 2,700 Old Colony people were there. Although movement to Belize in the later 1960s likely was driven as much or more by modernization in the home colonies as by land shortages, it eased land pressures in Mexico. Belize is still home to thousands of Mennonites, many of whom are conservative Old Colonists.

In 1967 and 1968, most of the Old Colony bishops and ministers and many followers from Swift Current, Nord, and Santa Rita colonies began to go to Bolivia, at least partly due to the rubber tire issue. Later movements from these colonies also took place to Bolivia over the vehicle issue. Although the later arrivals rejected the rubber tires they earlier had accepted in Mexico, the first groups to have gone did not accept those who came later, due to their disobedience in not leaving in the first wave of migration. A desire to continue living in isolated communities played a large part in the movement.
By 1972 about 5,000 settlers from Mexico and Canada moved to Bolivia, and by the 1990s Bolivia had the largest number of Old Colonists south of Mexico. Recently, Buenos Aires and El Cuervo founded Casas Grandes colony, to which movement was underway in 1996. Escaping power lines and innovations was part of the motivation for the movement. El Capulin also has seen recent movement to Bolivia, where they bought land. In 1996, families began leaving La Batea as part of a joint settlement effort with a group already in Bolivia. In 1996, of twenty-five Mennonite colonies counted there, six or seven were the original colonies formed by Mennonites from Mexico, others were formed by those who had gone first to Belize or elsewhere, and some were daughter colonies of colonies in Bolivia.

Beginning in 1969, Old Colonists settled in Paraguay. Due to land shortages and the growing dispute over vehicles, the Manitoba colony saw many move to Rio Verde in eastern Paraguay. Some from Swift Current colony joined them. Durango has founded Nuevo Durango colony, which has about 150 persons from Durango and La Honda.

By 1986 conservative Mennonites were attracted to Argentina from Bolivia and Mexico. The movement still continued in 1996. Durango had bought 8,670 hectares of land near Pampa de los Guanacos in the Chaco area of Argentina in 1994 for a price of $476,000. A guarantee of religious and educational freedom had been received but not of freedom from military service, although it was suggested that this may have been promised verbally, if the Mennonites lived as they said they would. By 1996, about eighteen young families from Durango had moved there, while there was room for about 200 families.

Other countries also have been considered for settlement. In 1976 and 1977, Durango colony looked at Brazil as a destination. Costa Rica, which offered the Mennonites land and privileges, also was considered. In 1978, eight colony leaders from Manitoba and Nord colonies went to Australia to investigate opportunities there and to discuss the possibilities of a Privilegium with government representatives.

Many Mennonites from Mexico have moved to the United States, partly because it often has been easier to enter than Canada. The main destination has been the Seminole, Texas area, where they were in demand as farm labourers in the 1970s. In October 1980, 653 persons there had received immigration papers, but in 1983, it was reported that at least three-quarters of those living there were illegals. The United States has been quite lenient and some amnesties have been declared. In 1995, there were thought to be about 4,000
Mexican Mennonites in the Seminole area. Some are affiliated with the Old Colony church from Canada. The EMMC, with its roots in Canada, also is in the area.

Some Mexican Mennonites moved to Storm Lake, Iowa, and others have moved to Walhalla, North Dakota, and to California, Kansas, Oklahoma, and many other parts of the United States. Total numbers in the United States may be 10,000, although it is not possible to know with any certainty how many there are and where they are.

There likely is truth in George Reimer's comment that "Permanent migrations to Canada... tend to indicate the preeminence of economic considerations over religious, while migrations to South America suggest the reverse." Extreme poverty is also a factor that cannot be overlooked, as many cannot afford to move south.

The Mennonites in Mexico, both leaders and individuals, have taken the population problem very seriously, while rejecting any restriction of the population growth. Families with means often have tried various things to provide for their children's futures, including buying land for them and helping them become established in a business. Many have agonized over the future of their families and colonies, with the future of their children being one of the greatest preoccupations of many parents.

Considering the obstacles they have faced, the success the Old Colony has had in finding new places to settle has been remarkable, and the predictions long offered by outsiders about the world no longer being able to accommodate the separate societies of the Old Colony have not come true. In the 1990s, the Old Colony still is buying land in parts of Mexico, Bolivia, and Argentina and establishing relatively unmolested, isolated societies. They also have been quite successful in having their demands for special status met by the various governments of the countries to which they have moved.

Uncontrolled population growth has been one of the greatest problems of the Old Colony people in Mexico. The obvious solutions of having fewer children, of allowing greater occupational diversification, and of moving into mixed non-Old Colony communities have been rejected by the leadership due to their dedication to their beliefs and values, and consequently they have carried the burden of trying to deal with this problem by land expansion alone. However, land expansion has not kept pace with the demand. As a result, undesirable solutions, from the Old Colony point of view, have been chosen by many individuals, including occupational change and movement north.
Chapter 4- The Mexican environment.

The Old Colony leaders of the 1920s chose well when they chose Mexico. While not a wise choice if only economic matters are considered, Mexico was a suitable environment for the more important religious and cultural elements to survive. The Old Colonists quite successfully maintained their communities, as long as the colonies could remain isolated and closed, but loss of control occurred when outside factors entered the scene.

The potential source of disruption that might have been expected to be most disruptive is the Mexican society which has surrounded the Mennonites for seventy-five years. Old Colonists, as early as the 1920s, feared that the Mexicans would overwhelm them, taking them into their society or forcing them to move on once again. This threat was seen particularly in the problems of the 1920s and 1930s. Outside observers also have predicted that dire consequences would come from the Mexican environment. In the 1940s, scarcely twenty years after moving to Mexico, Fretz was concerned about negative effects of the Mexican environment,1 and others have feared that the Mennonites would be overwhelmed by the Latin American environment.2 Yet, this threat has not materialized.

While not everything has been perfect between the Mennonites and the Mexicans, Mexico has been remarkably good about respecting the promises of the Obregón Privilegium.3 The Privilegium’s five points are still as free from infringement as they have been at any point.4 Time has shown that the Old Colony leaders chose wisely when they chose the Privilegium’s terms, as this agreement has helped protect their unique society. Other Mennonite groups who came to Mexico also have benefited from the Privilegium. Even without similar guarantees, they have been informally protected by its provisions.

Substantial Mennonite cultural survival after seventy-five years in Mexico might be cause for wonder. While the Mexican environment has had an effect, the bulk of the original Old Colony culture has survived. Remembering that about one-half of the Old Colony people remained in Canada in the 1920s while one-half went to Mexico, it can be seen that the survival of Old Colony Mennonite culture has been much greater in the Mexican
environment than it has been in the Canadian environment. The culture that exists in many of the Mexican colonies in the 1990s closely resembles that of the Old Colony group of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, while that of the Canadian Old Colony group largely has become that of the “English,” which the Mexican Old Colony people fled. The relative survival rates of the all-important belief system are more difficult to determine.

While the Mexicans sometimes have resented these strangers in their midst and the special treatment given to them by the Mexican government, the Mennonites have become part of the landscape in the areas of Mexico where they settled. Mexicans sometimes are curious about the Mennonites, although a more common reaction may be indifference, as they long since have ceased to be a novelty for their closer neighbours.

Cultural, language, and religious differences between the two groups, rather than threatening the Mennonites, have helped the colonies survive. One group is reserved, sober, and dour, while the other is outgoing, emotional, and hearty. One is frugal and the other lavish. The Old Colony and Roman Catholic religious differences have not been lessened by ecumenical influences. Few close relationships exist between Mexicans and Mennonites.

While the Mexicans have been willing to intermarry with the Mennonites, the Old Colonists have rejected intermarriage, causing some resentment among the Mexicans. Mennonite condescension and feelings of superiority towards the Mexicans, although not unnoticed by the Mexicans, also have served as a barrier between the groups. Some who joined the General Conference church have been willing to accept Mexicans into their group, and some intermarriage has occurred.

Mennonites in Mexico appear to have regarded their culture as being superior to that of the larger Mexican society around them. This attitude was not present to the same degree towards Canadian society. It may have been easier for the Mennonites to maintain boundaries with the Mexican world because in their view that world was culturally inferior, reducing pressure to join Mexican society. The source of these feelings of superiority may be based on ethnocentric preferences. Mexican society is a blend of Spanish and Native American cultures, while that of Canada was more like the Northern European culture from which the Mennonites themselves came and to which they were accustomed. Mennonites in Mexico have not always had a positive understanding and appreciation of the culture and history of Mexico.
Mennonites have hired Mexicans to work for them, although in the Durango area, due to work shortages, fewer Mexicans work for Mennonites than twenty years ago and more Mennonites work for Mexicans. They apple packers in the Manitoba colony employ both Mennonite and Mexican labour. Mennonite businessmen also hire Mexicans for their literacy and bookkeeping abilities, something lacking among the Mennonites.

Mennonites also have worked outside the colonies at manual labour, including in Mexican orchards and other businesses, particularly in the Cuauhtémoc area. At one time this would have been grounds for excommunication, but in many colonies no longer is.

Mennonite and Mexican contact over land matters has been one of the areas where these two groups have had the most contact with each other. In the wake of the Mexican Revolution, the expectation of millions of landless peasants was that they would be able to obtain land. The post-revolutionary reforms allowed the peasants to settle on ejidos, or rural communities, often on the land of former large haciendas, where they were allowed to use, although not to own, millions of acres of land. The agraristas, or peasants, often squatted on land and claimed it as theirs, relying on the Mexican government to support their claim. Sometimes the agraristas claimed and won land that the Mennonites had purchased. This was one of the large problems in the Cuauhtémoc area in the 1920s, and in Durango in 1935, where agraristas occupied some of the 2,600 hectares recently bought by the Durango colony. In the Durango case, President Lazaro Cárdenas supported the Mennonites and they were able to keep the land. In 1962, agraristas again wanted the Durango colony land to be broken up but this was turned down by the state governor who found that many Mexicans already were renting land to the Mennonites. It appeared that many wanted the extra land so they could rent it to the Mennonites to gain more income. More recent land disputes occurred at La Batea, Santa Rita, La Honda, and in other colonies, and the Mennonites sometimes lost land to the agraristas.

In recent years, Mennonites have been allowed to buy and rent ejido land, since the Mexican government has given titles to ejidatarios for their land. In time, this may mean more mixing with the Mexicans as Mennonite and Mexican land becomes less segregated.

Mennonites have shopped in the nearby Mexican communities, such as Cuauhtémoc and Nuevo Ideal, which have been largely dependent on Mennonite customers for their existence. Mennonite products are for sale there and some businesses display German signs.
and names. Some Mexicans know a little Low German and like to show it off.

The four-lane highway through the Manitoba colony has been a major influence. The highway traverses the colony, as it follows a straight line between Cuauhtémoc and Ciudad Col. Obregón, the two largest cities in the immediate area of the colony. The highway also continues northward, as a two-lane highway, towards the American border. The section of the highway in the colony carries a large volume of Mennonite and non-Mennonite traffic. Businesses along the highway are a point of much Mennonite-Mexican interaction as there are Mexican employees and customers.

Mennonites in Mexico are known, as elsewhere, for being hard-working people. This emphasis on the work ethic has been noticed by the Mexicans. The standard description heard about the Mennonites from the Mexicans is “muy trabajador” or “hard working.”

The Mennonites once had a reputation for being trustworthy and that their word was their bond. A sense of Mennonite superiority over the Mexicans in the area of morality has been common among the Mennonites. Already in the 1940s, a deterioration in Mennonite morals was reported, although their morals were said to still be considerably better than Mexican morals. The perception by some that Mennonite morals in Mexico have declined has been accompanied by blaming this on Mexican influences. Rightly or wronglY, Mennonite moral shortcomings often have been blamed on the Mexican system which some say demands crookedness.

Mennonites have not been immune from crime in Mexico. While some crime has come from within the Mennonite communities, crime originating in the Mexican environment has usually been a much larger concern. At least fifteen Mennonites have been murdered in the Cuauhtémoc area over the years. Although Mexicans have taken advantage of the Mennonite reputation for pacifism to steal from the Mennonites, numerous robbers also have been killed in the Mennonite colonies by armed Mexican guards. Sometimes the Mennonites also have resorted to armed defence, which, although not condoned, likely has lessened intrusions by the Mexicans. This and the presence of Mexican troops in the past have raised questions about the consistency of the Mennonite teachings and actions on nonresistance. A response more consistent with Mennonite teachings was seen when, in the 1920s, two bandits plundered a house and raped the wife and daughters in front of the father and sons. When they were asked why they didn’t fight they replied: “Vengeance is mine, I
will repay, says the Lord."^{20}

The Mexican law and order system has been used sporadically by the Mennonites. They have asked for protection from Mexican crime, as was the case in Durango in the 1930s and 1940s, but often have tried to deal with internal problems themselves. In dealing with internal problems of law and order in the colonies, often the police were called only as a last resort. In recent times, there were several cases where people, who were said to have caused the death of another in the Cuauhtémoc area colonies, were not brought to justice. One was when a girl was killed and another injured by a young driver, and another was when a boy stabbed another to death.^{21}

An old problem that continued in Mexico in the 1990s was highway robbery, where vehicles were stopped and the occupants robbed.^{22} Armed robberies also occurred at Mennonite businesses,^{23} and cattle thefts were common.^{24} Many homes have been robbed, resulting in terrifying situations when the occupants were home.^{25} The situation was so bad in 1985 that some villages in the Manitoba colony used night watchmen. Extra policemen also were used because of the high number of vehicle thefts, although there was suspicion about the complicity of the police in some crime.^{26} Kidnappings for ransom also occurred in the 1990s,^{27} as did possibly random shootings in both the Cuauhtémoc and Durango areas.^{28} Some other areas have been bothered less. Buenos Aires and El Cuervo have had little trouble with Mexican neighbours, other than occasional theft, and the Mexicans have been good neighbours.^{29}

In 1996, the army came to La Batea, and dug shallow trenches across the colony roads in numerous places, to prevent drug traffickers from landing aeroplanes on the streets. The residents were not aware that this had ever been a problem. The army presence was accepted, and shortly after they left, the trenches largely were filled in.

Mexican periodicals often have been unkind to the Mennonites. Cuauhtémoc and Chihuahua newspapers and national magazines have attacked the Mennonites for wealth inequities, failure to participate in Seguro Social, and opposition to immunization.^{30} Their descriptions often have not been accurate. One newspaper said the Mennonites practiced polygamy, "... limited only by the economic capacity of the Mennonite man ..."^{31} In 1957, Excelsior attacked the Mennonites claiming that these fanatics had been thrown out of Canada, and Russia before that, and compared the special treatment and property of the
Mennonites with the forgotten Tarahumara Indians whose land they occupied.\textsuperscript{32}

The Mennonites also have done various things that have been good for relations with the Mexicans. They sometimes voluntarily gave land to the \textit{agraristas}, and in 1985 the Manitoba colony gave land near Rubio to the Mexicans for use as a housing project and a school.\textsuperscript{33} Mexicans have been allowed to glean fields after the harvest and to cross Mennonite land with their herds of sheep.\textsuperscript{34} Sometimes government officials have asked the Mennonites for help with Mexican disasters, which they did not know about, as most do not follow the news. They donated generously to help with the earthquake in Mexico City in 1985,\textsuperscript{35} and have aided the poverty-stricken Tarahumara Indians of Chihuahua.\textsuperscript{36}

The Mennonites also have tried to maintain good relationships with local and other governments. They have maintained colony roads, have given money to local towns for improvements, and have helped to pay for roads and power lines they were not using.\textsuperscript{37} This has been reciprocated by local governments in various ways.\textsuperscript{38}

In the past, property taxes on "... land, wagons, and animals sold or killed for home use"\textsuperscript{39} were collected by the colonies for payment to the Mexican state. These taxes were low, but since 1990, Mexico has tried to implement an income tax system based on individual income.\textsuperscript{40} So far most Mennonites, including some of the well-off, do not pay income taxes. The main reason seems to be that the Mexican state has not yet enforced the implementation of this system among many individuals, possibly particularly not among the self-employed, including farmers. One tax paid by most is the 15 percent Mexican IVA tax, which is added to many goods sold.

When the Mennonites first arrived in Mexico, the government hoped they would mix with the Mexicans and act as an effective example for them, but this did not always happen.\textsuperscript{41} Their aloofness played a part in large numbers of Russian Mennonites not being allowed into Mexico.\textsuperscript{42} By the mid 1940s though, government attitudes toward the Mennonites again were positive. President Avila Camacho of Mexico wanted a Mennonite settlement in every Mexican state due to their value as free demonstration farms.\textsuperscript{43} This was at a time when Fretz recommended that other Mennonites should offer agricultural aid to the Mexican Mennonites.\textsuperscript{44} Outsiders' opinions about the backward state of the Old Colonist agriculture often have not been shared by the Mexicans.

The nonproselytizing nature of the Old Colony group likely has worked in favour of
smooth relations with the government. Had the Old Colony tried to convert the Mexicans to their beliefs, they likely also would have been the target of the antireligious sentiment, so common in Mexico, which was directed particularly at the Catholic church.

Visits by politicians of the various levels of government have been common in the colonies, where they usually were received hospitably. In May 1990, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari visited the Manitoba colony, and the current Chihuahua state governor Barrios’ picture is often in the papers in connection with the Mennonite colonies. The Durango municipal governor has close ties with some members of the Durango colony. Many polite words have been said by both sides, and Mennonite relations with all levels of government in Mexico have been overall good, and possibly never better than today.

Mennonites have valued their special relationship to the government, given to them by the Privilegium, and have tried not to endanger this. It was said that the Privilegium did not allow Mennonites to go into business or industry and that they must remain as farmers under it. Increasing economic diversification does not seem to have affected it though. A myth also grew up that the Privilegium was only valid for fifty years, or until 1972. It was unclear whether the Privilegium was to expire or whether the Presidential decrees were to be reviewed after fifty years, or whether either of these allegations was true. A great furor took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s with much hand wringing and wondering what would happen, likely more by observers than by the Old Colonists themselves. The Privilegium survived as 1972 came and went. Mennonites also were worried about endangering the Privilegium by appearing ungrateful and upsetting the government if they were to leave Mexico in large numbers. Yet, numerous large scale movements from Mexico took place. It also was said that the Mexican authorities took the position that the Privilegium only applied to the original settlements. In spite of anxiety over the status of the prized Privilegium, it still is alive and well at seventy-five years of age, as far as anyone knows.

Contradictory opinions exist about whether the Mennonites are Mexican or not, as the Privilegium placed the Mennonites into a separate category. Even the government has not been sure about their status. It has been suggested that those born of foreign parents need to apply for a Certificate of Mexican Nationality if they are to be Mexican citizens. Most Mennonites have done nothing to ensure that they were Mexican citizens, but then, maybe they did not need to. For the most part, this issue has been ignored. The Mexicans and the
Mennonites appear to be able to live with uncertainty in this area, and the conservative Mennonites often have not seen the uncertainty as being a problem, as they like to think of themselves as not being part of national states anyway.

Mexico does not allow dual citizenship. Most Mennonites, considering themselves not to be Mexicans, when they wanted a passport, tried to get a Canadian passport. If citizenship became an issue, most preferred to take Canadian citizenship, if possible. In spite of the uncertainty, the 1990 census counted the Mennonites as Mexicans. The government department responsible for this said the Mennonites were “one hundred percent” Mexican.51

The Mennonites have been exempted from participation in the Mexican military. Mexico has not had a universal military draft but does have a military registration program and a one year part-time training program for males aged eighteen to forty years.52 The Tarjeta Militar is the card that shows that military service has been performed. There are two levels of the military card. The Pre-Cartilla is the first document issued, and once the military service has been performed, the Carta Liberada is issued.53 Although Mennonites, if they registered, received the Carta Liberada after one year without doing any military service, relatively few registered, due to an apparent moral rejection of the idea of registering for military service, and the government did not enforce the law.54 The requirement to register also has been considered by some as being a violation of the Privilegium.55 When President Salinas visited the Manitoba colony in May of 1990, the issue of the military cards was raised with him. The Mennonites suggested that the government consider the fact that they had not taken government help for roads, schools, and other things as their contribution in lieu of military service. Failing this, they wanted alternate service,56 but so far discussions with the government have been fruitless.57 On the other hand, they have not been forced to register. The reasons heard for the Mennonites not being called for military service include: the government did not get around to calling them, it was because of the Privilegium, and it was because they were viewed as foreigners.58 One Mexican lawyer commented, regarding these and other ambiguities of the Mennonite situation in Mexico: “... in Mexico it was normal to have ambiguities and that he did not think it advisable to seek clarification.”59

Without the military card, some men have not been able to obtain Mexican passports. In some cases land purchases were not possible without the passport,60 and passports also were needed to emigrate to South America. In the past, a copy of the Privilegium served as
a substitute for the *Tarjeta Militar*, for purposes of obtaining passports and Mexican citizenship papers, but that practice was discontinued some time ago.\textsuperscript{61}

In 1991, all Mexicans over eighteen years of age were to enroll for a new voters list. Casas Grandes area authorities were upset when the Mennonites did not participate, and even encouraged the ministers to encourage their people to register, but this did not help.\textsuperscript{62}

*Seguro Social* caused problems between the Mennonites and the Mexican government as early as 1956. This system provides medical coverage, accident insurance, and an old age pension. Benefits depend on the level of coverage chosen and on the amount of premiums paid.\textsuperscript{63} Although many Mennonites have not been aware of all the benefits available to them under this program, many have rejected it out of a desire to remain separate from the state. The Mennonites had their *Waisenamt* and *Armenkasse* to meet their needs and opposed joining the government program. When the Mennonites threatened to leave Mexico if the system was forced on them,\textsuperscript{64} some Mexicans responded with joy.\textsuperscript{65} In 1957, it was reported that the Mennonites were not working their fields, waiting for the situation to be resolved, and that 20,000 might leave Mexico.\textsuperscript{66} In the end, the program was not forced on the Mennonites.

By the 1990s, there no longer was a clear Mennonite position on *Seguro Social*, as even some leaders favoured the plan.\textsuperscript{67} Premiums were relatively low, in comparison with the costs of medical care, and many saw its value, particularly in light of the *Armenkasse*’s shortcomings.\textsuperscript{68} Although the program allowed self-employed persons and farmers to enroll, likely only a small percentage of the Mennonites were enrolled. Many others went without medical care or strained their finances to pay the bills. Mexico’s universal social programs have been minimal, and sad cases abound where destitute individuals and families receive no aid from either the government or the colony. At any rate, the Mennonites largely have been left alone by the government in this area also.

Mennonites, over the years, have worried about possible Mexican interference in their schools. Already in 1927, the Mexican authorities challenged the Mennonite school system.\textsuperscript{69} The most serious problems came when the Mennonite schools were closed in the 1930s, but President Cardenas personally intervened to reopen the schools.\textsuperscript{70} Outsiders, both Mexicans and Canadians, have spoken of the poor schools and about possible intervention by the Mexican government.\textsuperscript{71} Some Canadians have considered whether they should “tell
on" the colonies, apparently thinking that the Mexican authorities did not know the state of the Mennonite schools. Predictions have been made of a mass exodus should interference take place, but in the 1990s, interference does not seem imminent.

A number of federal government programs have greatly aided the Mennonite farmers. In 1986, an offer by BANRURAL to loan money to Mennonites in Campeche was accepted by the farmers. BANRURAL is the federal government's development bank which specializes in financing rural development activities. The CONASUPO program has provided government marketing for many of the crops grown, although farmers have been free to sell outside this program. In 1994, the government introduced a program whereby farmers could apply for rebates of 35 percent of the cost of diesel fuel. PRONASOL was a program available in the 1990s that offered interest free loans to farmers. Efforts also have been made to cushion the effects of NAFTA, as some crop prices, including those for oats, were much higher in Mexico than on the world market, and free trade could endanger the production of some crops. The PROCAMPO program, begun in 1993, is a fifteen-year program of subsidies based on acreage seeded to particular crops. Most, but not all, Mennonites entered the program. A ten-year program called FINAPE, introduced in 1996, forgave a percentage of some farmers' debt. The prevailing interest rates were 30 percent or more for a number of years and many encountered difficulties as a result. Government grants also were available for purchasing equipment of various types. These programs have been used by the Mennonites, although not to their maximum capacity. When the overall poverty of Mexico is considered, the commitment of the Mexican government to the farming sector, including the Mennonite farming sector, is surprising.

Not all has been good in relations with the government. At times, the government has forced its will on the Mennonites. As an example, electric power was being installed in Durango colony in 1996 and 1997, against the will of the Old Colony leaders. The Municipal governor had said that he wanted the colony to develop, and electricity would make more industry possible. The Mennonites also have encountered bribery, graft, and corruption in dealings with the government. This may be due in part to the undefined or ambiguous nature of many things in Mexico, which is conducive to corrupt practices. Flexibility has sometimes been present, particularly if a monetary incentive was offered.

Complaints also often have been heard that the police do not treat the Mennonites as
well as they do the Mexicans. They have been involved in violence against the Mennonites and have been accused of attempting to obtain money from them. A noticeable reduction in police corruption has occurred in recent years.

In spite of problems, unease, and predictions of impending disaster for the Mennonites over the past seventy-five years, the Mexican environment has allowed them to maintain the separateness they desired. The distance between the Mennonites' and Mexicans' culture, religion, and language have aided in this. The Mennonites also have benefited from having ultimate recourse to the president, as the president and the federal government have taken their side numerous times, protecting them from violations of the Privilegium.

Assimilation, or accommodation, to the Mexican environment has not been the greatest threat to the Old Colonists. While not untouched by their time in Mexico, they are still distinct from the Mexicans, and the old ways and beliefs still survive, particularly in the most remote colonies. The leaders in the 1920s chose well when they chose Mexico as their new home and the Privilegium as the guarantee of their freedom. Unfortunately though, for the future of their vision, Mexico was too close to Canada, and while the Mexican threat proved to be benign, the connections with Canada created serious problems.
Mennonite Colonies of the Cuauhtémoc Area

- Colony Boundaries
- Highways
Chapter 5- Evangelization and community development.

In looking at the source of problems the Old Colony group has encountered in Mexico, blame has been placed on the theocratic leadership, economic problems, population explosion, and the Latin American environment, with the final blame often placed on the leadership for all of the other problems. However, this analysis is incomplete and unfair in some respects. The Old Colony leadership designed, established, and fought to preserve the separate colonies. They carried out, in a reasonably skilful way, their mandate to place noneconomic considerations first and yet survive. Economics have been determined largely by the Mexican physical and economic environment, and while they have been a consistent problem, they have been largely out of the group’s control. The population explosion was unavoidable in the context of the Old Colony beliefs. The Mexican environment, while not perfect, has been hospitable to the vision of these people, and more so than most nations would have been. Given the impossibility of the Old Colony group living their chosen way of life in Canada, the overriding and nonnegotiable importance of living that life in closed isolated groups, and the limitations imposed by their philosophy and environment, they managed quite well for much of the time in Mexico.

Two factors, both of which are connected with Canada, have affected the Old Colonists and endangered their vision of an isolated life in Mexico. One of these sources has been other Mennonite groups and individuals. The second has been continuing contact with Canada in the form of temporary and permanent movement to Canada.

What was said about the Mexicans respecting the Old Colonists’ privacy cannot be said of their own blood brothers, as other Mennonite groups have been one of the most serious challenges to the Old Colonists’ order and survival. The other Mennonites have focussed primarily on the older, larger colonies in the Cuauhtémoc area. Over the years, the Mennonites have expanded their holdings around the original colonies, making it possible to drive long distances through this “mennogopolis” and not leave Mennonite land. Yet, today, there is no longer an Old Colony church in the Swift Current or Santa Rita colonies,
and the Old Colony church has been under a long term siege elsewhere. Most colonies outside that area are still relatively free of the effects of the outsiders, likely because they are smaller and more isolated. Pressures have been mounting though, for example as at Durango, where the Old Colony leadership is experiencing the most serious challenge to its existence, largely due to the presence of outside churches.

This is similar to what happened to the Old Colonists' ancestors in Russia and in Canada. One motivation for leaving Russia was the inability of the most conservative Mennonites to maintain their chosen ways in the domineering presence of other Mennonite groups, and in the Manitoba West Reserve, other Mennonite groups were alternatives for banned Old Colony people, helping destroy the Old Colony group's isolation there.\(^1\) In Mennonite history, more liberal groups often have followed the more conservative in their migrations, and repeatedly have threatened the conservatives' isolation.\(^2\)

The Old Colonists have a long tradition of not accepting other Mennonite groups. Already in Poland, some Danzig Old Flemish, the Old Colonists' ancestors, did not accept the legitimacy of other Mennonites, and looked with disdain on the Frisian Mennonites.\(^3\)

Old Colonists think they are true Christians and that other Mennonites only claim to be Christians, as other Mennonites are part of the world, as are the "heathen" Mexicans.\(^4\) Other Mennonites often have not understood the Old Colonists' uncompromising positions. When they left Canada, more liberal Mennonites viewed them as narrow-minded and misguided and thought it to be unrealistic to "... run away from a difficult situation in the hope that they might find better conditions elsewhere."\(^5\) Other Mennonites have looked down on the Old Colonists,\(^6\) considering them to be incapable of making good decisions.

While each group has considered the other to be lost, the other Mennonites have been the aggressors and the Old Colonists have been their target. Little good has been said by the Canadians about the Old Colony group, and in widely circulated reports about them, positives have been rare and criticisms have abounded. The Canadians have felt they had a right to meddle in their brothers' affairs, being sure that they had right on their side.\(^7\) For example, a recent MCC Canada press release blamed those resisting the new influences for difficulties: "Colonies are being torn apart by those who want to keep old religious ways."\(^8\)

Certainly many who have tried to bring change to the Old Colonists and who have been excommunicated have viewed the situation in a different light than the Old Colonists.
The Old Colony leadership’s actions in resisting many changes and their attempts to enforce their will among the people have led to great frustration among those who have not agreed with them, and the leaders often have been perceived as being unreasonable.

While the efforts of the outsiders sometimes have been recognized as disruptive, writers of Old Colony history have not given these the importance they deserve as a determinant of their history. Some writers also have promoted the argument that the Old Colony philosophy and its manifestations in Mexico were fatally flawed, and that efforts to help the Old Colonists become more like the rest of the world should be encouraged.

Old Colony leaders, whose voice often has not been heard, recognize that without the outside interference they might have been able to hold back the changes and their closed colonies could have continued to prosper to a much greater extent. Great damage has been done, in their opinion. Had the other churches not offered an alternative, their system of enforcing compliance and conformity would have worked quite well, and they would not have lost many of their people. The Old Colonists who fled the Cuauhtémoc area know why they left, but also have not been heard. Some outsiders have recognized the effects of their actions and sometimes have felt remorse, but not enough to withdraw permanently, and while they would like to get along with the Old Colonists, they have wanted to set the terms.

Three theological differences, all justifications for the evangelizing presence of the outsiders, exist between the two groups. The first is that, while all Mennonite groups once believed physical separation from the world to be necessary, most have decided that this is no longer possible, necessary, or desirable. The second difference concerns whether it is possible to be sure that one is “saved.” When others speak of “... the assurance of personal salvation” to Old Colonists “... this sounds like proud and boastful talk.” Old Colonist theology has said: “... it is blasphemy if you say you know that you are a child of God.” This difference has been the primary justification for the outsiders coming to Mexico, as they judged the Old Colony group to be in need of spiritual salvation. Although they have been called pagans and have been the object of evangelical campaigns, most Old Colonists have not accepted the outsiders’ beliefs. The third theological difference is that the Old Colonists have not been evangelical, attracting converts to their group. These Old Colony beliefs have meant that some outsiders have thought they are lost and in need of salvation. The Old Colonists’ positions on the latter two theological issues, regarding the assurance of salvation
and spreading their beliefs, are difficult to defend. Most other Mennonite and contemporary Christian groups do not agree with the Old Colonists on these points, in light of New Testament teachings.

The Old Colony group also has been criticized for their method of teaching their children religion. They do not have Sunday Schools, their children do not attend church until they are in their teens, and there are no church youth activities. While much of the world does not conform to the other Mennonites’ religious model, the reason the evangelical Mennonite churches have concentrated on the Old Colonists has been at least partly because of a responsibility they have felt to help these “lost brothers” of theirs.

An additional justification for the Canadian Mennonites’ presence has been perceived shortcomings in nonreligious areas, including education, leadership, culture, population control, and business acumen. Sometimes these issues have received more attention than did the spiritual matters, and efforts to change these aspects of the Old Colony life may have been more disruptive than the efforts to change the religious beliefs. The Old Colonists could have accepted some evangelical religious beliefs without changing crucial aspects of their colony life and without endangering their isolation. However, to accept the outside ideas on education, culture, and business would bring an end to the separate colony lifestyle.

The Canadian Mennonites have not been unique in combining evangelism with efforts to change other aspects of a culture. This trend already was present in the mission work of other Canadian denominations, including the Presbyterians and Methodists, in the late-nineteenth century. “The evangelical emphasis on snatching the ‘heathen’ from the hell-fire of sinfulness was being replaced by an approach that emphasized long-term evangelisation through education and social service.”

As in Russia and Canada before, education has been one of the main disputed areas in the Mexican colonies, and its crucial importance in maintaining the Old Colony lifestyle has been recognized by both parties. At the same time, education has been an area that the leadership tenaciously refused to change. The line between the religious and the other issues also has become blurred. In 1981, George Reimer, a Canadian worker in Mexico, said: “I’m often convinced that ignorance is bliss, but I’m not convinced that it’s Christian.”

The outsiders, not recognizing the Old Colony leadership’s authority as legitimate, have challenged the leaders openly. They have opposed the use of excommunication in the
colonies, as it often has been heard from critics of the Mexican Old Colony that the ban, when used to enforce rules about rubber tires, cars, and electric power, was being used to enforce man-made laws. These critics have not accepted the validity of the connection between these man-made laws and the Old Colony's vision of living a separate life from the world, which the Old Colony has considered to be essential to follow God's will.

Not all other Mennonites have threatened the Old Colonists. The Sommerfelder and the Old Colonists have respected each other's right to privacy. While not sharing the Old Colony prohibitions on cars and rubber tires on tractors, the Sommerfelder have been nonproselytizing and content to leave the Old Colonists alone, although some movement from Old Colony to Sommerfelder ranks has taken place through intermarriage. 16

There presently are in Mexico many Mennonite groups besides the original Old Colony and Sommerfelder groups. There may not be another place, at any time, where the Mennonite churches have concentrated so many efforts on a group so small as the conservative Mennonites in Mexico. Already in 1977, it was estimated that the number of Mennonite "missionaries" working with the Old Colony people in North and South America "... could be as high as one hundred and the total yearly budget could be a million dollars." 17 Since then, many efforts have increased.

Present now in Mexico among the Old Colony are General Conference, Kleine Gemeinde, Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC), Evangelical Mennonite Missions Conference (EMMC), Reinländer, Sommerfelder, Mennonitische Gemeinschaft, and the Mennonite umbrella body Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). These are all Mennonite conferences or organizations. In the past there also were Mennonite Brethren and Church of God in Christ (Holdeman) Mennonites.

The three who have had the greatest effect on the Old Colonists and their isolation have been the General Conference, the Kleine Gemeinde, and MCC. 18 The first two arrived in Mexico initially for reasons other than evangelizing or helping the Old Colony.

The General Conference, one of the more secular Mennonite groups, entered the Cuauhtémoc area as the result of the arrival in Mexico in the 1920s of thirty-five to forty Mennonite families from Russia who could not gain entry to Canada or the United States. 19 Although they did not found a settlement and did not have a Privilégium, most came to the Cuauhtémoc area. 20 Partly because the Old Colonists would not accept them into their
church, in 1938 they formed the Hoffnungsau Gemeinde and joined the U. S. based General Conference in 1939. This group remained small for a long time, having only about fifty people in the mid 1940s. Most eventually had moved to Canada or the United States. However, their influence was to grow. The Mennonite Church of Mexico, which came to be made up of three General Conference congregations, was organized in 1963, and in June 1991, they founded the Conference of Mennonites in Mexico.

The General Conference work with the Old Colony people, directed from outside Mexico, began in 1950. The General Conference grew into a large presence in the colonies in the Cuauhtémoc area, and by the 1990s had churches and schools at Blumenau in Manitoba colony, Steinreich in Nord Colony, and Burwalde in Swift Current colony.

The schools encountered resistance but the persistence of the General Conference was great. A school, originally operated with MCC involvement near Santa Clara, soon was taken over by the General Conference. It later moved to Cuauhtémoc and then to Quinta Lupita near Cuauhtémoc. The school was attended largely by children of the excommunicated, and attendance at the school also was grounds for excommunication, but numerous Old Colony attempts to close the school failed. Eventually, the church and school were moved to Blumenau in the heart of the Manitoba colony after a businessman, Abe Olfert, bought land there and then sold it to the non-Old Colony people.

The Steinreich school, in another Old Colony bastion, the Nord Colony, began after some local residents asked the General Conference to help them establish a residential school. A church also was established there in the 1960s, and in 1987 an adult education centre, or Bible school, moved from Kilometre 17 to Steinreich.

In 1976, the General Conference started a school and church at Burwalde, on the Swift Current colony. In December 1996, a large new church addition was opened.

In 1977, it was said that: "The policy of the General Conference mission work at Cuauhtémoc is basically one of providing an alternative church for those who want to leave the Old Colony church." William Janzen recognized that the Conference church not only provided an alternative, but that it divided the people by accepting the excommunicated. The methods and some of the funding for the new churches came from outside, resulting in the people feeling dependent and childlike. Janzen made it clear that the two groups of Mennonites did not accept each other's points of view.
Numerous people have worked for the General Conference in Mexico over the decades. Many have not only been missionaries but have worked at meeting perceived needs in various areas. While many only stayed for a few years, some made this their life's work. Helen Ens spent from 1955 to July 1995 there, working as a teacher, a newspaper co-editor, and supervising a bookstore. Philip Dyck began working for the General Conference Board of Missions in 1963 as an agricultural researcher. In 1964, Manitoba colony farmers were told by their leaders not to have anything to do with his experimental work, but some cooperated anyway, renting him land for experimental projects. In the 1990s, although retired, he still was involved with agriculture in the colonies. The sincerity and dedication of these and other workers are unquestionable.

The Board of Christian service and later the Commission on Overseas Mission of the General Conference (Canada and United States) also supplied nurses and administrators for the government hospital in Cuauhtémoc and for a clinic established in 1965 at Nuevo Namiquipa, north of Cuauhtémoc. The clinic closed in the later 1980s.

The most disruptive aspects of the General Conference work in Mexico have not been their nursing services or agricultural experimentation efforts, but their churches and schools. Rather than limiting their efforts to trying to change Old Colony theology within the Old Colony church, they established alternate churches for Old Colonists to attend, splitting the group by providing an alternate group for disaffected Old Colony members. Old Colony discipline lost much of its force with this alternative present. Similarly, their schools, on Old Colony land, have offered an alternative to the Old Colony group and have helped to break the protective walls constructed by the Old Colonists.

The second major threat to the Old Colony group, the Kleine Gemeinde, came to Mexico seemingly without intentions of interfering with the Old Colonists. They came from Manitoba between 1947 and 1952, in their own flight from the Canadian world. However, they chose, as had the General Conference group, of all the possible sites in Mexico, an area close to the Old Colony settlements. About 600 persons, described as active and progressive, bought 22,000 hectares of land near Santa Clara, where they founded their Quellenkolonie (Los Jagueyes).

The Kleine Gemeinde in Mexico is a distinct group from the Kleine Gemeinde that remained in Canada and the United States. The Canadian and U. S. Kleine Gemeinde
changed their name to Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) while the Mexican group continues to use the name Kleine Gemeinde.

The Kleine Gemeinde threatened the Old Colonists by accepting excommunicated Old Colony members into their group, thereby weakening Old Colony discipline. At first, they asked converts to move to the Quellenkolonie, but since the late 1970s they have founded churches in a number of Old Colony areas.

The Kleine Gemeinde won converts at the ill-fated Yermo colony, where they provided a teacher and a church presence, as there was no Old Colony minister there, possibly due to the use of rubber tires and vehicles. This breakthrough into the Old Colony ranks showed other Old Colony people the Kleine Gemeinde education system, which more of them then wanted. While the Kleine Gemeinde educational system was not advanced in comparison with the Mexican system, it taught a broader range of material more effectively than did the Old Colony system. Someone commented: “The main difference between Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde education is that the former don’t know that they know nothing but the latter know at least that much.”

By the early 1980s, the Kleine Gemeinde made large inroads in many colonies due to its education system, more relaxed rules, and the added appeal of still being relatively conservative. In the 1990s, the Kleine Gemeinde had a presence in at least ten locations in Mexico, including the colonies of Manitoba, Nord, Swift Current, La Honda, and Durango, where they made rapid inroads. Their schools usually were accompanied by churches and a complete break from the Old Colony. The Kleine Gemeinde has been strongly resented by the Old Colonists, but their advance has not been checked.

The third major threat to the Old Colony system has come from MCC. MCC efforts in the colonies have differed from those of the various churches as their primary effort was not spiritual conversion but rather change in nonspiritual areas, including economics, education, and health care. Although this has been the position of MCC, some individual workers, themselves members of an outside church, have not followed this, just as the various Mennonite churches have not limited their efforts to religious change.

In 1946, P.C. Hiebert and William T. Snyder, representatives of MCC in Akron, Pennsylvania, visited Mexico to investigate the possibility of about 200 Russian Mennonite families moving to Mexico after World War II. When asked, the Old Colonists said they did
not want them in their colonies, and, in the end, the refugees did not go to Mexico.

In 1947, Winfield Fretz, a Mennonite college professor, after a 1946 visit to the Mexican colonies on behalf of MCC, wrote a widely distributed report on the colonies. Fretz was accompanied on his trip by Dr. C.W. Wiebe, a physician, Dr. A.D. Stoesz, an agriculturalist, and Dr. D.V. Wiebe, a farmer and assistant pastor, all there on behalf of MCC. A dismal picture was painted of Mennonite life in Mexico. The forward to Fretz’ report, written by Harold S. Bender, long time premiere Mennonite theologian, said: “The author is concerned about the future of the Mennonites in Mexico, and rightly so.” Fretz himself wrote: “... there remains a possibility of developing some inter-communication between the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico and those in the United States and Canada. ... there are useful services which the Mennonites in these countries can render to their brethren in Mexico. It remains for the channels of intercommunication to be developed and contacts to be made. At any rate, Mennonites in North America should no longer continue to be ignorant of the life and needs of the large block of 12,000 of their brethren in Mexico.”

Fretz’ report also recommended the assignment of nurses and a doctor to the Old Colony group, efforts in diet education through articles in the Steinbach Post and in pamphlets, and the supplying of seed grain for experimental purposes.

The early MCC involvement with the Mexican Mennonites was much as Fretz had envisioned, concentrating largely on medical and crop development matters. Seed loan, well digging, and food relief programs, as well as a hospital, were put in place. Already in 1947, ten U. S. and Canadian MCC workers were in the Cuauhtémoc area, engaged mainly in health work. In 1950, MCC provided teachers for the first outside school near the Santa Clara
colony, and for a time, until it closed in 1951, MCC had a clinic with nurses at Santa Clara. By 1951, there were thirteen MCC unit members, mainly nurses, teachers, and agricultural workers, in the colonies’ area. The early MCC efforts were directed from the United States. Meeting resistance though, MCC personnel left Mexico in the early 1950s, allegedly under pressure from Old Colony leaders and the Mexican government. A drought that lasted from 1950 to 1954 was responsible, at least partly, for the MCC program again being expanded in 1953 and 1954, and in early 1954, a railroad car loaded with 60,000 pounds of flour, milled from wheat donated by Kansas Mennonites, was sent to the Mennonites in Mexico. Food, seed and short term loans also had been distributed.

In 1956, Aaron Klassen, MCC Director at Cuauhtémoc, wrote to the Canadian Ambassador in Mexico: “The educational, intellectual, social, etc. standards of our fellow Mennonites in Mexico give us great concern. It is our purpose to help them to a higher level.” The letter asked the Ambassador for help in obtaining immigrant visas for MCC workers in Mexico, which were needed so that they could form a civil association which would administer properties that they wanted to acquire to build institutions in Mexico.

A common saying in the conservative colonies in the 1940s and 1950s was “MCC is DDT,” as MCC efforts to bring spiritual and cultural change among the conservative Mennonites met strong resistance. In 1956, MCC was forced out of Mexico under pressure from the Old Colonists, and the General Conference and others took over much of MCC’s work. A dislike for MCC still existed in the 1990s among some Old Colonists, as MCC had become a generic term for all the meddling outside churches, but particularly for the General Conference church. MCC still has not completely shaken that image, and some Old Colonists have not wanted to admit that MCC helped them in the earlier years, although the records still exist, showing that the help was given. Although MCC did not formally reenter the colonies until the 1980s, others kept up the work.

When MCC reentered the Mexican colonies, the work was directed from Canada. In April 1975, MCC Canada established the Kanadier Mennonite Colonization Committee (KMCC) to work with these Mennonites inside and outside Canada. The committee included representatives from various conservative Mennonite churches, but not from the Mexican Old Colony. By 1990, the Kanadier Mennonite Concerns Committee replaced the earlier committee. These committees represented the return of MCC to the Mexican colonies, with
the agenda of working change now directed from Canada.

The term "Kanadier" is used to refer to those Mennonites, including the Old Colony, whose ancestors came to Canada in the 1870s, as opposed to the "Russländer" who came to Canada in the 1920s and later. In contrast to some of the earlier MCC programs, many of the persons who later worked with the Old Colony were Kanadier Mennonites, including some of Old Colony background.

The new MCC approach was cautious in its choice of staff and KMCC members. Aware of MCC’s bad name in Mexico and of the opposition to outsiders among the conservative Mennonites, MCC used nonthreatening methods to enter the colonies.

The primary early effort was to bring a media presence into the colonies in the form of Die Mennonitische Post. Die Mennonitische Post succeeded the Steinbach Post, founded at Steinbach in 1913 as an independent paper by Derksen Printers. The Steinbach Post built a following in the conservative Mennonite constituency, and in 1964, with a circulation of about 5,000, covered from Ft. Vermilion, Alberta to Paraguay, including Mexico. The name Post had credibility and acceptance in the conservative colonies. Publication of the Post stopped in 1966 and did not resume until MCC began publishing the new paper in April of 1977. The Post was accepted by many who didn’t accept MCC, as it provided a forum for the exchange of news and letters between far flung conservative Mennonites in the Americas. Its role as a provider of family and community news made the publication valuable and its presence unthreatening.

In the early 1980s, George Reimer came to Mexico to work for the Post, not for MCC. This likely opened some doors for him as many did not and still do not understand that MCC is the Post. Who Reimer worked for is clear though, as he sent back numerous reports to MCC in Canada. From this tentative beginning, MCC soon expanded into a larger, more open presence again.

For most of its history, the new Post has been edited by Abe Warkentin, except for some years when Isbrand Hiebert was the editor, while Warkentin was Director of Kanadier Concerns. It has received substantial funding and support from MCC, and Post workers, in reality, have been in part MCC workers. MCC staff in Mexico also has looked after distribution of the newspaper in the colonies. Latin American subscribers have received preferential subscription rates, and in 1994 it was estimated that 23,000 persons read the Post
and more than 14,000 letters from readers had been printed. 

While serving as a communications link between conservative Mennonites in the Americas, possibly the main motivation for the Post’s publication has been to combat illiteracy and to change Old Colony life. In a 1992 brochure asking for financial support, it was said: “. . . the extreme conservatism and legalism of some groups have planted the seeds of illiteracy, the effects of which will be felt for generations to come. . . . One of the greatest tragedies in Mennonite history is occurring in many of the Old Colony villages where many children are often leaving their village schools functionally illiterate.”

Some of the Post’s content has violated Old Colony norms. For example, in 1996, it carried the story of Robinson Crusoe in installments, which, harmless as this may seem, violated their norms. Numerous articles, directly and indirectly, have attacked the Old Colony, its philosophy, its history, and its actions. While it is not surprising that the Old Colony leadership is sometimes against the Post, it is surprising that the opposition has not been stronger. In 1992, Abe Warkentin wrote: “Though the Mennonitische Post made a great impact on the Mennonites in Mexico and in reality was a greater threat to the system than the early 1940’s and 1950’s efforts because it gained entrance into so many homes, it never was strongly opposed.”

MCC and the Post introduced more local colony content in 1983 with the introduction of a supplement to the Post, the Beilage, published in Mexico and edited there by Helen Ens and George Reimer. In 1986, the Beilage was replaced by the Menno-Zeitung, which was edited and managed primarily by Reimer, first as an employee of MCC and then, from 1991, on his own. The paper though only appeared sporadically after MCC left it until its end in 1992.

MCC also wanted a children’s publication, which led to Das Blatt being published beginning in September 1989. In the 1990s, the paper had a circulation of 2,000 or more.

Over the years, among the various strong voices from within MCC favouring not leaving the Mexican Old Colony alone, one of the strongest has been Abe Warkentin, editor of Die Mennonitische Post and former director of MCC Canada’s Kanadier Concerns. He has described the Old Colony experience in Latin America as the worst tragedy in Mennonite history, as a manmade disaster made from within the group, and has blamed the bishops, whom he has described as tyrants who rule unchallenged with an iron fist, and illiteracy as
not leaving any way out for the Old Colony.\textsuperscript{72} While Warkentin and others have not expressed their strongest opinions directly in the \textit{Post}, they have been influential and have helped direct the intervention.

MCC leaders have been unwilling to accept the legitimacy of the Old Colony leaders' mandate to speak for and act on behalf of the Old Colony people, and have thought they knew what was best for the Mennonites in Mexico. Some have been extremely critical of the Old Colony system, wanting to undo or destroy the system and not just make adjustments to it.

In 1991, Victor Fast, an Ontario MCC worker, advocated destroying the Old Colony system. In a report to the KMCC, he said: "It is Bankrupt. It has been built on premises which have more in common with the dark ages, of pre-reformation days than with the generally accepted, enlightened values of today. Repression, control, male dominance, powerlessness of the people, ignorance, these are all things people talk to me about over and over again as characteristic of that system."\textsuperscript{73} He spoke of supporting the people in dismantling the system as quickly as possible, and asked whether they should massively confront the Old Colony leadership. He also spoke of possibly contacting the Mexican authorities and asking for their help to reform the school system, and, maybe with government help, challenging the idea of a separate Low-German community in the larger Spanish environment. This did not leave much of the Old Colony system free from attack.

In 1992, MCC Canada had ambitious goals and plans for Mexico. These included: gaining a presence and building relationships in the colonies, having a physical base for operations, addressing literacy and educational needs in various ways, introducing a youth worker couple, encouraging coordinated spiritual renewal efforts with other Mennonite groups, and helping with economic development and land searches.\textsuperscript{74}

The paper which laid out projections for Kanadier work in Mexico for 1992-1995 said: "The problems of the colony Mennonites in Mexico are no longer their problems. It would, first of all, be unconscionable not to seek to help those who are related by faith and blood. Secondly, Mexican Mennonite problems have been our problems for decades, ever since the first families began going to find summer work in Ontario in the 1950's. And thirdly, the Hilfskomitee . . . has invited MCCC to come to Mexico and continue helping with social needs such as the home for the handicapped."\textsuperscript{75} In 1995, Peter Rempel, a former Old Colonist and chairman of the Hilfskomitee, a Mexican inter-Mennonite group that has
worked with various community projects, urged MCCC to be "... considerably more direct with the leadership in Mexico."76

Warkentin's stance had not softened in 1995 when he left his position as Director of Kanadier Concerns. He said: "We have pussyfooted around the conservative colony leadership in Mexico too long."77 Seeing it as an opportune time, as the colonies were in crisis, Warkentin proposed a joint meeting between MCCC and Mexican Mennonite leaders. Six things wanted from the leaders were: acknowledgement that it was a joint problem due to migration to Canada, changes in schools including curriculum and teacher training, electrification for small businesses and cottage industries to allow occupational diversification, introduction of expertise on crops and farming, an understanding regarding excommunicated members in Canada, and regular future meetings. Had the Old Colony leaders agreed to these points, the strength of their leadership and control in the colonies could have diminished dramatically. Warkentin went on to speak of a "... bold new effort in Mexico. The groundwork and base has been laid; new thrusts in education and economic development await money and people."78

MCC work in Mexico has obviously deviated from the often perceived MCC policy of providing help when and how requested by the target groups. While by 1996, the critical rhetoric coming from MCC leaders had been toned down under the new Director of Kanadier Concerns, Anton Enns, the basic program remained the same.

In contrast, some individuals from MCC Canada sometimes have been sensitive and understanding towards the Old Colony group. In 1977, after a trip to Mexico, William Janzen79 recognized that right might not be completely on the side of the "conference churches." He appeared to recognize the possible validity of the Old Colony commitment to living physically separately from the world, tracing the concept to the "... Old Testament concept of a chosen people separate from the world, to the New Testament teachings about the church and to the several centuries of recent history when Mennonites as a religious-ethnic group were isolated from the societies in which they lived."80 He discussed the Old Colony positions in a number of areas, including living in isolation, missionary and outreach work, humility, education, and leadership, and recognized that the "Conference Mennonites" did not necessarily hold the only truth.

MCC representatives have made numerous trips to Mexico in the last several decades
to study the situation there. Numerous reports were written, and workers, first cautiously and then boldly, were sent to work there. By 1996, progress was made in opening doors to some colony leaders. Distrust and a distance still existed though, as the perceived reconciliation between the two sides and the Old Colonists' acceptance of the outsiders has been exaggerated. People often have had the impression that acceptance was gained, only to discover later that it was not so. More than one person, who thought they had made inroads and gained acceptance with ministers and bishops, was later denounced from the pulpit or otherwise spoken or acted against. Politeness and hospitality on the part of the Old Colonists sometimes have been mistaken for agreement and acquiescence. How MCC projects are viewed by the Old Colony leadership also depends a lot on the people involved on both sides.

Old Colony leaders often have opposed MCC projects, but desensitization also has occurred, as the efforts of MCC, GCs, and others have been present for about fifty years. Old Colonists have received economic aid from the other Mennonites, sometimes at the request of the Old Colony people. Drought from 1948-1956 led to requests for aid from Mennonites in the United States and Canada. In 1981, MCC Canada lent money to help families in danger of losing their land at Monclova. In 1994, La Batea received help during a severe drought, and, in 1995, MCC planned to help meet emergency needs at Chavi and Nuevo Casas Grandes. In 1995, MCC offered to help some colonies' Armenkassen. In one case, where the colony did not want the money, MCC left $5,000 with them anyway. In numerous other cases, other Mennonites have given various types of help to the Mexican Mennonites. Some Old Colony leaders are positive about MCC's help. However, in 1996, the senior Manitoba colony bishop, while admitting that his people had received aid from MCC, said it had not done much good, not in a major way. While it has been valuable to individuals and colonies at times, MCC's overall aid has not been large when the total needs of the colonies are considered.

Old Colonists long have tried to avoid involvement with other Mennonite groups. Already in 1958, Old Colonists preferred donating money to the Red Cross, rather than to MCC, to avoid involvement with MCC. They feared MCC would try to influence or missionize them, and viewed other Mennonites as more of a threat than non-Mennonite groups, due to their similarity and consequent attraction for their members. In spite of need, the Old Colony sometimes forbade its members to accept relief grain gifts from other
Mennonite groups for fear of proselytization. Harassment by government and the dominant society is much more straightforward than dealing with other Mennonites.91

MCC has concentrated most of its efforts in Chihuahua state, where, in the 1990s they have two offices to deal with the Mexican Mennonites. The primary one is in the Manitoba colony and the other is in Nuevo Casas Grandes, serving the northern colonies.92 The Manitoba colony office is held by a Mexican Mennonite, as MCC is not allowed to own property in Mexico, being a foreign agency. From these offices, MCC workers make the rounds of many of the colonies, carrying out the plans of the Canadian KMCC.

Canadians Bill and Nora Janzen lived in the Cuauhtémoc area from 1992-1996 as the first Kanadier Concerns directors in Mexico. Their efforts to develop trust with the Old Colony met with some success. Educational change and improvement were priorities as Bill and his successor, Abe Peters, organized teacher training sessions, although the efforts were opposed by Bishop Loewen of the Manitoba Old Colony.93 MCC workers also helped set up Spanish classes in the Manitoba colony, which, in 1996, were held at MCC headquarters and in nine or ten villages.

Rosabel Fast was in Mexico from 1992 to 1995, developing educational curriculum and working with adult education. The readers she produced were not used in Old Colony schools, although they presumably were to be used by the Kleine Gemeinde whom Fast had also worked with. It was hoped that the Old Colony would use them in the future.

In 1995, Abe and Anne Peters of Manitoba began working in Mexico and took over the work there once the Janzens left. Abe Peters previously had been involved in Mexico when, in 1993, he investigated ways of modernizing the Mennonite milk industry.94

In 1995, MCC placed Daniel and Tina Penner and their eighteen and nineteen-year-old children, Denver and Erna, in Nuevo Casas Grandes. They have worked with the area Mennonites. Dan’s emphasis has been on community development work, including trying to start cooperatives in the colonies and to tailor farm production to new market possibilities in the United States under NAFTA. Cooperatives are seen as being able to create large blocks of products that can be marketed. By 1996, a cooperative was created in Las Virginias, whose first project was to start a grocery store. At first the church there told the people not to work with the cooperative but later the bishop did cooperate. The Penners also operated the MCC office, bookstore, and library, and appeared to be gaining acceptance
among many of the people and leaders in the area colonies.  

MCC also has not ignored Durango colony, as many MCC workers have visited there. Abe Warkentin, after a 1992 visit, wrote to one of the colony members offering to explore land in Manitoba's Interlake area. He also was interested in: "... studying the economic viability of your colony, working out a plan of action and helping you implement same."  

MCC policy has been ambivalent towards the Mennonites in Mexico, partly due to the variety of individuals who have worked for the organization. Some supported the intrusions while some thought they went too far. William Janzen critically and accurately recognized that the basic mechanism used by the outsiders was to find an opening by making contact with the rebellious members of the community. Splits resulted as the presence of the outsiders "... forces everyone to choose sides -- either to go into the new or remain with the old. . . . People who were once known as rebellious and who were excommunicated for certain actions, can now get away with them after all. That the new church can accept such people implies a basic disrespect for the Old Colony church." Others have represented the contrasting opinion, that MCC and other Mennonite groups were justified in forcing their way into the colonies.  

While most groups are among the Old Colonists for purposes of evangelism, MCC has said they are there to help the conservative Mennonites with their various problems. Yet, in 1992, MCC representatives were involved with meetings of: "... the various North American mission board representatives and non-conference groups who either have workers or an interest and concern for the spiritual welfare of the conservative colony Mennonites in Latin America . . . ." Also, "The MCC Canada executive, at its May, 1992 meeting, encouraged the mission boards to further explore the possibility of a joint mission effort of mission boards and MCC." The KMCC, MB, EMMC, COM, EMC, and MCC met to discuss and begin coordinating their programs.  

In the 1990s, MCC has an aggressive, multipronged approach operating in the Mexican colonies. Mexico has experienced devaluation of the peso, exorbitant inflation and interest rates, the effects of free trade, and drought. In 1996, MCC placed a lot of hope in economic development plans for the colonies. There was talk of tripartite economic development involving MCC Canada, the Canadian-based Mennonite Foundation, and the Mennonite Credit Union in Mexico. It was hoped to raise the $250,000 needed in Canada.
Projects visualized were a feed mill near Durango, a cucumber and melon business near Casas Grandes, yogurt and ice cream production, greenhouses, and the conversion of corn fields to apple orchards. In addition to its efforts to bring changes to the Mexican Mennonite economy, MCC is also working on changes in the areas of religion, education, and culture. They also appear to understand the dynamics of change in the colonies well, including the effect of internal splits.

Another group, the Mennonite Brethren, and their Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS), came to Mexico in 1950 when they bought land near the Durango colony. Colony leaders and Mexican law opposed the Mennonite Brethren efforts, and a Bible school was forced to close. A nurse also worked with medical needs. In 1973, the MBs moved from near the Durango colony into the colony itself, opening a school and church there. By 1979, there were at least five missionaries in the area. They found a receptive audience among the excommunicated, of whom some were said to be accepting salvation. Displeased Old Colony leaders said: “... the M.B.’s were not acting in accordance with God’s Word in taking people into their fellowship who were in the process of being disciplined by the church (OC).” In 1980, it was noted that: “The missionaries at Nuevo Ideal seem to feel the opposition of the Old Colony church sharply.”

Inroads were relatively small though, partly due to the relative liberality of the MBs, and in the 1980s they gave their church and school over to the more conservative Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. The EMMC church came to Mexico after some Mexican Mennonites, in Ontario to work, became involved with it. The EMMC, formerly the Rudnerweider Mennonite Church, originated in 1937 because of an “... evangelistic revival that split the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church in Manitoba ...”. Being Kanadier Mennonites, they felt closely related to other Kanadier Mennonites, including the Old Colony group, and felt a duty to evangelize other Kanadier Mennonites. EMMC churches in Mexico were made up mainly of excommunicated Old Colony people, excommunicated either before or after beginning to attend that church. In addition to their presence at Durango, the EMMC started a church and school at Campo 79 near Cuauhtémoc.

After decades of MB and EMMC efforts at Durango, their progress was small compared to the progress the Kleine Gemeinde made there in 1996. Some Old Colony leaders objected to what they thought were EMMC and Kleine Gemeinde tactics of using
vehicles and rubber tires to attract members,\textsuperscript{113} as those attending these other groups were allowed to use these items.

Other Mennonite groups also are present in Mexico. In 1978, the Kentucky-based Mennonitische Gemeinschaft started a mission and school on the Manitoba Colony. They have used Canadian teachers.\textsuperscript{114} They also are known as the Paul Landis Fellowship. While their roots were in the Mexican Kleine Gemeinde and the Manitoba EMC, in the early 1980s most of their personnel came from Ontario. The Canadian Evangelical Mission Conference (EMC) has had a mission presence near Los Jagueyes colony and a school on the Nord Colony. The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, or Holdeman, came to Mexico in 1927, from Oklahoma. Their work had been more successful among the Mexicans, and their clinic at Campo 45 was closed by the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{115}

The United States Amish also have had contact with the Mexican colonies. They helped the struggling Yermo colony with a loan in the 1950s,\textsuperscript{116} and recently lent money to Buenos Aires colony to finance a daughter colony in Campeche. In 1995, eight Amish participated in an MCC-sponsored tour of the colonies, where they were welcomed. The Amish encouraged them to teach Spanish in their schools, to upgrade their education system, and to take advantage of tourism possibilities by advertising for tourists and selling items to them.\textsuperscript{117} Some Mennonites from Mexico in turn visited the Amish, along with MCC workers. MCC seems to think that the Old Colonists can learn from the Amish. Old Colonists are fascinated by how the Amish have kept their traditions and still have been able to make a living in the modern world.\textsuperscript{118}

There also are numerous non-Mennonite church groups present in the colonies. The Canadian Gemeinde Gottes, which had contact with the Mennonites from Mexico in the Aylmer, Ontario area, set up a church and school on the Swift Current colony\textsuperscript{119} and a church along the four-lane highway south of Rubio.\textsuperscript{120} There also is a First Christian Pentecostal Church at Campo 6 ½ of the Manitoba colony, begun by Americans but now operated by a Mexican pastor. Seventh Day Adventists, who had a clinic and church in Cuauhtémoc, also bought land in the Swift Current colony for a church and school. Mormon missionaries also were active in the colonies, but without much success.\textsuperscript{121}

The Old Colony lost many members to other groups when leaders decided new migrations were necessary to escape seemingly inevitable change. Those who were unwilling
or unable to participate in these migrations were abandoned. This made it easy for the other
churches to come in, and they usually have done so.

While often the new church groups have been the more liberal evangelical groups, the
conservative Reinländer from Manitoba, Canada also are present in the Swift Current and
Santa Rita colonies. In 1974, when the Old Colony leaders from the Swift Current colony
left for Bolivia, largely over the issue of vehicles, some Old Colonists in the Swift Current
colony asked the Old Colony church from the Manitoba colony to come in. They refused,
as they did not want to allow cars. The Swift Current people then turned to the Reinländer
from Manitoba, Canada, who did come there.

After most Santa Rita Old Colony leaders moved to Bolivia in 1967, the Manitoba
colony Old Colonists reorganized the church there, but the new leadership and their
supporters also left for Bolivia in 1980, again leaving the colony without leadership. The
former Old Colonists in Santa Rita then invited the Reinländer from Swift Current colony
into their colony. The Reinländer also spread to Buena Vista in the Nuevo Casas Grandes
area. The Reinländer are quite similar to the Old Colony group that is left in the
Cuauhtémoc area, largely because the Old Colonists in that area have changed a lot.

In other cases too, the Old Colony group has lost its people due to neglect or by
leaving. In the case of Yermo, the Manitoba Old Colony leaders had stopped looking after
the Yermo people's spiritual needs, allowing the Kleine Gemeinde to step in. At Monclova,
a mixed Sommerfelder and Old Colony community, the Old Colony did not look after its
people either, leaving them to the Sommerfelder.

Die Mennonitische Post and other MCC-sponsored newspapers already have been
mentioned as powerful tools used by Canadian Mennonites to influence the Old Colonists.
Other efforts also have been made to bring change by using various media.

An independent newspaper, the Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, appeared in 1992
with Abram Siemens as the editor. It was distributed in the Casas Grandes, Durango,
Zacatecas, Campeche, Tamaulipas, and Cuauhtémoc areas, as well as in Ontario, Manitoba,
and Alberta. Siemens, a Paraguayan Mennonite, university educated in Canada, has been
concerned with educating the people and has seen the newspaper, and the radio program that
he hosts, as tools to change attitudes towards education.

Radio is another medium used by the outsiders to reach the conservative colonies, in
spite of the Old Colony prohibition against radios. While of questionable legality in Mexico in the past, religious broadcasting generally passed as cultural broadcasting. Many organizations, mostly Mennonite, have provided the conservative Mennonites with High German and Low German radio broadcasts since the early 1960s. More recently, in the 1980s, Carsten Brandt had a radio program. George Reimer, for a time, also had a twice weekly Low German and High German radio broadcast in the Cuauhtémoc area. By 1989, Abram Siemens, began broadcasting from Cuauhtémoc what became a six night a week German language program. Other programs, with other hosts, also have aired in the 1990s, filling the northern Mexican air waves with German programs in the mornings and evenings. Radio programming has included advertising, announcements, music, and religious programming from Canada.

Old Colonist prohibitions on radio use have not prevented the broadcasters from providing the radio programs. In spite of some interest in becoming involved in radio programming for the Mennonites in Mexico, MCC is not directly involved in this, but has left radio broadcasting to the individual churches.

A number of bookstores also have operated in the Cuauhtémoc area. With the exception of one at Lowe Farm, supported by the Old Colony, they were begun by non-Old Colony people as part of their program of change, and often have provided a much larger range of reading and educational materials than allowed by the Old Colony. The General Conference operated a bookstore in Cuauhtémoc until 1982 when the books were transferred to Die Mennonitische Post, which also has sold books in Mexico. In the 1990s, there was a Mennonite bookstore in Cuauhtémoc. Lending libraries also have been located in bookstores and at the MCC offices.

George Reimer, who no longer works for MCC, has been described as the MCC worker who would not go home. He and several coworkers continue a strong crusade to educate and influence the conservative Mennonites of Mexico, selling books and educational materials at Strassbourg Platz in the Manitoba colony, and distributing these also to other colonies.

Cassette audio tapes have been used to influence and educate colony Mennonites since the early 1980s. While tape players were often not approved of, many people used them, and large selections of religious tapes have been available for sale in bookstores and
elsewhere. Portions of the New Testament are also available on tape in Low German.

Some have thought the traditional family-centred care did not meet the needs of some people. Non-Old Colony Mennonites consequently created facilities for the aged and the handicapped in the Manitoba colony. A home for older people, the *Altenheim*, was opened in 1986.\(^{138}\) By 1996, after several additions were built, it was to have a capacity of sixty people.\(^ {139}\) In 1982, a short-lived MCC program working with handicapped persons failed, partly due to opposition from the Old Colony.\(^ {140}\) MCC also was involved in talks that led to the establishment of a home for the handicapped, without Old Colony support. On March 21, 1993, the *Hoffnungsheim*, a home for the handicapped, was opened near the *Altenheim* in the Manitoba colony.\(^ {141}\)

The Mennonite Hilfskomitee has been involved with the efforts to build facilities in the Cuauhtemoc area. It has become a unifying force and has been somewhat effective in combatting the disunity and lack of cooperation that is so common in the area. Although in 1996 there were some Old Colony representatives included in the committee,\(^ {142}\) the new “unity” generally has moved in the direction preferred by the more liberal churches.

The efforts by other Mennonites to bring change to the Old Colony life in Mexico have been varied and persistent. A number of times, outsiders have been expelled or forced from Mexico,\(^ {143}\) and their documentation problems continue in the 1990s.\(^ {144}\) Repeatedly renewed visitors’ visas have been used by some to allow extended stays in Mexico. For much of their time in Mexico, continuing into the 1990s, some individuals and organizations were not legally or officially there.

These efforts have seen many dedicated volunteers over the years. Many positions were temporary voluntary service positions, and some workers have not had sympathy for, or an understanding of, the Old Colony and Mexican cultures. While some developed trust with the Old Colony people, the trust built up could be quickly destroyed by a successor. Staff turnover also has hurt their credibility, as most did not stay long. Few publicly questioned what they were doing there, appearing sure that they were right and that the Old Colonists were wrong.

The Old Colony leadership has tried to control land ownership by not allowing individual titles, but the continuous pressures have taken large areas of the colonies, and in some cases the whole colonies, out of their control. When they lost a landowning member
to one of the other churches, they also lost control of the land. The Old Colony group has resorted to legal measures and appeals to the Mexican authorities for protection. While numerous incidents of resistance have been reported,\textsuperscript{145} when the pressures appeared to be irresistible, many moved on to other colonies.

In spite of movement to the new churches, great loyalty is evident to the Old Colony church and society among some who left. Many left reluctantly, with feelings of sorrow and guilt. Even some who would not consider being part of that church again have staunchly defended some aspects of Old Colony society, and some have guarded the Old Colony group, scrutinizing and discouraging researchers from approaching it. Cooperation also can be withheld in giving information about the group. Many, who no longer are Old Colony members, are still partly Old Colonists in spirit, as this is also a cultural and ethnic group.

The Old Colony leadership thinks of those who have left as lost, and as having gone the way of the world. Looking at this from another perspective, this does not appear to be so. Probably the vast majority of those who leave the Old Colony join, or at least attend, another Mennonite church, with most having been attracted to other conservative Mennonite churches. This phenomenon has been described by Leo Driedger as the Anabaptist Identification Ladder, an escape route protecting conservative Mennonites from assimilation.\textsuperscript{146} Driedger has said that the Old Colonists may look on more urban Mennonites “... as a group which provides alternatives for their deviants.”\textsuperscript{147} Whether or not the Mexican Old Colonists recognize or approve of the connection, in practise the “ladder” is there and works. It also is a threat though as it lures many from the Old Colony fold by offering them a comfortable and relatively familiar alternative.

In 1981, it was estimated that of the 41,000 Kanadier Mennonites in Mexico, about 80 percent were Old Colonists, while the rest were with other groups.\textsuperscript{148} In the 1990s, the Old Colony still counted a large majority of the Mexican Mennonites as its followers, even in the Cuauhtémoc area.\textsuperscript{149} However, many of the remaining Old Colonists were no longer solidly part of the group. The leaders could not enforce discipline to the extent that they wanted, and could not roll back changes, without the loss of many more adherents.

Other churches have had many effects on the conservative Mennonites. Their presence is largely responsible for chronic disunity in the Old Colony group,\textsuperscript{150} and has helped disrupt the dream the Old Colonists had when they left Canada to the extent that many
Old Colony people have fled further yet. They also have helped reduce the Old Colony leadership’s power and control. The two sides disagree about whether these are positive developments or not. Disagreement also exists about whether the increasingly capitalistic and individualistic economic system brought by the outside groups is an improvement over the old system. While the primary stated justification of the outsiders for interference in the colonies was their mandate to spread the gospel, in practice they also have tried to a large extent to remake Old Colony society into the image of Canadian Mennonite society, rejecting the concept of closed colonies separate from the world. While this intervention has been welcomed by many, it has meant that the traditional Old Colony society could not continue as it had before.
Another major determinant of Old Colony history in Mexico has been movement to Canada, both temporary and permanent. While this often has been viewed as a symptom of the various problems already described in the Mexican colonies, contact with Canada also has become a long term contributing factor to the breakdown of the Old Colony system in Mexico. The primary reasons for the movement to Canada have been Canada’s favourable immigration policies, Canada’s high standard of living, care offered by Mennonites in Canada, and economic and population pressures in Mexico.

In 1969, Redekop estimated that about 18 percent of each generation returned to Canada. By 1977, up to 1,500 Mexican Mennonites entered Canada per year, and between 1962 and 1982, up to 12,000 Old Colony people returned to Canada. By 1996, the number of Mennonites from Mexico in Canada was said to be “at least 35,000...”

Most movement back to Canada before 1950 was permanent. Sawatzky estimated that about 20 percent of those who migrated to Mexico returned to Canada by 1940. Durango colony had fewer early returnees than did the Chihuahua colonies, partly because the poor in the northern colonies had come partially at community expense and had little stake in the venture, whereas Durango colony had not assisted its members to move, and, on the average, those who came were likely more dedicated. Some left as early as 1923, and by 1927 two or three good sized groups left Chihuahua for Canada.

A mass return also was contemplated. In the mid 1930s, a delegation was sent to Canada to look for settlement opportunities, and: “In the fall of 1935, Bishops Isaak M. Dyck and Jacob Peters, with 13 ministers and 3 laymen, were consulting by mail with their former lawyers in Morden about a return to ‘the old beloved fatherland Canada.’” They asked for their own private schools and exemption from military service, and Bishop Jacob Abrams petitioned Ottawa, with six conditions for their return. They bargained, not as from a position of weakness, but as if they could set the terms for their return.

A promising destination for a mass return was Quebec, where there were settlement
opportunities in the Abitibi region. No agreement on educational concessions was reached with the government of Quebec though. Again in 1937, attempts were made to return to Canada but no mass exodus took place. Throughout this time, a trickle of people returned to Canada, although some encountered difficulties due to the Canadian immigration laws. Many returnees, after only a short stay in Mexico, readjusted to life in Canada reasonably well, and some returned to former Old Colony communities in Canada.

Canadian Mennonites also tried to help with the return. In 1939, Rev. David Toews, Chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, submitted a list to the Canadian authorities of about thirty-five families who wanted to return to Canada.

A popular destination in the 1930s and 1940s, for those still dedicated to the Old Colony ideals, was the La Crete and Buffalo Head Prairie area of northern Alberta, where isolation and the absence of public schools attracted many. Later, they had to choose between leaving or having their communities disintegrate, largely due to the presence of other Mennonite groups who followed them. Some moved to British Honduras between 1958 and 1962, and others to Bolivia in 1969 and 1970, "... driven to this extreme action, in part at least, by the missionary activities of other Canadian Mennonites."

With the outbreak of war in 1939, some who had returned to Canada again left for Mexico, as they did not trust their military exemption and also wanted to avoid the war issue in Canada. The movement to Canada did not stop completely though even then.

Migration to Canada increased greatly in the 1950s, as many left for Canada in the drought years after 1950. By June of 1954, about 514 families returned from Mexico, of whom one hundred families returned to Manitoba and fifty to Saskatchewan. British Columbia was a particularly favoured destination, and a source of difficulties, including at the border. In 1954, families from Mexico were at Yarrow, Abbotsford, and Burns Lake where they worked as migrant farm labourers, and others went to the Fort St. John area of British Colombia. Many arrived at the Canadian border, poor, sick, and without proper documents. An immigration official described those going to Burns Lake as "... a poverty stricken lot, and some of them are living under very poor and unsanitary conditions in that area." The existing Mennonite community in the Fraser Valley and others were concerned about these immigrants. The official wrote: "... any substantial movement of these people into the areas mentioned should be discouraged ..."
In 1954, the Cuauhtémoc area received heavy rains, ending the drought that had added to the migration. Later, “Local hostility and competition from other immigrants, mainly from India and Asia, made British Colombia less attractive to the Mexican Mennonites after 1956.”

New permanent settlements also were attempted elsewhere in Canada. A settlement begun at Matheson, Ontario in 1957, met with various difficulties and dissolved partly due to internal dissension, and in the early 1960s, a settlement at Fort Francis, Ontario, failed to thrive. A settlement founded in the remote Rainy River area of north western Ontario survived with help from the Mennonite Assistance Agency, created for that purpose. This settlement was the last attempt at a group settlement in Canada for the Old Colony.

A characteristic of the migration since the 1950s has been its mixed seasonal and permanent nature, as opposed to the earlier predominantly permanent migration. Through the seasonal migration, Canadian influences have been carried into the Mexican colonies. The primary destinations of this second phase of migration have been Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta. Few have gone to Saskatchewan, largely due to its mechanized agriculture.

The migration to Ontario began in 1952 with a few families. In 1954, about fifty-five people from five families arrived in a three-ton truck, to take advantage of Ontario’s seasonal agricultural work. The first migrants came to the Port Rowan area, near Lake Erie in southern Ontario, where Russlander Mennonites employed them in row crop work. By the 1960s, the destination area included Port Rowan, Port Burwell, Aylmer, Fairground, Walsingham, St. Thomas, Mt. Salem, Leamington, Wheatley, and Chatham and beyond. Many worked seasonally in Canada, returning to Mexico for the winter.

The late sixties and early seventies saw the migration to Ontario grow, as Ontario recruited foreign harvest workers, and by 1977, about 8,000 had come to Ontario since the mid 1950s. Beginning in 1974, the entry of some was blocked as temporary labour importation policies favoured adult Mexican Nationals with Mexican federal passports, which many Mennonites did not have. In 1978, the numbers entering also were reduced, largely due to Canadian restrictions on immigration. Many potential Canadian citizens had not been registered by the age of two years, and until the government agreed to overlook this shortcoming, the numbers of new immigrants declined significantly.

In the 1990s, it was estimated that 250 new families per year were moving into
southern Ontario.\textsuperscript{34} With an average of six children per family,\textsuperscript{35} this meant 2,000 persons per year, not including the population expansion of those already there. New families were defined as those who had not lived in Canada during the last ten years. In addition, many others repeatedly spent their summers in Canada and their winters in Mexico.

By December of 1990, it was estimated that 17,000 to 20,000 Mexican Mennonites were living in Ontario,\textsuperscript{36} and in 1996, the total was estimated to be 25,050, although some Old Colony church officials felt this total might be low.\textsuperscript{37} A 1992 survey showed that, of those surveyed, 92.5 percent had Canadian status.\textsuperscript{38}

The Chihuahua colonies have been the source of the bulk of the recent migration. MCC figures show that for the years 1993 to 1996, of new families seen in Ontario, 657 were from Chihuahua, 146 from Durango, forty-nine from Zacatecas, twenty from Tamaulipas, two from Coahuila, and two from Campeche.\textsuperscript{39}

For many decades, Manitoba has been one of the main destinations for the Mexican Mennonites, as well as the home of many other Mennonites. Winnipeg has the offices of MCC Canada as well as many other Mennonite institutions and offices, and Steinbach is the home of \textit{Die Mennonitische Post} and \textit{Das Blatt}. Since the 1920s, southern Manitoba has provided a welcoming home for many immigrants, as many there shared the language and heritage of the Mexican Mennonites.

As with the movement to Ontario, the movement to Manitoba has been disorganized, although efforts were made to bring about organized migrations. MCC was involved in looking at plans for a large scale migration to northern Manitoba in 1977.\textsuperscript{40} This possibly was because Mennonites from Mexico were facing possible deportation at Seminole, Texas at that time. Premier Schreyer of Manitoba, considering them to be desirable immigrants, wrote to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau asking that the Canadian Government invite these Mennonites to Manitoba.\textsuperscript{41} Also, in 1992, Abe Warkentin, KMCC Director, after a visit to Durango, wrote to one of the colonists offering to explore land in the Interlake area of Manitoba,\textsuperscript{42} but nothing came of this.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Manitoba was a popular destination because of work in the sugar beet fields, but later on fewer went to Manitoba and more to Ontario. By the 1980s, immigration from Mexico to Manitoba again rose greatly. The total influx from 1986 to 1991 was estimated at more than 1,700, although the numbers dropped sharply in
This drop was likely due to a lack of employment in Manitoba and an improved economic situation in Mexico. In 1988, only about one-quarter of those who came to Manitoba obtained well-paying employment, as Manitoba was hit by a drought, which resulted in a work shortage and layoffs. More families began to choose Alberta and Ontario as destinations. Although by 1989 economic and employment conditions in Manitoba again improved, levels of immigration remained lower than before. A rise in immigration, although not to the previously high level, again occurred by 1996, when sixty or more new families from Mexico were seen by Manitoba MCC workers.

In the mid 1980s, many came from the Swift Current colony after the leadership left for Bolivia, and more recently, most coming to Manitoba were from the Manitoba and Swift Current colonies. Few came from Tamaulipas or Campeche, and most from Durango went to Ontario. Seasonal workers, in the 1990s, are less likely to go to Manitoba than to Ontario or Alberta, but Manitoba has seen a higher proportion of permanent migration.

Although Winkler long was a popular destination, high housing costs there have pushed immigrants into surrounding areas. The Reinland School Division in the Altona area and the Morris McDonald School Division are both more rural and have lower housing costs, and may have higher numbers of Mexican Mennonites than does Winkler.

Alberta has become the third major Canadian destination for the Mennonites from Mexico. Not many went to southern Alberta early on as the federal government brought Natives to work in the sugar beet industry there, but by the 1970s, more were going there. Alberta increasingly became a destination in the 1980s and 1990s as work shortages occurred elsewhere, although the Alberta labour market has not been stable either. By June 1993, MCC estimated that there were 500 families in the area, which could have meant about 3,000 people. About 200 families had been there for five years or more. It was thought that more than 90 percent of the Kanadier were Canadian citizens, and that the rest were sponsored by family members. From 1994 to 1996, MCC dealt with about 450 new families, and by 1996, there were about 1,200 families in Alberta from Mexico. Many of these were young, small families. Most were in the Vauxhall, Taber, and Grassy Lake areas of southern Alberta, although some had moved to scattered spots in Alberta. Seven families were also placed in Saskatchewan from Alberta in 1996.

The Mexican Mennonites in Alberta came directly from Mexico or indirectly via
Manitoba or Ontario. In the early 1990s, the immigrants came mostly from Nord Colony and Ontario,\(^5\) and in 1996 many of the recent immigrants were Reinländer from the Santa Rita colony, although some came from Zacatecas, the Casas Grandes area, and Durango.

The total number of Mexican Mennonites in Canada is estimated at 35,000. If 25,000 are in Ontario, that leaves 10,000 for Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Colombia, which is realistic. Most of these live in Canada permanently, although some, along with new additions every year, do move back and forth between the two countries.

Mexican Mennonites, in all three provinces, have been slow to blend with the Canadian environment. Many have been attracted to conservative churches, including the Canadian Old Colony church, which is not the same Old Colony church the immigrants knew in Mexico. Church control of the people is much less in Canada.\(^5\) They also have Sunday School for the children.\(^5\) The Canadian Old Colony church, organized in 1936, is made up of some who never went to Mexico and some who returned to Canada. It has not accepted excommunicated members from Mexico until they settled matters with the church in Mexico. To do that, they often needed to return to Mexico and promise to stay there, even if they intended not to. Efforts made by the Canadian church, to build connections with the Old Colony church in Mexico, had not led to any official connection by 1996.\(^5\)

Old Colony ministers came to Ontario from Saskatchewan and Manitoba in the 1950s, to minister to the immigrants. Their first ministerial election in Ontario was held in 1960.\(^5\) By 1995, there were eight congregations,\(^5\) with 2,536 members and a total of 5,824 persons.\(^5\) Thousands more also have had contact with the Canadian Old Colony church.

Also present in Ontario is the EMMC, who by 1996 had six churches in the area. The EMC also founded several churches in Ontario.\(^5\) The Reinland Mennonite Fellowship had three churches,\(^6\) and there were three New Reinländer churches, conservative churches who split from the Canadian Old Colony in 1984.\(^6\) Other churches included two Christian Gospel Mennonite, one Sommerfelder, one Old Sommerfelder,\(^6\) and a Conservative Mennonite Fellowship group.\(^6\) The Gemeinde Gottes also had a church in the area. The more liberal General Conference and Mennonite Brethren groups tried working with the Mennonites from Mexico, but did not attract many in the early days.\(^6\)

By the early 1990s, of the several thousand Mexican Mennonites in Winkler, only a few hundred were church members there. They mainly joined the conservative Reinländer,
Old Colony, and Zion Mennonite churches. In Alberta, the La Crete Old Colony recently began a church in Vauxhall. Other churches attended included the Sommerfelder, Kleine Gemeinde, EMC, General Conference, and Mennonite Brethren. The Interlake Mennonite Fellowship also founded a school and church in the Grassy Lake area some years ago.

Complaints about a lack of church attendance among the immigrants from Mexico have been heard in many areas. In Ontario, in 1996, it was estimated that one-third attended regularly, one-third attended part time, and one-third did not attend church at all. It is likely that the promise many made at their baptism, not to leave the Old Colony church, has played a part in not attending other churches. Part of the reason for the low attendance also has been that many were excommunicated, therefore believing that they were barred from entry to heaven and could not attend church until the excommunication was lifted. Another barrier to church attendance has been a difference in permitted behaviours, as most churches use musical instruments and the women cut their hair and do not wear head coverings. Possibly the largest reason though has been that many do not want to go to church, as church attendance also has been poor in Mexico.

All three provinces have seen summer gatherings of the Mennonites from Latin America called Kanadiertreffen, first begun in Manitoba in 1989. These have served as an opportunity for the immigrants to meet as a group.

Even though the immigrants left the conservative Mexican colonies behind, they have not embraced Canadian life completely. They still have wanted to maintain their separate culture, to a point. Immigrant parents have been particularly concerned about negative and assimilating effects of the public schools, and the banning of prayers and religious instruction in schools also has caused objections to the public schools. Ontario has seen the greatest development of alternatives.

Beginning in the 1970s, the Old Colony and EMMC conducted Saturday German school in their churches, and for years they discussed opening private schools, made quite easy by Ontario law. In 1988, the Old Colony church at Dresden started a home schooling program, and by 1996 six Old Colony schools in southern Ontario offered kindergarten to grade twelve. Although most teachers were not qualified, the schools had to meet government standards. They received no government funding, relying on tuition fees for their funding. The Christian Light Education curriculum, prepared by conservative Virginia
Mennonites, was used for the most part. The EMC also started a school at Mount Salem in about 1976, and the Conservative Mennonite Conference started a school at Calton in 1984. In Alberta, by 1994, one private school had been founded "... by and for the Mexican Mennonites."

Many severe attendance and academic retardation problems have been seen in public schools in all three provinces. In Ontario, truancy officials went to the fields to find absent children. In December, once the field work was over, large numbers arrived at school, only to leave for Mexico in January. Many did not go beyond grade eight, and some parents obtained work permits so children could leave school before the legal age. A 1992 Ontario survey showed that about one-third of the school age children had not attended school in Canada. One-third of the parents did "... not believe in secondary school education," and another one-fifth were "... unsure of the value of high school.

The Ontario public school system has catered to the newcomers, attracting them by hiring a Low German speaking attendance counsellor, by using a seasonal harvest leave program, and by offering numerous vocational programs designed to keep the Mennonites in school after grade eight. Some successes have occurred and progress has been made.

In Manitoba, efforts also have been made to make education friendly. Many teachers, Mennonites themselves, speak Low German, and liaison workers have replaced attendance officers to work with the parents of the children to help them understand the education program. Parents often have not supported the school system, fearing that education would contaminate their lives. Teen-aged girls generally have been willing to attend school, but many absenteeism problems have occurred with teen-aged boys. Many completed school in Mexico before being forced to again attend school in Canada.

Alberta, where MCC and the RCMP have enforced the school attendance laws, also has had school attendance problems. As elsewhere, parents often caused the problems.

The work done by the migrants has included tedious manual field work and other low paying jobs which many Canadians did not want. Over the years, the work changed somewhat, with changing crops and increasing mechanization. Some have worked as tradesmen and factory workers, particularly in southern Ontario and Manitoba where factories are common. Even when work was found, adults often did not value job security and stability in employment and residence, as these values seemed foreign to many. On the
other hand, many of those who permanently moved to Canada wanted to own their own farms or other businesses, and many achieved this goal, soon doing well. Their opposition to working on Sundays or religious holidays has caused problems for them, and some have lost jobs over this while others have given in and worked when asked to.

Pay for field work once was poor, and farm workers often were not protected by federal or provincial labour codes. Most Mennonites from Mexico also were not protected in the areas of adequate housing, pay, and treatment, unlike some foreign seasonal workers. Minimum wage laws only began to apply to Ontario farm workers in 1975.

By the 1990s, wages were quite good. In 1996, a father, mother, and five children aged fifteen and older, in Canada for the fifth summer, worked for seven or eight dollars an hour. Working about fifty-five hours a week, they could earn $10,000 a month.

Child labour has been an issue, as children as young as six years of age worked long days in the fields. Child labour laws have not applied to agriculture. In 1973, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, Robert Andras, spoke about the exploitation of children where only the father was paid. Some or all of the children’s pay usually has gone to their father until they were twenty years of age or married. A 1979 Immigration report said that farmers preferred hiring family units: “A cucumber picking machine, for example, holds six people and less problems are encountered when everyone on the machine is from one family. The extra children walk behind the machine to pick up the falling vegetables.”

Language, education, and literacy problems have existed in all three provinces, and a large variety of programs have been offered to adults for several decades. Ontario especially has had numerous programs designed to teach adults English. Illiteracy has been common, and in spite of good aptitude in various trades, certification has been difficult due to language difficulties. Women have learned English the least, as they often have spent more time at home and less in the surrounding environment.

It has been possible for some Mexican Mennonites to live in southern Manitoba and learn almost no English, as the men often worked for Mennonite employers and the women often stayed home. Many of the better jobs though have required a knowledge of English. While both men and women took part in various English classes offered, many felt education was not good and that they were not able to learn. In Alberta, some English as Second Language programs were offered, although funding was cut in 1996.
Inadequate housing has been common, particularly in Ontario, where some lived year round in poor housing, including in bunkhouses designed for seasonal use, refurbished tobacco kilns, old school buses, and barns. Many houses were occupied by more than one family. Some were able to live in “rent-geared-to-income units” in Aylmer, where some units had up to six bedrooms to accommodate large families. Menno Lodge, a nonprofit organization that has worked with MCC, has helped provide housing for many.

In Manitoba, the availability of affordable housing may be more important than the availability of employment in choosing where to live. By 1996, housing was expensive in Winkler, but less so in the nearby Altona and Morris areas, causing many to move there.

Social problems have been encountered in all areas. The stereotypical image of Mexican Mennonites is that they are all on Employment Insurance. This is not completely unfounded as, in Alberta in 1996, an estimated 40 percent of the Mexican Mennonites lived from Employment Insurance during the winter. Very few were on welfare, except for some who couldn’t work due to health problems or who had not worked long enough to collect Employment Insurance. While many immigrants relied on aid programs for part of the year initially, in time, most worked at full-time employment.

The Mexican Mennonites’ use of social programs sometimes has been resented by Canadians, including other Mennonites. Sawatzky described the Mexican Mennonite as a peasant who viewed social programs as generous and paternalistic, and “If a bit of cunning should be involved in obtaining the maximum personal advantage from it, this too is a peasant trait.” Contrary to the stereotype of abuse, in 1975 Martens found that the Mennonites from Mexico considered taking welfare to be a disgrace and that most would “... take any kind of work rather than apply for welfare assistance.”

Poverty has been common in this group, whose plight has been compared to the migrant workers in John Steinbeck’s “Grapes of Wrath.” This received a lot of Ontario media attention in the 1990s. The situation was not new though, as, already in 1973, a Department of Manpower and Immigration report attacked farmers who hired Mennonite labourers “... for providing ‘intolerable and inhumane’ working conditions.” Ontario Mennonite farmers have been said to be among those exploiting the immigrants.

Some working with the immigrants have argued that social problems are not more common among these people than in the larger society. However, numbers for 1994 in
Ontario's Elgin County showed that, while Mennonites made up 9 percent of the county, they made up about 25 percent of Childrens Aid cases where foster care was needed.112 A counsellor blamed this partly on the use of corporal punishment, called for as a method of discipline by their religious beliefs. There also has been some sexual abuse and incest. Spousal abuse, possibly partly due to the patriarchal system where women are to be subservient, also was seen. An estimated 10 percent of families were counselled for adjustment issues.113

A Morden, Manitoba RCMP Corporal was roughly quoted as saying: "I am a Christian. The Bible speaks about heathens. These people from Mexico are again heathen."114 He estimated that 70 to 75 percent of RCMP problems and calls were related to the Mexican Mennonites. One social worker said: "These people are still children in a lot of ways."115 The Superintendent of the Garden Valley School Division in 1991, Elmer Bartel, pointed to the difference in values between Canada and Mexico. He noted that the Mexican macho attitudes had rubbed off on the Mexican Mennonites and said: "... rubber tires are taboo but drinking and infidelity are not dealt with... when they come here they find the direct opposite: conservative approach to machinery is not an issue but excessive drinking and immorality and sexual abuse are."116 The involvement of Mennonites from Mexico in drug smuggling also has hurt their image in Manitoba.

Many have thought the patriarchal church and family systems are dysfunctional. Some men may also have been threatened by the changing gender roles in their families, as women’s traditional roles changed in the Canadian society.117 In Alberta, one family, with sixteen children, left Canada after the father spent six months in jail for beating his wife and children. Abuse has been seen as connected with drinking. As elsewhere, alcoholism has been a problem, including among some teenagers and women.118 Abe Fehr estimated that only 5 percent or fewer of the arrivals in Alberta were problems though.

The Old Colony leaders and communities in Mexico or Canada do not condone spousal abuse, sexual abuse, or incest. Church and community norms condemn these practices. Neither do they support child abuse, as least not by their definition of child abuse. Corporal punishment of children appears to be widely accepted as a valid means of discipline. Complaints of abuse, other than those related to disciplining of children, often are in families that are dysfunctional by both Canadian and Old Colony standards.
In 1975, Martens thought that the most severe adjustment problems were in the area of health. She said: "Traditional attitudes towards doctors and dentists, birth control, immunization, prenatal care, child raising, and nutrition still prevail." A 1979 Department of Immigration report, possibly inaccurately, said there was frequent intermarriage in the group and that: "Many families have several children with cataracts, co-ordination problems, and the appearance of dull normal intelligence. . . . their ability to learn is limited and they apparently respond poorly to occupational training." Various people have noticed a lack of self-esteem among the Mexican Mennonites in Canada. This may be partly due to growing up in a society where pride is seen as a sin and also may be due to their minority presence in the dominant Canadian society.

Community feelings often have run against the Mennonites. One Ontario school official said: "We whites treat the Mexican Mennonites very well. . . . In another generation, they might be more like everyone else, although I don't think they will get rid of the fact that they are Mennonite." Some have opposed the special services provided to the immigrants in a language other than English, and someone changed the Aylmer population sign to: "Population 6,499 Mexicans, 1 Canadian." Other Mennonites also sometimes have resented the new arrivals. Martens noted that they ". . . with their variety of social problems seem to threaten the Russländer's reputation as quiet, law-abiding, and self-sufficient people. Perhaps for this reason some . . . do not appear too sympathetic . . ." The children have been in the front line of contact with Canadian society, facing social pressure to change many things, including their traditional clothing, while their parents often have held them back from changing. Living between the two worlds, with their conflicting values and expectations, can cause long-lasting adjustment problems for many Mexican Mennonites, adults and children.

In addition to the Mexican immigrants, Mennonites also have come to Canada from other Latin American countries, although many, and probably most, first moved to those countries from Mexico. These numbers are impossible to calculate.

The reasons for the movement to Canada after World War II have been mixed, with most falling into the categories of push and pull factors. Without the possibility of being able to enter Canada legally, as tens of thousands had Canadian citizenship or a claim to Canadian citizenship, most of the movement would not have taken place. The open border itself was not a pull factor though, as the immigration and citizenship policies of Canada only regulated
the flow created by other factors. These policies will be discussed further later on.

The primary push factor has been economic difficulties in Mexico. Landlessness has been a large part of this. While movement to Canada has been one solution to land shortages, there also have been the alternatives of migrating to other colonies and of finding alternate employment to farming.

Repeated droughts have added to the economic problems and to the migration. In 1995, it was reported that: "In many colonies . . . as many as half the families are packing up and heading north amid what are being called the worst conditions for farming since the Mennonites first set foot on this land in 1922." By 1996, about twenty to twenty-five families had gone to Canada from the small community of El Capulin in the two previous years. Even some who were well established considered leaving as conditions worsened.

The peso also repeatedly lost much of its purchasing power in the past decades, causing financial difficulties for many. Loans often needed to be repaid in American dollars, which was difficult with a devalued peso, and, as a result, some formerly well-off families joined the movement to Canada. Some who trusted the Waisenamt or Mexican banks with their money also lost heavily. Additionally, NAFTA reduced incomes by lowering crop prices to world market levels, and by removing subsidies on input costs.

Chronic poverty in Mexico certainly has been one of the primary motivations for the movement. Mexico is notorious for its low wages, with minimum wages below four dollars Canadian per day. Even employed people are often very poor. Once people have seen the living conditions in Canada, many have been dissatisfied with Mexico’s economic environment. The temptation to place all of the blame for the poverty on the colonies’ leadership should be resisted, as most of this was out of their control.

Not only the poor have moved to Canada, seasonally or permanently. Kelly Hedges recently said: "... only poor Old Colonists migrate seasonally to Canada." This statement is inaccurate, as some migrants were not poor or landless, but saw an opportunity to earn money to improve their situation in Mexico. One family, which worked in Ontario in 1996, owned 300 acres of good land and a large dairy herd in Mexico. Their earnings made their lives in Mexico easier. The presence of this type of family also was noticed earlier on. A 1992 survey showed that, of the survey population living in Canada, 14 percent still owned a farm or house in Mexico. Often the migrants have handled their time in Canada
efficiently, living as cheaply as possible, minimizing government deductions from their pay, and leaving when the work ended. Those who were in Canada for only a short time were exempted from Canadian income taxes. In 1996, one Durango resident said that almost all of the new buildings being built were built by people who had returned from Canada with money. Not only the destitute have gone to Canada, but many who were ambitious and saw a source of income in Canada also went.

An additional push factor for the movement to Canada has been dissatisfaction with the conservative churches and colonies in Mexico. Some objected to the colony rules and wanted greater control over their lives. One writer described the movement of some of the relatively affluent people as being related to the “antediluvian colony rules.”

In the past, many came to Canada because they were excommunicated and others were excommunicated because they came to Canada. When they returned to their colony in Mexico, they often had to clear up their “transgressions” with the Lehrdienst. Elder Dyck, of the Manitoba colony, described those who had returned to Canada as “... now sitting calmly in the lap of the world... can send their children to the public schools, come back to us as skilled car drivers, and what would be punishable in the congregation, they can all use...” The prohibitions against the movement have weakened though, and in 1996, one bishop, whose own son had moved to Canada, reluctantly said it was all right to go to Canada. Excommunication for moving to Canada has become rare.

In addition to the push factors in Mexico, many pull factors have existed in Canada. One powerful attraction has been Canada’s prosperity and wealth, including higher wages. These wages have allowed large families to earn substantial amounts of money during the agricultural season. The wages also have attracted young adults, single or married, who have arrived in Canada, often penniless, but with energy, optimism, and determination to succeed.

Another attraction to Canada has been its social programs, as the post World War II decades saw expanding social programs in Canada, while Mexico did not develop an effective social safety net. In Canada, large families collected substantial amounts of family allowance, although this required longer stays in Canada and school attendance. It was also legal to collect Canadian family allowance during winters spent “vacationing” in Mexico, as temporary absences of less than one year allowed them to collect the money.

Canada’s medical care also has been a powerful magnet. In 1996, one poverty-
stricken man, with a wife and six children less than twelve years of age, planned to move to Canada. He and the children were Canadian citizens but his wife was not. He had lost several fingers due to infections, apparently caused by chemicals used in apple production, and although other fingers were also seriously infected, he kept on working in the Mexican apple orchards with his heavily bandaged hands. His pay cheque was cut off, as he had not repaid money borrowed from his employer to pay for medical treatment for his wife. Canada was seen as a place where this family could obtain desperately needed relief from their life of poverty and disease in Mexico.142

The Old Age security programs also have been an attraction, as Mexico does not have an equivalent universal program, leaving many older persons in poverty. Some people, described as “old and worn out” have gone to Canada to live an easier life.143

One of the largest attractions has been created by other Mennonites in Canada. They have established a “net of care” for the immigrants.144 MCC has been the primary organization involved with the Mexican Mennonites in Canada.145 A soft landing has been provided for tens of thousands of immigrants by MCC and its programs.

The Kanadier Mennonite Colonization Committee, established by MCC in 1975,146 its predecessor the Mexico Concerns Committee,147 and its successor the Kanadier Mennonite Concerns Committee have directed MCC’s work with the Kanadier in Mexico and Canada. The KMCC and the provincial MCC committees which have worked with the Mennonites from Mexico have had heavy involvement from the conservative Mennonite groups. The final word on most things to do with their programs has rested with MCC though, which also has represented the more liberal groups.

While MCC policies tried not to encourage the Mennonites to return to Canada, indirectly their services became one of the reasons for the immigration. MCC workers paternalistically assumed, often rightly, that the immigrants could not care for their various needs in Canada, and MCC programs have gone a long way towards meeting these.

Canadian Mennonites not only were motivated by a desire to help the Mennonites from Mexico for the sake of helping those in need, but also were driven by a concern to minimize the damage done by the Mexican Mennonites to the Mennonite name in Canada. Canadian Mennonites, who were positive and productive members of Canadian society, found their good name threatened by the migrants.148 By looking after and minimizing the
adjustment problems in Canada, the damage to the Mennonite name likely was successfully lessened. Ironically, policies designed to ease problems the Mexican Mennonites were creating for the other Mennonites also added to the size of the movement to Canada.

Although MCC Canada once was responsible for work with the immigrants, this work later was transferred to the provincial MCC organizations. MCC Canada, particularly William Janzen of the Ottawa office, continued as an active advocate for the Mennonites from Mexico with the Canadian government. In 1987, MCC estimated they had dealt with 8,000 cases of regaining "Canadian legal status" over the previous twelve years.

MCC has actively helped the immigrants obtain Canadian documents, allowing them to stay in Canada. MCC policies often were contradictory about whether they should help those still in Mexico with documentation. With Canadian government encouragement, MCC personnel helped documentation agents in Mexico with their work. Conscious of the "pull" effect this could have, MCC spoke of efforts made to counter this, by supporting the Mexican colonies through its presence there. MCC also did not want to help seasonal workers migrate, but was willing to help those wanting to move to Canada permanently. The issue of whether and how MCC should be involved in documentation work was controversial, even within MCC, as some questioned MCC's involvement in this area.

An MCC worker in Mexico was one who thought that the documentation work in Canada "... encouraged people to think in terms of leaving Mexico rather than working hard to address the situation there." MCC workers have encouraged the Canadian government to provide better services to the Mennonites in Mexico, which also could have increased immigration. In 1976, an MCC representative was to "... resume discussions with the officials and to press further for the provision of better services, including the possibility of setting up a Consulate office near the colonies."

MCC has worked with the Mennonites from Mexico in all three provinces. In Ontario, MCC originally was involved when they brought relief aid to those who settled in the Kapuskasing, New Liskard, and Rainy River areas. The earliest program directed at helping the migrant workers came from the EMMC church in December 1965, with staff persons David and Helen Friesen. In 1973, the Aylmer Information and Self-Help Centre opened, staffed by the Friesens and others and partially financed by MCC Ontario. By 1975, the centre helped many, but because of EMMC involvement, Old Colony and
Sommerfelder leaders did not support it. The EMMC mission work was seen as being a threat to their "... traditional 'way of life' ..."159

The Ontario Mennonite Immigrant Assistance Committee (OMIAC) became the advisory committee to MCC for the work with the Mexican Mennonites in Ontario,160 with the involvement of churches including the Canadian Old Colony, EMMC, Sommerfelder, and EMC groups.161 In 1977, MCC hired David Friesen, largely to work with immigration documentation work.162 In the program proposal, William Janzen wrote: "... the self-help emphasis should be so strong that some of the workers might have worked themselves out of a job in two years."163 The two years soon passed though, and in 1982 Janzen wrote: "I would predict that if MCC withdrew from documentation work in Ontario, the situation would soon be very messy, fraught with illegalities. ... It would be a terrible situation!"164 MCC had become one of the major elements in the scene.

In 1980, David Friesen was succeeded by George Rempel, a former Old Colony teacher from Mexico, who remained as a worker there until 1990.165 Victor Fast began to work as the program development coordinator in 1988.166

A major expansion of MCC services to the immigrants in Ontario took place around 1987,167 and in addition to programs at Aylmer and Leamington, programs were introduced in Chatham, Langton, Virgil, Frogmore, St. Jacobs, and Seaforth. The three main locations used by MCC in 1996, to provide assistance, were Aylmer, Chatham, and Leamington.

Programs have included help with documentation, housing, education, counselling, job skills development, health promotion, and social services.168 It is estimated that, from 1977 to 1995, 9,000 applications for citizenship or landed immigrant status were handled by OMIAC personnel. They also handled about 16,000 other documentation services, dealing largely with various Canadian documents, 5,000 medical matters, 8,000 English as a Second Language students, and 4,000 dealings with social service agencies.169 Usually families did well by the time they were in Canada five years and no longer needed help.170

In Manitoba, before MCC involvement, various individuals worked on documentation matters for the Mennonites from Mexico, and Klassen Travel Service also did some of this work.171 However the demand for immigration work grew strongly during the 1980s as the numbers of immigrants without proper documentation increased.

MCC Manitoba began providing services to the immigrants in 1986 through MCC
Family Services in Winkler, where Bruce Wiebe was the program coordinator from 1986 to 1993. As the introduction of the MCC work coincided with a large growth in the movement from Mexico to Manitoba, by 1991, 16,000 people used the MCC services. Assistance was provided primarily with documentation, employment, financial matters, and in gaining access to social programs. MCC briefly expanded some services to Altona in the late 1980s. Funding ran out for the full program in Winkler by 1994, and the services were reduced. Services continued to be provided on a part-time basis only.

In Alberta, by 1970 or sooner, Rev. Jacob H. Reimer of Coaldale helped people with documentation work. With a rise in immigration, MCC Alberta organized a Kanadier Concerns Committee in 1991. Voluntary service staff members Abe and Kathy Fehr, themselves Mennonites from Mexico, were placed in Lethbridge in 1992 and since then have offered a wide range of services to the immigrants including documentation, orientation, employment placement, and education. Although the families who were in the area before MCC programs were in place managed to make it that far without MCC help, MCC workers also have performed many useful services since they became involved.

Using the various newspapers that reach the colonies, MCC workers have told people in Mexico that they should not come to Canada without having their documents in order, and have warned them of employment, housing, and other economic difficulties in Canada. MCC has tried to bring order to the movement and to prevent difficulties.

Without doubt though, MCC’s programs have added greatly to the movement to Canada. In addition to MCC’s services attracting some Mexican Mennonites to Canada, MCC workers advocated more generous immigration policies and smoothed relations between the immigrants and government officials. Without this, the generous extension of the time period for registering as Canadian citizens in 1977, and other things, might not have occurred. It is likely that, without MCC’s programs, thousands, and possibly tens of thousands, fewer Mennonites from Mexico would have moved permanently to Canada.

To a point, MCC involvement with the Mennonites from Mexico in Canada has been part of the same program of religious and cultural conversion carried out in the Mexican colonies by the Canadian Mennonites, as the same KMCC and many of the same individuals were involved with both programs. The involvement of conservative groups in delivering services to the Mennonites from Mexico, has helped legitimize MCC’s work. The staff
members who deal with the Old Colony have been carefully chosen. Almost without exception they are Low German speaking and in some cases of Old Colony background. However, none are active members of the Mexican Old Colony church.

It would be too cynical though to suggest that the primary reason for the MCC program in Canada was to bring cultural and religious change to the Mexican colonies. Without doubt, there was a genuine concern for the welfare of the arrivals in Canada, and much worthwhile work was done with the immigrants. There also was the desire to help the immigrants adjust to Canada quickly to spare the good name of other Canadian Mennonites. However, some have been aware that a side effect of their work was change in the Mexican colonies. Even if the migrants did not stay in Canada and returned to Mexico, that was not necessarily a failure, as they carried the seeds of discontent and change back to Mexico with them to the closed colonies.

The variety of push and pull factors that have contributed to the movement to Canada show that the blame for this movement cannot only be placed on the Mexican Old Colony leadership and on the Mexican economy. The reasons for it are much more varied.

The Canadian border has been surprisingly open, making movement to Canada an option for these people. However, this openness has been complicated by many obstacles. The laws permitting or prohibiting the Mennonites from reentering Canada have been complex, not always rational, and have changed frequently.

Under the Naturalization Act of 1914, a person born outside of Canada was a British subject, and in effect a Canadian citizen, if the father was Canadian and the parents were married at the time of the birth.\(^\text{179}\) Although this opened the door to Canada for many Mennonites born in Mexico, the greatest obstacle to a return to Canada came about because Canada did not consider Mennonite church marriages to be valid. Unless a civil marriage ceremony was performed before the child was born, the child had no claim to Canadian citizenship. The justification given by Canadian authorities was that Mexico did not recognize the Mennonite church weddings. This however overlooked the fact that Mexican law did consider these children to be legitimate if the parents had a civil ceremony even after the child was born. The Canadian government chose to follow the Mexican law only in as far as it removed the claim to citizenship. It appears that the Mennonites were long unaware of potential problems and thought their church marriages were valid, as the Privilegium
granted them freedom of religion and of managing their own colonies.

The validity of Mennonite church weddings already was an issue in 1936, when the Acting British Consul-General in Mexico City recommended that the Mennonite children should "... be recognized as British subjects." In 1937 the Deputy Minister of Justice however indicated that Mexican law would be followed, in as far as it did not recognize the Mennonite marriages, and, in his opinion, children born in Mexico of parents not legally married were not British subjects. By 1936, of the Durango colonists alone, there were eighty-nine marriages in Mexico, from which 280 persons had been born. The Canadian decision not to recognize the church marriages, thereby removing the citizenship claims of tens of thousands, would have serious ramifications for generations to come.

Under a new law that became effective January 1, 1947, no one born outside Canada was automatically a Canadian citizen. Persons born abroad to Canadian parents needed to be registered by the age of two years, and needed to apply for retention of citizenship between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-four or be resident in Canada on their twenty-fourth birthday in order to be Canadian citizens. Although the requirement for the parents' civil marriage ceremony was done away with for those born after this date, the matter was further complicated. If the father and mother were not legally married, but if the mother was a Canadian citizen, the child had a claim to be a "natural born Canadian." If the parents were legally married and the father only or both parents were Canadian citizens, the child also had a claim as a "natural born Canadian." If the parents were legally married, but only the mother was a Canadian citizen, the child was not a "natural born Canadian" but rather could become a "granted Canadian." This had implications for the child's future children, as the children of the "natural born Canadian" would have a claim to Canadian citizenship, while the children of the "granted Canadian" would have no claim. This created a situation where, if the parents were legally married but only the mother was a Canadian citizen, their children could only be "natural born Canadians" if the parents claimed not to be married. These and other complex rules have resulted in some irrational situations of eligibility and ineligibility for Canadian citizenship.

The Canadian government also seemingly forgot that they decided in the 1930s that Mennonite marriages in Mexico were not valid, and issued hundreds of Canadian citizenship papers to Mexican Mennonites, born before 1947, whose parents only had church
ceremonies. Later, in 1961, the Canadian Embassy in Mexico was told that they had misinterpreted the Act and citizenship papers issued in error should be recalled.\textsuperscript{185} As a result, many Canadian citizenship certificates were recovered. Still, in the 1990s, the lack of Mexican marriage certificates caused grief for many.

Both the Canadian government and MCC have claimed that Canadian officials did not know until the 1960s that Mennonite church marriage certificates were not considered valid by the Mexican government.\textsuperscript{186} In 1978, officials remembered that they had known of the invalidity of the marriage certificates in the 1930s, when a 1937 Ministry of Justice judgement ruled that children from such marriages were considered as illegitimate.\textsuperscript{187}

Numerous citizenship papers were cancelled, as the government became aware of them, sometimes more than twenty years after they were issued.\textsuperscript{188} MCC objected strongly to these cancellations but the government policy did not change. In 1989, a man, a citizen since 1956, had his citizenship recalled when an investigation into his wife’s application for citizenship showed he was born prior to his parents’ civil marriage. Similar cases were brought to the attention of the Minister of State, Gerry Weiner, by Ken Monteith, M.P. for Elgin.\textsuperscript{189} Weiner replied to Monteith: “... I cannot waive the requirements of the Citizenship Act on their behalf.”\textsuperscript{190} In a 1990 Ontario case, a grandfather had obtained Canadian citizenship in about 1953. His children also obtained citizenship and now his grandchildren’s applications were being processed, when it was discovered that their great-grandparents’ marriage was not a civil ceremony. Even though some family members had lived in Canada for some time, all of their citizenship certificates were invalid.\textsuperscript{191} The threat of losing Canadian citizenship still hangs over many Mennonites from Mexico.

This issue, and the grief resulting from it, could have been settled at any time had the Canadian government accepted Mennonite church marriages as valid. The arbitrary barriers to citizenship, the uncertainties, the splitting of families, the recalls of citizenship certificates, and the deportations that have resulted from this are difficult to justify.

Another problem came about because the 1947 Act required those born abroad to be registered by two years of age. Needless to say, numerous Mexican Mennonites were not registered. A clause allowed for a delayed registration period “... as the government might approve.”\textsuperscript{192} After a tightening of immigration laws in the 1970s, and some deportations, appeals were launched. After much grief, delayed registration was allowed,\textsuperscript{193} resulting in
perhaps 20,000 obtaining Canadian citizenship, greatly adding to the migration to Canada.\textsuperscript{194} This decision was crucial and set the pattern for later immigration policy.\textsuperscript{195}

William Janzen pointed out the fragile nature of the citizenship and immigration process when he wrote: "The people do not have ‘rights’ to these things. Thus it is very important to maintain good relations with the officials and to present the cases well!"\textsuperscript{196}

The law again changed in 1977. Those born after that date are “natural born Canadians” if one parent is a Canadian citizen, although the child needs to apply for retention of citizenship before the age of twenty-eight. If one of the parents was actually born in Canada, the registration for retention is not required. Also eliminated was the need for registration within two years of the birth and of being a resident of Canada by the age of twenty-four years.\textsuperscript{197} The 1977 law also allowed the children born in wedlock after 1947 of a Canadian mother and non-Canadian father to become Canadian citizens. If born out of wedlock to a Canadian father and a non-Canadian mother, or if born out of wedlock before 1947, even if both parents were Canadian, they still had no claim to citizenship.\textsuperscript{198}

The 1977 law also required that, if a citizen ceased to be a citizen, for example if they did not register for Canadian citizenship before their twenty-fourth birthday, landed immigrant status and a one year residence in Canada would be required for resumption of citizenship.\textsuperscript{199} Becoming a landed immigrant was “... an almost insurmountable problem,”\textsuperscript{200} for the Mennonites, as they needed to qualify under the point system. After MCC objected,\textsuperscript{201} from 1981 on some immigration requirements were waived, although they still needed to have a sponsor in Canada.

Thousands who could not enter Canada by right, as citizens, have entered as immigrants. The difference between falling into one category or the other usually simply was that one group had the proper paperwork and the other did not, as both groups were equally descended from the same group who left Canada in the 1920s.

In the 1990s, the immigrants can enter Canada under five categories. The first is the point system, which evaluates elements such as language, employment, and education. Almost no Mexican Mennonite has the points needed to qualify, as educated and skilled immigrants have been favoured.\textsuperscript{202} Another category which they usually do not qualify for is the entrepreneur class, which requires the applicant to have a substantial amount of money to invest in Canada. Neither does the humanitarian and compassionate class often apply,
unless possibly if an isolated family member is stranded in Mexico while the rest of the family is in Canada. The spousal category is commonly used by the Mennonites to enter Canada if one spouse is a “natural born Canadian,” who can then sponsor their spouse and children as landed immigrants. The family class category is also used, allowing those in Canada to sponsor family members, although siblings cannot sponsor siblings.

While many have arrived at the Canadian border without a claim for citizenship or landed immigrant status, they usually were allowed to enter anyway as tourists or visitors, even if they were honest about their intentions of working or remaining in Canada.203

Although applications for immigration to Canada usually were to be made from outside Canada, many Mennonites have left their paper work until they arrived in Canada. The MCC offices in Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta have helped many. Having the work done in Mexico meant paying a fee while MCC in Canada did the work free of charge, except for the government fees. This, and other services MCC offered in Canada, made MCC a “pull factor” for bringing the Mennonites to Canada. This has been recognized in both Canada and Mexico, and has resulted in some hostility towards MCC and its workers from those who, for various reasons, would rather see the people remain in Mexico.204

Fees charged by the Canadian authorities have been high. In 1996, the fee for an adult obtaining landed immigrant status was $1475, and numerous other fees also have been in place.205 In 1995, it was reported that “...farmers are selling virtually everything to collect the expensive processing fees for passports and citizenship papers...”206

In the 1990s, the process to become a Canadian citizen is long. Once admitted to Canada as an immigrant, a three-year period is required before an application can be made for citizenship. That application then can take numerous months to be processed,207 causing problems for those who wait until they come to Canada to apply for the papers, as they often are not eligible for work permits. Many have worked illegally anyway.

Many have obtained Canadian papers before leaving Mexico. In January 1989, the Canadian consul participated in a ceremony at Gnadenfeld where 125 persons promised allegiance to the Queen,208 and in the Cuauhtémoc area in 1993, the Canadian Embassy Vice Consul in Mexico officiated when about forty persons became Canadian citizens.209

Applications made from within Mexico are handled by the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City. This is easier, although it is more than one thousand miles from some colonies.
to Mexico City, than it was earlier, when, from 1968 to about 1975, immigration matters were handled from Kingston, Jamaica. Nothing has come of talk about placing Canadian immigration representatives in northern Mexico to serve the Mennonites.

Some Canadian government departments that deal with these immigrants claim they do not keep separate records for this group. Yet in 1976, a "low key" investigation was launched into their immigration. A Regional Intelligence Officer wrote: "The decision on a low-key approach was indicated, based on the possible political ramifications in dealing with one socio-cultural group." Also, a 1980 memorandum from the Director General, Immigration Ontario Region asked: "In order for us to effectively monitor the Mexican Mennonite situation, we request that you forward a statistical report to us by 31 December 1980." The same memo referred to "... the highly sensitive nature of cases involving Mexican Mennonites." Archival records also show that citizenship and immigration officials have given the Mexican Mennonites special attention as a distinct group.

By necessity, the Canadian government has been involved with the return of the Mennonites. Already at the time of the educational crisis in Mexico in the 1930s, when it looked as if there might be a mass return to Canada, the British Consulate in Mexico and the Canadian government were involved in discussions about this.

Authorities have not encouraged the Mexican Mennonites to move to Canada and have viewed the movement with unease and trepidation. In 1951, the Secretary of State for External Affairs described the migrating Mennonites as "'simon pure' religionists," and as being "... honest, simple, naive- frequently to the point of complete stupidity, the latter difficulty being enhanced by the tendency to inbreeding over the generations." Officials often were concerned about health problems that might be brought to Canada, with feeblemindedness and particularly trachoma being recurring concerns. In 1937, orders went out to have all returning Mennonites detained and checked for trachoma. Then, in June of 1938, the Regina Leader Post reported that over the next two years about 7,500 Mennonites from Mexico were to travel under guard, in sealed cars, to the Peace River country of northern Alberta. Sixty percent of them were said to be suffering from trachoma. Canada was reportedly welcoming them, and each family was being assured 160 acres of land for the price of ten dollars. By August, stories said that anywhere from 7,000 to 15,000 Mennonites, 80 percent of whom had trachoma, were on their way in the sealed railroad cars.
The story reached the Director of Health of the Department of National Health and Welfare who commented: "That story is some weeks old and the Mennonites have not arrived. If they have been kept in the sealed cars all this time, time will have solved all the problems so far as their settlement is concerned." In August 1938, a federal health official wrote: "Officials of the Department have discussed the question of the prevalence of trachoma among those few Mennonites who from time to time arrive at the Canadian border and have been advised that there has not been a single case of trachoma notified among them." Yet, officials in later decades still used trachoma among the Mennonites who arrived in the 1930s as a reason for not wanting them to immigrate.

In 1952, officials were on guard for foot and mouth disease among Mennonite arrivals, and in 1956, they were said to be bringing typhoid fever to Canada. Many reports of diseases among the Mennonites from Mexico were unsubstantiated.

Those who wanted to return to Canada often could not, as in 1936 it was indicated that anyone not born in Canada, in this case those born in Russia, did not have the right of readmission to Canada. By leaving Canada, to live in another country, they had given up their right to live in Canada, unless they could prove that they were born in Canada, which was a problem. A 1952 memo to the Deputy Minister of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration said: "The present applications for resumption of Canadian citizenship status could only be considered if the parents of the persons concerned were born in Canada and it is doubtful if evidence of the parents birth here, acceptable to the Department, could be readily obtained in view of the sect’s refusal to register births in accordance with the Civil Law of the Western Provinces while in this country." At times, the Canadian government did not favour applications for resumption of citizenship. In 1952, the Deputy Minister of the Department of the Secretary of State, Laval Fortier, wrote: "While the Canadian Citizenship Act does give the Minister authority to sanction the acceptance of a Declaration of Resumption after twenty-two years of age, we cannot overlook the fact that Mennonite migrations arise out of the unwillingness on their part to accept the responsibilities of citizenship. Consequently, this Department does not look with favour on the exercise of this Ministerial discretion . . ." Other officials also took a similar position, and made repeated references to the Mennonites having left Canada and
being undesirable immigrants. 229

 Officials sometimes disagreed with the Canadian laws allowing some Mennonites back into Canada. In 1966, correspondence from the Canadian Embassy in Mexico said: “We cannot believe that it was the intention of those who drew up the Canadian Citizenship Act in 1947 that German speaking Mennonites living in Mexico should maintain Canadian citizenship from generation to generation in order to have a passport of convenience. . . . In any event it is clear that Mexican Mennonites are Canadian in the legal sense only and in no other way.” 230 This objection appears to have been quite reasonable.

 Canadian officials were sometimes aware of the situation in the Mexican colonies and were forewarned about coming movements resulting from drought and other problems in the colonies. For example, in 1952, they expected 500 destitute families who would be coming to Canada in trucks due to crop failures in Chihuahua. 231

 Given the Mennonites’ prohibition against owning and driving motor vehicles, many could not drive themselves to Canada. As a result, people have transported them for pay. In 1966, a Manitoba resident crossed the border at Emerson, Manitoba with twenty-eight passengers in a pickup truck. Canadian immigration officials watched them pile back into the truck after issuing them visitors’ permits. The driver had lent those who did not have money $300 to allow them to enter the United States from Mexico. That year, he made about seven trips from Mexico to Manitoba and Ontario, bringing about 133 persons. While fined for carrying paying passengers in a vehicle not licenced for this and for not having a permit, no action was taken for immigration violations. 232

 By the 1970s, officials were aware of a large trade in transporting persons from Mexico. 233 A 1979 Immigration department report commented on the large number of “visitors” entering: “It is simply not realistic to assume that large families with a subsistence livelihood can afford to holiday for months at a time, depleting what few assets they have.” The report went on to say: “It is our contention that we are witnessing a highly organized and sophisticated movement designed to bring forward increasing numbers of Mennonites from Mexico and possibly Texas.” 234

 Some who transported Mexican Mennonites had their passengers, sometimes dozens of them, walk across the border, presumably to disguise the entry and to hide their personal involvement in it. It had to be a poor border guard who did not recognize the man’s bib
overalls, the woman’s long dark dress and head covering, the similarly dressed six or eight children, and the inability to speak English or French, as clues that these were Mennonites from Mexico. Windsor has been one of the easiest and most common places to cross.\textsuperscript{235} In 1995, a fifteen-year-old runaway girl, took the family vehicle and drove alone from Mexico to Canada, crossing both the United States and Canadian borders successfully.\textsuperscript{236}

Although Mennonites are still hauled from Mexico for pay in the 1990s,\textsuperscript{237} many migrants now have their own vehicles. Even from Durango, most who went to Canada in the mid 1990s had vehicles, often vans. These were put away on the farm or left with Mexicans when they returned to Mexico, although bold persons drove them on the colony.

Much immigration to Canada has been illegal. In 1979, eleven families, or 126 persons, were in Canada applying for immigration to Canada. A government memorandum at the time said: “A major argument against favourable treatment of this group is a concern that it would generate a much larger movement to Canada and would seem to reward persons who have avoided processing outside of Canada as required by the Act and Regulations. We are aware of 121 families comprising 534 persons who have entered Canada in similar circumstances and are presently on visitor status.”\textsuperscript{238} A 1979 Immigration Department report claimed that the Mennonites seldom used the visa office in Mexico City, mainly because it was easier to come to Canada as a visitor, “...find unauthorized employment, and disappear indefinitely. By doing this, he has foregone the requirements of an IMM. 2151, medical examination, a possible interview, a limited time factor and a possible refusal.”\textsuperscript{239} The same report said: “As it appears that the trend is approaching alarming proportions, the need for a clear national policy is evident.”\textsuperscript{240}

In the 1960s, the R.C.M.P. investigated the movement of Mexican Mennonites to Ontario,\textsuperscript{241} and in 1975 and 1976, an Intelligence Officer of the Department of Manpower and Immigration Intelligence Division in Winnipeg conducted a prolonged investigation into the illegal migration. Various clandestine methods used included using sources from within the Mennonite community. Profile characteristics of the Mexican Mennonite included: agricultural worker, low educational level, large family, religious orthodoxy, and language patterns. The final identifying characteristic was: “Suffers from hereditary physical defects, i.e. hair-lip and other physical debilitations related to malnutrition.” The investigator also suspected that: “... the Bible institutes, prevalent in southern Manitoba, may well be
facilitating the reception of illegal Mexican Mennonites . . . 242 It was estimated that there were possibly 200 illegals in the Winkler area and 300 to 500 in the Steinbach area. Correspondence of the Department of Manpower and Immigration shows a long term awareness of illegal Mennonite migration methods and patterns.

In spite of the seeming openness of the border, many have been refused entry to Canada.243 The records describe Mennonite families with up to eight children, poorly dressed and with little money, turned back at the Canadian border, with some trying to enter at various border points.244 A large family, who sold their land and belongings in Mexico, was also refused entry.245 Some officials have lacked knowledge about the Mexican Mennonites and have treated them with impatience and disdain at the border.246

There has been communication between American and Canadian authorities about illegal immigration. Some who crossed the Mexican border were expected when they arrived in Canada. In one case, a man’s citizenship papers were seized by United States officials at the Mexican border, who then forwarded them to Canadian officials. At the Canadian border, the man was asked where his citizenship papers were. He offered various stories, all lies, before the official showed him his papers, which had been received from the Americans.247

Some have been forced to leave Canada. In one year, more than 100 families were ordered to leave Ontario. Many only left for a few days and then reentered, applying for immigrant status.248 If someone left when they were issued a “Notice to leave the country” they could reenter later on, but once they were deported, it was difficult to reenter Canada.249

In December of 1974, when a family of fourteen was deported,250 controversy and interest were aroused, due to possible heavy-handed tactics by Canadian officials. Some also were refused entry or were forced to leave, as they were medically inadmissible, due to physical, mental, or emotional reasons.251 In Saskatchewan, a thirty-three-year-old Mexican Mennonite was deported three times primarily because he had served time in jail for minor criminal offenses in Canada. He did not want to return to Durango because he feared that he would be asked if he had driven a car or played the mouth organ, and then, when he answered honestly, he would be excommunicated.252

As it has been best if the migrants did not come to Canada without having their paperwork in order, many colonies have long had resident local “experts,” who, for a fee, looked after the necessary paperwork. Some have been more competent than others. In 1966,
a Canadian Embassy official in Mexico indicated that no one in Durango performed this service but that Chihuahua had four "self-appointed" amateur documentation specialists. One was described as "... verging on being simpleminded, and his blank face and fat overhanging belly have made him an object of ridicule to the Canadians from the General Conference Mennonite Church who must often translate Embassy letters into German for his benefit. They have nicknamed him 'the Canadian Consul.'" Still in the 1990s, not all "experts" could read the correspondence from Canadian officials. Many have handled large volumes of work, and in the 1970s, one estimated that he had helped with 1,700 Canadian passports in two years. In 1996, Manitoba colony had about four persons handling documents, Durango had one, and El Capulin had one.

Applicants for Canadian documents usually have had to supply copies of their Mexican birth certificates, marriage certificates, and sometimes their parents' marriage certificates. As Canadian regulations frequently changed, some birth and marriage certificates were falsified to fit the changing Canadian regulations. Sometimes this was done easily, with the help of a bribe to a local Mexican official.

Particularly problematic have been Mexican marriage certificates. Certificates for nonexistent civil marriages were often issued, although there is no way of knowing the number. Often there was a partially filled or an empty page in the Mexican registry book where a false entry, made later on, could appear genuine. At other times, even without an entry being made in the book, certificates were issued. In 1983, Mexico introduced a relatively tamper-proof numbered system of vital statistics registration, although the possibility of having documents falsified for older births and marriages still exists.

Unusual situations have resulted from false documents. Three brothers all applied for Canadian citizenship during one year, each with a different false marriage certificate for their parents. Needless to say, this did not add credibility to their applications. Some falsified their ages so that they appeared to be born after 1947, when in fact they were born earlier, and some used false birth certificates showing their birth took place after their parents' civil marriage and not before. As they approached the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and other pensions in Canada, some wanted to use their proper birth date.

False dates have also been used for other reasons. If a Mexican Mennonite man wants a Mexican passport, he either needs to possess a tarjeta militar or be over forty years of age,
often making it advantageous to become older by using a false birth certificate. It then later may be undesirable to be the older age, particularly if this would block eligibility to become a Canadian citizen by showing a birth date before 1947.

In 1978, the Canadian authorities were aware of persons entering with other persons' documents in what they called the “Fake Family” method, where various people formed temporary “families” that fit the false documents. There also are stories of persons using the Canadian papers of deceased persons.

Canadian officials have known about false documents. In 1966, the Canadian Embassy in Mexico wrote: “We were also able to confirm that for an adequate payment it was possible to secure any Mexican document required drawn up according to order . . . Even though we know many of these documents are false, they are valid Mexican documents and there seems to be no alternative but to accept them . . .” When documents are questioned, the Canadian Embassy in Mexico is asked to investigate the situation in Mexico. This can take several years, and cause long delays in the applications.

Another problem with Mexican documents has been discrepancies in names. As many Mexican clerks could not spell the Mennonite names, Johann became Juan, Heinrich became Enrique, Gerhard became Jorge or Gerardo, and Franz became Francisco or Pancho. Last names also often were misspelt. Errors with names or dates on documents, have led to delays or to the rejection of applications for papers.

Mexico does not allow dual citizenship, although Canada does. Some have hidden their Canadian citizenship from the Mexican authorities, and have been in Mexico illegally. “Some show their Canadian papers when they want to enter Canada and their Mexican papers when they want to enter there.”

The dealings Mexican Mennonites have had with the Canadian authorities have fallen into two categories: citizenship and immigration. Those, who have had Canadian citizenship, or a claim to it, could enter Canada as a matter of right, while those who have not had this right have been treated as immigrants. The doors to Canada, while opened wider by the efforts of the Canadian Mennonites, already were open because of a grudgingly generous Canadian immigration policy.

The movement to Canada has provided an alternative to the poverty and limitations of the Mexican colonies, particularly for those who had few resources to make other choices.
Most, however, repeatedly moved back and forth, bringing Canada and its influences back to the colonies, thereby making this one of the main disruptive forces to the Old Colony vision of a life apart in Mexico. The Canadian government cannot be blamed for this, as their policies have not tried to destabilize the Old Colony in Mexico. The question, of what other alternatives the Mexican Old Colonists might have found had the doors to Canada not been as open as they were, also needs to be raised.
Chapter 7- Crisis, disintegration, and survival.

The news about the Mexican colonies has been overwhelmingly negative for decades. One reason is that many news reports have focussed on the failures and ignored the successes of the Old Colonists, presenting a biased and inaccurate picture of colony life in Mexico. Few communities, including those of Mennonites in Canada, could withstand critical scrutiny without some negative reports.

While news reports have not adequately told about the successes of the Old Colonists in following the old ways, it also is true that the colonies have experienced many problems. For many, the vision of harmonious religious communities is no longer reality. Leadership, economics, population growth, the Mexican environment, the presence of other churches, and continuing contact with Canada all have played a part in this.

Determining how serious the problems are is made difficult by the diversity of the colonies. On the one extreme are the Cuauhtémoc area colonies, where many are obviously prospering. The attitude in these colonies, among many who have left the Old Colony church, is that the physically and culturally isolated colony way of life is merely a quaint part of their history, something they can celebrate as a historical event, as in 1997 at the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations, in a brief time-out from commercial pursuits. This group is increasingly economically and culturally influential.

On the other extreme, there are colonies like La Batea, where the clear mountain air is not broken by power lines, but by windmills, and the dust on the roads is stirred up by horses and buggies. In most respects, the life there is much as life was in the older colonies in the 1920s. To these people, Old Colony history is not something that happened long ago and which they have tried to leave behind, but something they still are living and which they hope their children and grandchildren will live. While disruptive forces also are challenging these colonies, most of the time they can be successfully resisted, particularly if the rains come and other Mennonites stay away.

Between these extremes are colonies like Durango, where people adhere to some old
ideals but also accept some changes advocated by liberal Mennonites. This in-between stage causes great pain for all concerned, as the communities are split and unhealthy.

The Mexican Old Colony group has been in a painful crisis for more than thirty years, caused mainly by divisions over whether it should continue to live in isolated enclaves or whether it should join the larger Mennonite world. While battles, and likely the war, have been lost by the conservatives in the Cuauhtémoc area, many there still try to follow the old ways, to one degree or another. Elsewhere, the escalating war is causing great distress among those who see their entire way of life threatened, and who fear that in time their communities also will lose their separatist character.

The Old Colonists fought much more tenaciously than many expected, as their beliefs have been strong and they must rank as one of the most persistent peoples on earth. In some communities, those who remain can no longer follow their forefathers’ vision, as the isolation has been broken. As in Canada, many still have the name but not the former lifestyle. Although many of the most conservative members migrated to more isolated colonies, many also remain, even if they are no longer recognized as brothers by those who left. The Lehrdienst members who remain behind, while weakened, have not given up the fight.

Leadership has been one of the key elements in Old Colony history in Mexico, as without strong leadership the colonies could not have been successfully established and could not have survived. Their sincere vows to their ancestors not to allow change, and a belief that man’s changeable wisdom is to be disregarded in favour of the unchanging wisdom of the Bible and of that revealed to their ancestors, have helped them not to be overwhelmed by outside forces. Individual leaders cannot be blamed for most errors, although issue can be taken with some basic premises of the system.

In recent times, the burdens on the ministers, mainly due to the dissent in the communities, have been so great that often being elected as a minister is not a time of joy, but of sorrow. Being a minister means separation from the rest of the community and accepting the burdens of controlling the colony and its future. Some have resisted ordination, fleeing for a while “... hoping the church would change its mind.” Still, people dutifully serve as front line leaders in the battle to maintain the old ways. All too often leadership has come to mean fighting against those tearing down the walls, rather than concentrating on meeting the other challenges of life, a situation comparable to a country at war, which
neglects all else while it concentrates on surviving the challenge from outside. The battle to maintain the boundaries has made dealing with population pressures and economic hardships more difficult. The leadership and people also likely did not fulfill the full potential of their vision, in large part due to the challenges from outside.

That the Old Colony leaders not only have followed the will of their forefathers but also have followed the will of many of the people can still be seen in the more conservative colonies, where many despair at the changes that have come and that are coming. Ordinary people fear that what they believe in and stand for is going under, and they feel threatened by the outsiders and their own young, over whom they are losing control.

Possibly, if the leadership, or the system, is to be faulted, it can be faulted for not being firmer and harder. The leadership has been soft in allowing outside influences to enter the colonies. While they, since the 1920s, made it clear to other Mennonites who came to Mexico that they and their influences were not wanted, they were not effective in keeping them out. Little has been recorded about how the Old Colonists tried to keep the outsiders out, although it is known that they protested vehemently and asked the Mexican authorities for help to evict them from Mexico. The resistance though was sporadic, disorganized, and ineffective.

The leadership also could have taken a much harder line with those who moved to Canada seasonally. They brought many outside influences back with them and disrupted colony life. However, the migrant workers were someone’s child, sibling, parent, or friend, and they, and the influences they brought back, were not kept out of the colonies.

The leaders have left themselves vulnerable to charges of poor judgement, or of being unnecessarily stubborn, when their rules could not be justified, even to meet the goals of maintaining isolation, their religion, and their communities. They sometimes have not been willing to listen and discuss alternatives with the people. While the logic can be seen for not allowing rubber tires on a tractor, many argued that allowing the front tires to be rubber would have the same effect while making field work much more practical. Similarly, why the combines at La Batea need to have steel wheels is puzzling. The question of how many of the colony’s children would go to Fresnillo, the nearest city, more than fifty miles away, on a combine with rubber tires, is not difficult to answer. Some rules about vehicles also are difficult to defend. One farmer at Las Virginias, where rubber tires were allowed but motor
vehicles were not, carefully followed the rules, transporting his family in a motorless Suburban pulled by an air-conditioned tractor with a cassette deck.³

Recently, some leaders have changed their approach, recognizing the risks of extreme positions. They also know that mass excommunications can open the door for outside groups, and have begun to walk the dangerous line between giving in enough to stop rebellion and giving in so much that the vision is lost. At Las Virginias during 1996, the leadership was on the verge of excommunicating twenty to thirty persons but recognized that could open the way for outside groups to come in. Their holding off on the excommunications was one of the first times that the Old Colony reacted in this way.⁴

Excommunication has lost much of its power to control deviant behaviour, particularly where the banned can ignore the community’s authority and join other Mennonite groups. Sometimes the more liberal Old Colony group has also undermined the excommunication that another Old Colony group applied, as was the case in La Honda after the most conservative group left for Sabinal. The Cuauhtémoc Old Colony church came to La Honda, reorganized the remaining Old Colonists there, and lifted their excommunication.⁵

Excommunication has not been an effective control measure considering the size of the challenge to the old ways. The mass excommunications in the Manitoba colony of the 1960s were ineffective, possibly hurting the community more than helping it. In 1996, Durango had about seventy excommunicated men, primarily for rubber tires and vehicle ownership.⁶ Discipline was not effective there anymore either. Durango’s future likely will include increased liberalization and a mass exodus by the conservatives to other colonies.

Old Colony leaders also have been soft with excommunication, as could be seen at La Batea in 1996, where there were four excommunicated men, all over rubber tires. Of these four, two had made matters worse by buying pickup trucks, and it looked as if they did not want to come back to the church. One of the others was expected to “make his peace” with the church, once he finished custom combining for his neighbours with his rubber tired combine. He likely would be let back into the church when he apologized, even though he was expected to use the rubber tires again during the next harvest. The “harsh” discipline was really quite soft, and threatened the future of the community because of its softness.

The system of maintaining land within the Old Colony community has begun to break down, particularly in the Cuauhtémoc area, where the leadership has not been able to enforce
the rule of only allowing Old Colonists to own land. Excommunication resulted in much land going out of Old Colony hands, allowing other groups to gain footholds in the colonies. Had the leaders, along with excommunication, forced people off the land, they could have kept control of the land, and likely fewer would have been excommunicated.

In the Swift Current colony, where there no longer is an Old Colony church, the system has changed possibly the most and many individual titles have been issued to the land. In the 1970s, no Mexicans lived in the colonies in the Cuauhtémoc area, but by the 1990s some did, although the numbers were still small. In 1996, a Mexican Pentecostal pastor on the Manitoba colony guarded the land he controlled against trespassers.

The lack of community control over land has resulted in artificially high land values in many colonies, due to competition among the Mennonites over scarce land. In 1996, unirrigated farm land in the Manitoba colony had a value of $500 to $1,000 per acre, and irrigated land was worth about $2,000 per acre. Commercial land along the four-lane highway was worth as much as $5,000 to $10,000 per acre. In Durango colony, good land had a value of about $500 per acre in 1996. The difficulty of many buying land is clear when the reality of Mexican wages and poverty is considered.

While those leaving for other colonies frequently sold land in the home colony, this often did not make land available for the landless, as only those who already had resources could afford to buy the land, which they often did. Also, some wealthier colony members, who did not move, sometimes purchased land in the new colony and then rented it to the settlers. They sometimes later sold the then developed land for large profits. At La Honda, after allowance for inflation, a profit of 50:1 was made through land speculation.

The Old Colonists in the Cuauhtémoc area are, in many respects, somewhere in between the new model of an increasingly competitive materialism and the older model of a less competitive and more egalitarian colony life, although other colonies are not perfectly egalitarian either. Material inequities have grown greatly in some colonies. While the Old Colony is not communal, economic considerations often have been secondary to spiritual survival. However, in the 1990s, some in the Cuauhtémoc area had 1,000 acres or more of land, using resources for one family that could support a dozen families. While many of these had left the Old Colony Church, many Old Colonists did not put community welfare first in this crucial area either. Given the population pressures and land shortages, the cause and
effect between some accumulating surpluses and others being destitute is clear.

The concentration of wealth is not limited to the farming sector. In 1996, a number of Manitoba colony businessmen were estimated to have net annual incomes of $500,000 or more, and one man incredibly was said to have accumulated hundreds of millions of dollars. Many wealthy entrepreneurs are non-Old Colony Mennonites. The Kleine Gemeinde and General Conference people are particularly known for their materialism. Barred windows, high fences, and guard dogs are becoming common protection for extravagant fine homes along the highway in the Manitoba colony. Yet, small hovels can be found not far away.

The Old Colony has failed to provide a future in a colony situation, whether in Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America, for many of its people. It often has been a situation of everyone looking out for themselves. Yet, the resources likely have been there among the Mennonites of Mexico to provide a viable farm for all, or almost all, of its members. The traditional programs designed to help one another, the Armenkasse, the Waisenamt, and the community land purchases of daughter colonies, have not distributed the wealth sufficiently to allow everyone to continue to live in the colonies. This might also in part be due to the leadership’s efforts being diverted to the battle to expel outside influences.

The traditional emphasis on farming as the primary occupation is being eroded. In the Manitoba colony, already in 1970, the nonagricultural sector was about 12 percent of the economy. By 1980, of approximately 6,200 Mennonite families in Mexico, about 1,000 were primarily or completely dependent on industry and trade. Driving along the four-lane highway through the Manitoba colony in the 1990s, businesses dominate the landscape, stretching intermittently for about thirty kilometres. The presence of the other Mennonite groups is partly responsible for the growing acceptance of a variety of occupations.

Possibly the most convincing argument for occupational diversification is the presence of the landless, as many have had to look for alternatives to farming. For some this has meant going to the United States or Canada, while for others, it has meant finding work on or off the colony. The actual land shortage is partly hidden by the movement of tens of thousands of the landless and poverty stricken to Canada and the United States.

It is ironic that these people, who highly value their offspring and want to pass on their values and separate lifestyle, have, for financial reasons, forced a high percentage of their children into the “world.” The population explosion and the accompanying land
shortage have been key determinants of Old Colony history in Mexico. These issues have not been adequately addressed by the Old Colonists.

The Old Colonists also can be faulted for a lack of business acumen. The failure of some daughter colonies could have been avoided by more thorough investigations of soils and climate characteristics. Other colonies that survive but struggle severely economically, particularly those in the Casas Grandes area, possibly never should have been started there. Even Old Colony leaders admit this in the 1990s, after years of severe drought and largely futile efforts to establish a comfortable lifestyle. Questionable land purchases still have been made recently, as at Villa Ahumada, bought by the Manitoba colony in the 1990s for six million dollars. Although thirty-two villages of up to forty families each were planned, by 1996 only about twenty-one families were there, as the area experienced severe drought and water shortages. Water availability was not verified prior to the purchase. Before judging too harshly though, it should be remembered that Mexican land reform policies and the need for geographic isolation severely limited the Mennonites’ choices in land.

The Old Colony also has been criticized for not taking advantage of the potential for colony expansion, due to the use of steel wheels. Now that ejido land can be purchased, potential expansion also has not materialized, at least partly due to the steel wheels. The colonies also have been criticized for their dependence on cheese for income and for not expanding into producing other milk products. Some of this criticism is likely valid, particularly where innovations would have no effect on boundaries to the world.

Numerous decisions were not “good business.” These include the dedication to the agricultural lifestyle, the use of steel wheels, the use of horses, and the avoidance of much modern technology. The leadership often has felt they had little choice about their stand on these things, as change would lead to a breakdown of the community and its walls. However, some of the firm stands could be reexamined. In the northern colonies, the lack of electricity to run irrigation pumps is a serious handicap, particularly since NAFTA raised the price of diesel fuel used to drive the pumps. In 1996, the El Capulin leadership still opposed electricity, after three years of severe drought dried up the river, and over one-half of the colony members, facing financial ruin, wanted electric power. Up to one-half of the land in the colony was not seeded due to a lack of money to plant and irrigate the crops, and farmers who had built successful farms watched their resources being eroded. Many colony
members, defying the leadership, hoped that electricity would arrive during 1997. This was likely to cause an exodus of the most conservative to Bolivia, where the colony owned land.

In contrast to the situation at El Capulin, the leadership of nearby Buenos Aires accepted electricity, although only after the most conservative leaders and others left for South America. This colony also faced financial ruin without electricity. They still held the line on rubber tires and vehicles but negotiated a concession with pressing necessity. The most conservative fled to South America without mass excommunications occurring. This also may happen with the electricity issue at El Capulin and Durango. The avoidance of excommunications and the careful and limited concessions to economic necessity show that the Old Colonists are learning to survive in a difficult environment.

Durango also has experienced the battle over electricity in 1996 and 1997. Although they once paid to have power lines routed around the colony, in 1996 the municipal governor attended the ceremonial inauguration of the power project, where the symbolic first concrete pole was set in place. By April of 1997, power poles were erected in four villages, in spite of opposition from the leaders and complaints that the colony's right to control internal matters was being violated. The split community made it possible for the project to proceed. Some leaders and many others will likely leave rather than accept electricity.

The leadership in these colonies has been in a very difficult position. In some colonies, having electricity could mean the difference between economic ruin and survival. On the other hand, electricity means that televisions and various other technological links with the world are not far behind, unless its use can be limited.

While leadership has played a large part in Old Colony history, some things have been outside the leaders' control. The nineties have brought increased economic problems and financial pressures, as most colonies have experienced severe drought. The water table also has dropped in many areas. In the Cuauhtémoc area, wells originally were about fifty feet deep, but by the 1990s they were commonly 300 feet deep, with some 400 and 500 feet deep. Although it was estimated that the aquifer had twice as much water pumped out as was going back in, increased irrigation was seen as the way of the future. Irrigation was relatively economical in the Cuauhtémoc area with electric powered pumps. A drop in the aquifer also was noted in Durango, in spite of limited irrigation.

El Capulin, Buenos Aires and El Cuervo, because of deep or scarce water, have been
in a constant state of crisis. Wells are up to 1,000 feet deep and expensive diesel fuel has been used to drive the pumps. Due to the receding water table, shallow wells were dry, even in wet years, a situation which hurt the richer farmers less than the poorer ones.

NAFTA has caused additional economic strain, as it ended the exclusivity of Mexico's internal market for agricultural goods and allowed cheaper imports to enter from the north, adversely affecting the prices for agricultural products in Mexico. The Mennonites have been hurt further by repeated devaluations of the peso, the last one since early 1995, when the peso lost about one-half of its value in relation to the dollar. High interest rates have resulted from the fall of the peso, hurting many farmers who are in debt.

At El Capulin, it was estimated that only about 40 percent had enough income to manage in 1996. Poverty in the Nuevo Casas Grandes area gave the Mexicans and the Mennonites something to share, as both agreed that things were tough in Mexico in the 1990s. In the past “ging es noch” (it was still bearable), but for many this no longer was the case. After decades of hard work, many, poverty stricken and discouraged, fled to Canada and the United States to escape the financial problems. The difficult economic times were most apparent in the smaller, isolated colonies. There, many established farmers experienced serious financial difficulties, and in some places, few, if any, were doing well.

The Cuauhtémoc area colonies are doing better, in part due to their economic diversification. It also is likely that modernization, including electric power, rubber tires, and motor vehicles, has helped that area cope with the difficult times. Ironically, many of the things that the Old Colonists have resisted have helped the more liberal Mennonites survive. Seeing this is trying the Old Colonists' commitment to the old ways, which are seen to be necessary for cultural and religious survival.

One symptom of the economic difficulties can be seen in the marketing of cheese, as many Old Colonists travel long distances to sell cheese. Mennonite cheese can be bought from bib-overalled men and boys on streets and at roadside stands in many parts of Mexico.

In some colonies, economic problems also are caused increasingly by the education system, as there is no doubt that the Old Colony group's low level of education and illiteracy has not equipped them well for life in the modern world. While, in the past, educational changes would have endangered community boundaries, in the Cuauhtémoc area colonies the boundaries are already largely gone and change seems inevitable. Yet, the education
system is one area that the leadership continues to defend, rejecting all significant change. There, the Old Colony education system no longer prepares people for the world they live in, although in the isolated colonies, the education system, for the most part, is appropriate and likely essential if these colonies are to preserve their life styles.

There is no doubt that many graduates of the Old Colony education system cannot read or write well in any language. Recently, an Old Colony man installed a number of gas heaters. Later, it was pointed out to him that all of the installations were illegal and dangerous. He had been unable to read the instructions printed on the appliances.

In all Old Colony settlements, educational change has been slow to come, and even some teachers are frustrated and dissatisfied with the curriculum and restrictions put on them by their leaders. Some teachers tried using booklets with pictures, but that was stopped as they were considered to be worldly. Outsiders also have tried to introduce changes to the school system, knowing that the Lehrdienst might not approve. MCC has offered training to Old Colony teachers in the Cuauhtémoc area. Already in 1983, there were innovative monthly teacher meetings in the Manitoba colony to exchange ideas and train the teachers. However, MCC workers in 1996 described much the same phenomenon, viewing these meetings as a new hopeful development. Not much had changed in thirteen years.

The Old Colony crisis in Mexico can be seen in social problems. One of the most obvious is drinking among teenaged boys, a problem that, while worsening recently, has been present for a long time. In the more liberal colonies, the evening and Sunday walking of the young people on the village street has been replaced by roaring pickups. This and alcohol sometimes are a deadly combination. Some residents stay off the streets on Sunday evenings, out of fear. Fatal accidents have occurred. In Buenos Aires, fathers followed their sons around for months when they went drinking, and by doing this stopped the problem with at least some of them.

Alcohol use among adult men also is an increasing problem. No alcoholism treatment programs have been organized by the Old Colony leaders, and their method of dealing with it has been mainly to speak against it. In the Cuauhtémoc area, some other Mennonite groups organized an Alcoholics Anonymous program, which some Old Colony people also attended. The problem is difficult to quantify, as are the reasons for it.

The Old Colonists were brought to Canadians' attention in 1992 by a television
program, the Fifth Estate, which used the term “The Mennonite Mob” to refer to Mexican Mennonite drug smugglers. The program caused consternation in the Mennonite community, particularly in Canada. It was said that twenty-four Mennonites, with almost two million dollars in drugs, had been arrested in a ten-month period at borders in New Mexico, Texas, and Canada. Reportedly, five Mennonite drug cells involved about 100 persons, and about 20 percent of the marijuana crossing the border into Canada at Windsor was handled by Mennonites. It also was suggested that the Mennonite church sheltered an accused drug smuggler, Cornelius Banman, who had jumped bail in the United States after being arrested on drug charges. Sensationalised attention was drawn to the Mexican Mennonites by the television program, which gave the impression that drug trafficking was a major problem among them. Subsequent newspaper coverage also was controversial. Winnipeg Free Press articles were criticized for identifying the drug smugglers as Mennonites and thereby leading to stereotyping, prejudice, and racism. However the media, knowing a good story when they saw one, in 1997 still identified smugglers as Mennonites. While Mennonite connections to drugs did not make the media headlines until 1992, police already knew about Mexican Mennonite involvement with the drug traffic in 1989.

Mennonites often were not inspected at the borders, as it was assumed that they were “... very law abiding, family oriented, and civic minded” and not drug smugglers. It was felt that some had exploited their reputation as Mennonites to smuggle drugs.

During the past years, numerous other Mexican Mennonites have been arrested and jailed for drug offences in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Some may work with Mexican drug dealers, as rumours abound in the Manitoba colony of drug dealings between Mennonites and Mexicans. The Mennonite role may be mainly to move the drugs, although some have grown marijuana, and rumours say Mennonite businesses launder drug money. In May 1997, Canada Customs officials reportedly said that the: “... Mexican-Mennonite drug pipeline ... is the largest source of marijuana being smuggled into Canada.”

Mennonites also have had other problems with the law. The use of vehicles in some of the colonies has caused difficulties as many of the pickups and cars are schief (crooked), which means that they have been brought into Mexico illegally. In 1996, illegal vehicles still were present, although the authorities had done a lot to stem the flow.

Mennonites also have been involved with violence directed at each other. Most of
these incidents do not reach the ears of the police or the press, and parents and colony leaders often handle the situation when youths are involved.\textsuperscript{51} One young hand gun owner recently returned from Canada, causing concern in his colony because of aggressive behaviour. The community did not blame the parents for his behaviour though, as it was said that they had done what they could, including beating him.

In the past, suicides occurred among the Old Colonists, but they have increased over the past decades.\textsuperscript{52} While the rate does not appear to be elevated in comparison with North America overall, it is likely higher than in the past, which is possibly another symptom of the problems in the colonies.

Church attendance often is poor, with fewer than half of the people attending the services, although some ministers will get a bigger turnout than others. When communities experience divisions and controversies, attendance particularly suffers.\textsuperscript{53}

Jeffrey Lynn Eighmy examined the process of change in some Mexican Old Colony and Sommerfelder colonies. He concluded that when change comes, it comes quickly and on a large scale.\textsuperscript{54} One reason for this is that before change is accepted, the people have had an opportunity to evaluate the item or behaviour in question in the world around them. Therefore, there is not the experimenting that there is in other places with innovations. The Old Colony also is heavily influenced by community opinion, which leads to making changes in unison. Eighmy’s findings certainly are borne out in looking at things such as rubber tires, vehicles, and electrical power. These often have arrived in a flood, and what was previously prohibited has been enthusiastically accepted by the majority not many years later.

In 1985, in the Manitoba colony, the possession of a motor vehicle still was punished with excommunication and was seen as the rapid road to sin. Three years later, car ownership no longer brought the ban, although their ownership still was discouraged.\textsuperscript{55} Many Old Colonists and other Mennonites in the area have followed the Mexican taste for low-slung short box pickups, often late model Chevys, with wide tires and blacked out windows. It is an unsettling sight to see a conservative Mennonite woman in her traditional dress and black head covering rumble away driving a hot rod pickup. Pickups are particularly valued and some have sold their cattle, on which they depended for their income, to buy them.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1996, it was estimated that, in the four colonies in the Cuauhtémoc area, fewer than twenty-five Reinländer and Old Colony farmers still drove with horses. Three Old Colony
elders still used them to drive to church when they did not have to go too far, and Bishop Franz Banman did not have a pickup or car.

While the various pressures on the Old Colony have taken their toll, many have held auction sales and moved on to another colony to follow the vision of their forefathers. In early 1996, auction sales were common at Buenos Aires as an estimated twenty-five families, or 120 persons, were to leave for Bolivia, bringing the total who made the move since June 1994 to forty-six families or 217 persons. Possibly the largest reason for this movement was the electrical power lines that were being installed there in 1996. This scene has been repeated in many other colonies.

Not all who have wanted to maintain the old order have been able to do so. In 1996, various people considering migrating to Bolivia or Argentina estimated they would need about $10,000 U. S. to make the move. They hoped to be able to sell their small acreages, cows, and other goods to raise this. In some of the poorer colonies, there was little money to buy their assets, while others did not have anything to sell. The $10,000 appeared to be a vast amount of money to these people, and, for many, was an amount they could not hope to raise. Some colonies, including La Batea, El Capulin, and Buenos Aires, were so poverty stricken, that families and the community could not help much either.

Positives also are present in the colonies in the 1990s. Many in the colonies of the Cuauhtémoc area are enjoying relative prosperity and are over the worst of the adjustment between the old and the new. Their dream appears to be to create an extension of prosperous Canada in Mexico. Others, in some isolated colonies, are living the vision of their parents and grandparents, largely unaffected by the Mexican or the Canadian world.

For the large number in the middle though, colony life has been a prolonged time of difficulty, from which there is no easy way out. The choice for tens of thousands has been and still is between living in chronic poverty in colonies filled with turmoil or moving to Canada or the U. S. While outsiders have often blamed the Old Colony leadership for this state of affairs, the true explanation is not so simple. The reasons include the influence of outside churches and the effects of the movement to Canada.
Conclusion: The Vision Lives On.

Three distinct and mutually exclusive groups today claim the right to use the designation Old Colony Mennonite: the original Old Colony church that remained in Canada, the Old Colony church that remains in the liberalized Mexican colonies, and the Old Colony church that lives in the more isolated colonies of Mexico and other parts of Latin America. The resulting diversity is great, making analysis of this group difficult.

The third group, those living in the isolated colonies, is the only group that is still able to live the life their forefathers envisioned when they came to Mexico and transformed their vision into reality. This group likely represents less than one-half of the total number of the Mexican Old Colony descendants. While life has been difficult for these people, the old vision still survives among them.

The reasons why this is not the case for more Old Colony descendants are complex and controversial. It is, however, important to try to understand them. The experiment carried out by the Old Colonists in designing and living in isolated, closed communities in Mexico is unparalleled in history, and deserves careful study, free of agendas of change for this group.

Traditionally four reasons have been offered for the difficulties the Old Colonists have encountered. They are leadership shortcomings, economic failure, population explosion, and a threatening Mexican environment. Economic failure and the population explosion both are closely related to the leadership issue, as they are seen as being the result of poor leadership, and the decision to move into the Mexican environment also has been blamed on the leaders. The leadership has been characterized, by some looking to place blame for the problems, as inadequate, power hungry, and despotic.

While all four of these factors are to some extent part of the history of the Old Colony in Mexico, two additional factors, that have caused many of the problems for the colonies, have been largely overlooked. Part of the reason for this is that those who have done much of the analysis of the Old Colony problems have also been those who have been closely
involved with bringing these two factors into the situation.

One of the most disruptive factors, and the one that has transformed the largest Mennonite colonies in Mexico, has been the presence of other Mennonite groups. Some of these came to Mexico looking for a home for themselves and some came to Mexico with the specific purpose of changing the Old Colonists spiritually, structurally, economically, educationally, and socially. For fifty years, they have worked at breaking down the barriers the Old Colonists erected between themselves and the world, including the larger Mennonite world. The attempts to change the Old Colony religion were not made within the framework of the existing Old Colony church, but by setting up rival church structures that brought a lot of nonreligious cultural changes with them. The provision of this alternative structure offered the Old Colony people an alternative to the closed colony life and destroyed Old Colony boundaries, communities, unity, and discipline.

Walter Schmiedehaus, historian and long time friend of the Old Colony, said in 1988 as he neared the end of his life: “Some 25 years ago church representatives of Canadian and American persuasion surfaced here (and whatever shortcomings they had, they more than compensated for them with presumption and a judgmental stance) and then the dam broke. ... I thank God that their total disintegration shall be spared me. After all, I am 87 years of age and so my demise will be an act of mercy so that I shall not see the final collapse of my beloved people.” While Schmiedehaus did not name the Mennonite churches, they are the churches who have brought the most change.

Some twentieth-century sentiment dictates that no outside group has the right to interfere with the self determination of another group. This line of thought could fault the other Mennonites for their often unwelcome presence in the colonies. Other thinking could fault the Old Colonists for being undemocratic and unenlightened in various areas. While philosophical justifications can be made for leaving the Old Colonists alone and for not leaving them alone, the disruptiveness of the outside intervention is indisputable. Some within the colonies have welcomed the opportunities and changes brought by the outside groups while others have strongly opposed them.

The second factor that has not received adequate recognition as a disruptive factor in Mexican Old Colony history is the effect of the return migration to Canada. This migration usually has been seen only as a symptom of the problems in Mexico rather than as a
contributing factor to the disintegration of the Old Colony world there. Had people, who came to Canada, stayed in Canada, the damage would have been minimized. However, most migrants have repeatedly gone back and forth, introducing Canada and the money earned there as a long term element of the colonies’ reality. Along with this have come numerous cultural changes and a different world outlook than that taught by the Old Colonists.

Old Colony society in Mexico is in a weakened state, due to the various factors mentioned. The large Cuauhtémoc area colonies are likely to move steadily farther from the design their founders had in mind. There, the Old Colony vision has become a colourful part of their history, rather than an integral part of the present reality. Other colonies have joined the trend of the Cuauhtémoc area to varying degrees, and are leaving the Old Colony vision behind, free of many of the limitations of their traditions.

The future of other colonies is uncertain. Durango is possibly the most likely to see radical change, not due to the leadership, the economy, population pressure, or Mexican influences, although these factors do make the colony vulnerable, but because other Mennonite churches are splitting the community and because more people are bringing Canada back to Mexico with them. Other colonies are still farther from disintegration, although the beginnings of the walls breaking down can also be seen there.

The dream of those who went to Mexico is still far from dead though. While Schmiedehaus’ prediction of the demise of the traditional Old Colony in the Cuauhtémoc area still seems accurate, the Old Colony has not died, but only moved on. Even with the heavy losses to the outside churches and to Canada, there today likely are more Old Colony people living in conservative colonies than ever before, spread through remote parts of Mexico and other Latin American countries. Their survival still is uncertain and no guarantees exist of permanent religious and cultural freedom, but as the Old Colony people say, “es geht noch.”

What will be their future in the high plains, deserts, and jungles of Latin America? Will the expansion of world population, liberal democracy, and the larger Mennonite world increasingly close in on them? Any attempt to make any prediction about this likely would be foolhardy, as the Old Colonists so far have proven many observers wrong.
1. The choice of these four factors is based on a reading of the literature about the Old Colony available in books and periodicals. The grouping of the various factors into these categories is the partly the interpretation of this author.

2. Abe Fehr, interview by author, Lethbridge, Alberta, November 1996.

3. This characteristic of this study is apparent throughout this work. The tenses involved in writing this history frequently change between the past and the present. The present perfect tense is particularly suited for this history as it accommodates these time elements of this history well.

Their official name is Die Altkolonier Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde. The designation “Old Colony” was added later on but now is part of their name.

Various sources have called this group by different names. Some have referred to them as the Reinland Mennonite Church, as Reinländer, as the Reinländer Mennonitische Altkolonie, as Fürstenländer, and as Kanadier. They often refer to themselves as being *Dietscha* and their language as *Dietsch*. Among other Mennonites they call themselves *oolt Kolnia*—Old Colony.


The Old Colony Mennonites have their primary roots in the Flemish congregations of Poland and Prussia.


This paper reviews the history of Mennonite privileges in Europe and North America beginning with concessions given by Agustín I in 1642.


   This early conservatism may be the basis for the later conservatism in Canada and Mexico.


22. *ME* 5, 196.

   Urry, *None but Saints*, 211.


   It has been suggested that it was the poorest who left Russia and that the primary motivation may have been the land offered in Canada.
   Urry, *None But Saints*, 216.
   Urry has an extensive discussion of the complex factors involved in the movement.


31. Francis, In Search of Utopia, 48-49. Francis refers to the procedure involved as “devious.”

32. Urry, None But Saints, 215.

33. Sawatzky, M E 5, 651.


35. Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 10.


37. Guenter, Men of Steele, 6.

38. Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 9. The West Reserve Old Colony did not want to adopt the Reeve system, which the East Reserve did adopt.


41. Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 14.

42. Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 10.


44. William Janzen, Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite, and Doukhobor Communities in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 91.

45. Janzen, Limits on Liberty, 104.


47. Ens, Subjects or Citizens, 133.
In 1923, A.W. Ball, the deputy minister, commented that no appreciable headway had been made in getting the Old Colony children into the schools. He also noted the privation caused by the fines and he seemed to favour compromise. Numerous other people tried to exert their influence to settle the situation as well.

He felt that they had found in Mexico what they had lost in Canada. When warned against going to Mexico, they said that they didn’t just depend on the government but on...
Francis outlines the government position in this regard.

In Saskatchewan, the groups had difficulty selling their land and deals that had been made fell through. There were feelings at the time that the government was behind the difficulties in selling the land.


Dyck, Auswanderung der Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde, 43-53.

Ens, “Mennonite Relations with Government,” 357.


“A second look at the rejected conservatives,” 36.

Jubiläums Jahr Kalendar (Strassburg Platz, Chihuahua, Mexico: Strassburgo, 1996).

Jubiläums Jahr Kalendar.

Friesen, “Emigration in Mennonite History,” 160.


Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 251.

“Governor attends celebration,” Mennonite Reporter 17, no. 18 (14 September 1987): 11.

This article speaks of the sixtieth anniversary of Cuauhtémoc as celebrated in 1987. The city then would have been founded in 1927.

Menno-Zeitung von Mexico 1, no. 12, (25 June 25 1987):1
San Antonio de los Arenales was founded as an ejido in 1918.

83. Estimates of the percentages of the Old Colony people who left each of the areas in Canada have varied but these numbers represent the mid range of the estimates.

84. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 192.


95. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 188.


99. *Jubiläums Jahr Kalendar*.


103. H. Ens, ME 5, 536.


106. Krahn, ME 4, 40.
Sawatzky, ME 5, 582.


108. The Kleine Gemeinde in Canada is now known as the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC). The Mexican Kleine Gemeinde has not changed its name.

109. Dyck, Auswanderung der Reindländer Mennoniten Gemeinde, 156.


111. Fretz, Mennonite Colonization in Mexico, 23.

112. Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 148.


114. Dyck, Auswanderung der Reindländer Mennoniten Gemeinde, 149.


118. Dyck, Auswanderung der Reindländer Mennoniten Gemeinde, 144.

119. Schmiedehaus, Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexiko. 120.

120. Sawatzky, ME 5, 580.


122. Janzen, “The movement of Mennonites from Mexico back to Canada.”

123. Fretz, Mennonite Colonization in Mexico, 19.

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125. “Sein Dienst an die Mennoniten ist beendet”, *Menno-Zeitung von Mexiko* 3, no. 21 (9 July 1990): 1. Schmiedehaus spent his last days living at the Altenheim in the Manitoba Colony and died in June of 1990 at the age of eighty-eight years.

126. Margaret Klassen, interview with author, Durango, Mexico, 19-20 December 1996.


5. “Neuer Ältester gewählt,” *Die Mennonitische Post* 20, no. 24 (18 April 1997): 16. In 1997 the Manitoba colony elected a third bishop, Franz Kroeker, as a helper for Franz Banman, who was ill. Some other colonies have had two bishops at times, often when the first bishop has become ill, as was the case at Durango, Las Virginias, and Buenos Aires colonies in 1996.


12. Bishop Bernhard Bueckert and Gerhard Klassen, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 2 December 1996.

13. Abe Dueck, Centre for MB Studies, “Church discipline in Mennonite history” (for Kanadier Concerns Committee Meeting, 14 May 1993), from Abe Warkentin files.


17. Bishop Franz Wall and Minister Isaak Fehr, interview by author, Buenos Aires colony, Mexico, 19 December 1996.


There are similarities between the Mexican Old Colonists' stand on technological matters and that of the Old Order Amish. Donald B. Kraybill has explored the sources of many of the Amish technological prohibitions. He shows that below the surface there are logical and often sound reasons for the various rules. The prohibitions and the reasons for them are similar in many cases among the Amish and the Old Colony groups.


Kraybill makes this point in regards to the Amish. It also is valid for the Old Colonists.


The radios had been purchased in the U.S. and were being used illegally, as only one radio in the area was registered. In early 1990, most of the approximate 900 2 meter radios in use in the villages were not registered. Registration campaigns that had gone on for years were reported to be largely unsuccessful.


32. Based on personal observation, December 1996.

33. The original colonies are all between 6500 and 7500 feet above sea level and are located on the eastern slope of the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains. The Cuauhtémoc area colonies are located in the Bustillos Basin and Durango colony is in the Guatimapé valley. La Batea is at about 2,600 meters in elevation. La Honda is located at about 2,300 metres above sea level.

34. Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 112.

35. Fretz, Mennonite Colonization in Mexico, 16.

36. Sawatzky, Sie Suchten Eine Heimat, 184.
Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 245-246.

In the early days, the Manitoba Colony was organized under the names of early leaders: the Rempel-Wall-Reinland Waisenamt and the Heide-Neufeld-Reinland Waisenamt.

Colony leaders have not always been willing to sign the necessary papers that would have allowed those wanting loans to use the land for collateral,


40. Based on personal observations, December 1996.

The Certificados were not made for pieces of land smaller than twenty hectares, but to obtain them, smaller landowners could join together to apply for them.

42. Henry Bergen, interview by author, Port Burwell, Ontario, 2 December 1996.
Similarities exist between church services in late twentieth century Flemish Belgium and the Old Colony. Men and women enter through separate entrances and sit on separate sides of the church. Mannerisms, including a reserved shyness, are also similar between the two groups. Some of these things may be survivals from the Old Colony Flemish roots.


Personal observation has shown that burning of stubble in the winter, in spite of its harmful effects, is still common in the 1990s. However predictions of impending doom have not materialized. In 1966, it was predicted that, if the next forty years went as the past forty had, the land would be worthless.

Cheese making was introduced to the colonies in about 1933 by Peter G. Friesen, a young Mennonite who had worked for the Mormons in the Nuevo Casas Grandes area and had learnt about cheese making from them. Cheese making spread throughout the colonies. Butter making was also tried, but there was not a good market for butter in Mexico, as the Mexicans were not accustomed to using it. By 1947, there were fourteen cheese factories in the Old Colony villages in Chihuahua.
52. Personal interviews, December 1996.

53. Annual cheese production in 1996 was about 950 tonnes from about 10,000 tonnes of milk. The highest paid milk producer received about 150,000 pesos of milk per year while the average person received about 30,000 pesos.

54. George Rempel, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 12 December 1996.


   In 1994 plans were underway to inspect all the cheese factories in the colonies. While Mexican law called for pasteurization of the cheese, by 1996 much still was not pasteurized. No cases have been heard of where the cheese has been a health hazard due to a lack of pasteurization, but efforts have been made by the Mexican health officials to have the cheese factories meet health standards.

56. The government has introduced incentives for efficient use of water, such as drip irrigation in apple orchards.

57. Based on observations and interviews, December 1996.


   A Quaker Oats representative called the area an “oat paradise,” and it was said to probably be the “... heaviest concentration of oats commensurate with land area of any place on the earth.” In 1962, at least ninety-eight percent of Mexico’s oats were grown in the Cuauhtémoc area.


   Also in 1960, the United States milling company, Ogilvie Oats Company, had supplied Willard Stucky, agricultural researcher of the Board of Christian Service, with one hundred varieties of oats.

59. Eighmy, Mennonite Architecture, 54.

60. Philip Dyck, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 11 December 1996.

61. Isaac Ens, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996.


   In the Cuauhtémoc area, the 1940s were easier years than the previous decades, with good markets for grain. Three crop failures in the early 1950s caused a crisis. In the 1970s, rains were better, artificial fertilizers were used, and markets for grain and cheese were good. The 1980s were yet better. Irrigation of corn and government subsidies for corn helped make this time good in the Cuauhtémoc area. Other colonies did well also due to good weather, chemical fertilizer, and good markets.
63. Philip Dyck, interview by author, Manitoba colony, December 1996.


68. Fretz, “Mennonites in Mexico,” 26. In 1947, Fretz said that there were fourteen stores in the Chihuahua Old Colony villages.


71. *The Living Bible*.


76. Bishop Franz Banman, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 24 December 1996.


78. Harry Loewen and Al Reimer, “Origins and Literacy Development of Canadian-Mennonite Low German,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 59 (July 1985): 286. It has been suggested that: “Perhaps the ironic conclusion to be drawn is that a literary consciousness of Plautdietsch seems to develop inversely to the actual use of the language; that as it recedes within the larger context of a more sophisticated culture and life experience with their own language and literature it can at least be given a distanced aesthetic form and setting- like any other properly mounted museum exhibit representing a
vanished past.”


81. Numerous Spanish classes were offered by MCC in the Cuauhtémoc area in 1996.

82. Hedges, “Plautdietsch and Huuchdietsch,” 228.

83. Based on personal observations.

84. This is not always the case. A completely High German service was attended in La Batea.


96. It involves breaking words into syllables and first saying the first syllable, then repeating the first syllable and then the second syllable, then beginning with the first syllable and the second syllable again, followed by the third syllable again, and so on. They read like this in unison. The sound is much like a chant.

98. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG8, B94, Schmiedehaus Papers, Box 2, file 21, Walter Schmiedehaus to Dr. S. Schnippenkötter, German Embassy, Mexico City, letter dated 10 January 1955.

Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG8, B94, Schmiedehaus Papers, Box 2, file 21, Walter Schmiedehaus to Dr. Andreas W. Bauer, German Embassy, Mexico City, letter dated 28 March 1956.


100. Based on personal experiences.


104. This is often said jokingly by outsiders.


108. Among adults, visiting friends and relatives, is also the primary social activity. Sometimes opportunities are available to stop and visit briefly on a working day. Some evenings are spent visiting also and Sunday afternoons are devoted largely to this activity. Hedges, “Plautdietsch and Huuchdietsch in Chihuahua,” 30-31.

Sundays are days of rest, including mainly for the women, who have used Saturdays for cleaning the house. They still are expected to prepare meals and clean up after the meals on Sundays.


115. Based on personal observations.


118. Royden K Loewen, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 32. Loewen has said that among Mennonites in Russia, the family was the most important institution of everyday life.

119. Based on personal observation.


121. Helen Ens, interview by author, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 16 October 1996. After about forty years working with the Mennonites in Mexico, Helen Ens had never heard anyone take issue with the women’s lack of a vote.

Rosabelle Fast, telephone interview by author, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 16 October, 1996.

Rosabelle Fast, who recently spent several years working with the Mexican Mennonites also said that she heard no talk about women voting and no signs of women’s liberation.


123. Rosabelle Fast, telephone interview by author, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 16 October 1996.


A study was carried out in Canada on the Old Colony group, using a definition of the Old Colony group that included all descendants of Chortitza. It looked into diseases that descendants of Chortitza have a high incidence of, and found that the Old Colony group had the world’s largest familial aggregations of insulin dependent diabetes mellitus,
autoimmune diseases, and Tourette syndrome.


They have been described as “semi-communal” due to the lack of emphasis on capitalistic self-interest and private property.

If a spouse dies and the surviving spouse remarries, one half of the property goes to the Waisenamt for the children of the first marriage, although it does not have to be paid immediately.

In 1996, out of about 1,000 families in Durango, only about five families were receiving living expenses from the Armenkasse. Two widows received aid.

The Kleine Gemeinde had also set up an Armenkasse at Durango but no one had used it as of 1996. The Kleine Gemeinde had no objection to participation in Seguro Social.

Based on personal observations.

In 1985, Cuauhtémoc had a surplus of trained dentists, who attacked the untrained Mennonite dentists, but Mexican officials supported the Mennonite dentists.


Later in the same year, three Mennonites were arrested and held for the night.

This occurred on the same day that a twice weekly, three month training program had begun for the unlicensed dentists.


At least partly to pacify the Cuauhtémoc College of Dentists, some Mennonite dentists were to attend classes in Cuauhtémoc. Earlier in the year, one dentist had his freezing equipment impounded by the Mexican health authorities.

In 1992, after requests from Cuauhtémoc doctors and dentists, a Mexican official was looking at the situation and at possible solutions, including testing of the local practitioners or limiting them to serve only “Deutsche”.

    Längin, *Gottes letzte Inseln*, 223.
    In the mid 90s, the child mortality rate was said to be four times higher than in the United States.

    In 1993, the names of those in this category were to be given to the government authorities for possible action.

134. Numerous fillings are very common, even among young adults. Particularly common are fillings made of bright metal outlining the front teeth of many people. This makes for very flashy smiles. It almost appears that these are valued types of cosmetic fillings.

    In the 1990s, it is very common to spit sunflower seeds on the kitchen or living room floor, possibly especially when company is present. Milk still is unpasteurized.

136. Based on personal observations.
    Fretz, *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico*, 25. Already in the 1940's, Fretz estimated that at least seventy-five percent of the men smoked.


    One family was said to have taken five “mentally weak” members of its family to Canada in the 1970's, leaving them there in public care. The parents returned to Mexico, where they died.

139. Bishop Bernhard Bueckert and Gerhard Klassen, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996.


On September 16, 1983, eight persons were killed on the Manitoba colony when a tractor drawn wagon loaded with workers was hit by a bus. One report said that the wagon had not been marked or lit, when the accident happened at night. Another said that the bus driver appeared to have been drinking heavily and was imprisoned.

In October of 1985, three brothers were killed by lightning. In more than one other case, several people have been killed by lightning strikes.


George Rempel, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, December 1996.
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE


   Redekop said the average was nine children.


19. Based on personal observations in 1996. This also has been the case for some time. Sawatzky, *Sie Suchten eine Heimat*, 239.


In 1967 a study of the Manitoba colony showed that 37 per cent of Mexican born married men still lived in the village of their birth. "If a man can obtain a farm in his own or his new wife's village, he generally will settle there. Otherwise he is forced to search widely, and the Old Colony communication network is such that remote villages are almost as likely as near ones to come to his attention."


Buenos Aires, and El Capulin were both settled largely by persons opposed to the modernization occurring in the Manitoba colony in the early 1960s. Manitoba colony had chosen a second elder, Bernhard Wiebe, by the early 1960s. He, several ministers, and a deacon led numerous committed persons to the new colonies. The elder and two of the ministers at Buenos Aires were brothers, all grandsons of Bishop Wiebe who had led the Old Colony from Russia to Canada. Rubber tires were one large issue as was the continuing preaching of Abram Dyck, the brother of Bishop Isaak Dyck. Abram Dyck was seen as favouring the use of rubber tires.
26. At first it had 5,000 hectare, but 935 were added in 1981 and 3,700 in 1983.


28. George Rempel, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 26 December 1996.


Electrical power became available in 1990 and about one third of the about 140 wells used electric pumps while two thirds used diesel.


A bus ran three times a week to Nuevo Casas Grandes. A train that had previously run no longer ran, other than sporadically to the mines in the hills.


The land was broken into 108 titles, that did not correspond to actual land ownership.


A large rancher, Jose Angel Mier, sold a large piece of land to the Mennonites, likely because of land reform. The land had to be sold in smaller pieces, not larger than 50 hectares each, which was said to jeopardize the establishment of solidly Mennonite
communities.

40. Franz Wiebe, interview by author, La Batea colony, Mexico, 20 December 1996


   Modernization was underway in La Honda during the 1990s. Vehicles and rubber tires were common. In 1993, electric power was being extended to seven villages there.


   By 1984, eighty families had moved to Campeche.


46. Bishop Franz Wall and Isaak Fehr, interview by author, Buenos Aires colony, Mexico, 29 December 1996.

   The interest rate is favourable, rising from zero to seven percent over time. The Amish themselves borrowed some of the loaned money. Prospects were better in Campeche than in drought ravaged northern Chihuahua. More money was needed though to purchase the essentials to start life there. Land in the north also was difficult to sell.


   Only two families had less than ten acres of land, and thirty-three families, of a total of eighty-two families, had 160 acres or more.


   In 1984, it was described as being split into two school groups, one with thirteen students and the other with eight. There were also two church groups.


   In 1985, some land title problems were resolved favourably, giving more hope to
the colony. One group's four families attended the old church while the other group met in a school for church services. The residents hoped more settlers would come.


Arthur Driedger, Associate Director for Overseas Services, MCC Canada, letter to Andrew Plett, 14 September 1981, vol. 3585, file OS-064, Mennonite Heritage Centre.


52. Sawatzky, ME 5, 651.


54. Sawatzky, Sie Suchten eine Heimat, 121.


The colony only briefly had its own minister and otherwise relied on occasional visiting Old Colony ministers. The reason for the abandonment by the Old Colony may have been at least partly because most of the Yermo settlers used rubber tractor tires and some used trucks also. The Kleine Gemeinde was first asked to send a teacher from the Quellenkolonie and later the Kleine Gemeinde church also came to the community.

56. Sawatzky, Sie Suchten eine Heimat, 123.

57. Sawatzky, Sie Suchten eine Heimat, 124.


While the government in the 1920s welcomed foreign immigration, by 1961 this was frowned on. The Mennonite settlements were blocked from obtaining needed land.


Since the withdrawal of Article 27, the problems with land security should be many fewer. The government no longer helps the agraristas to obtain land, which may ease land search problems for the Mennonites.

61. Sawatzky, Sie Suchten eine Heimat, 124.


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Cornelius Neufeld, interview by author, El Capulin colony, Mexico, 28 December 1996.


63. Based on personal interviews with a number of people planning to emigrate.

64. Schmiedehaus, “Mennonites Again on the Move,” 16.


67. Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 23.

68. Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 178.


    Swift Current people went to Swift Current colony, near Brechas. Nord people went to Riva Palacios colony, also near Brechas, and Santa Rita founded Santa Rita colony, also in the same area.


73. Bishop Franz Wall and Isaak Fehr, interview by author, Buenos Aires colony, Mexico, 29 December 1996.

74. Dan Penner, interview by author, Nuevo Casas Grandes, Mexico, 27 December 1996.

75. Franz Wiebe, interview by author, La Batea colony, Mexico, 20 December 1996.


77. Sawatzky, ME 5, 653.

78. Isaak Ens, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996.

80. Bishop Bernhard Bueckert and Gerhard Klassen, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996.

81. Isaak Ens, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996. Enthusiasm was not high for the move to Argentina, at least partly because of the cost involved. It was difficult to sell land in Durango, which often needed to be sold on credit.

82. Mennonite Heritage Centre, vol. 3584, file no. OS-054, George Reimer, “Durango and La Honda,” 31 December 1981, page 6. Durango colony considered and rejected Brazil as a possible destination, possibly due to disunity, although their not speaking Portuguese, the official language there, may have played a part.


84. “Bericht von Seminole,” *Die Mennonitische Post, Beilage für Mexiko* 1, no. 7 (15 August 1983): 6. Most of the Mexican Mennonites in the U.S. are thought to be there illegally, but they are not usually forced to leave.

Bruce Wiebe, interview by author, Winkler, Manitoba, 17 October 1996. From time to time the U.S. has declared amnesty for the illegals.


88. Bruce Wiebe, interview by author, Winkler, Manitoba, 17 October 1996.


ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR


   This fits with findings that have been made about relationships of similar societies and their host societies by others. “Plain people have developed and grown and persisted on the basis of a reciprocal relationship with the larger environment. These relationships have tended to be affirmative of the plain peoples’ life styles rather than serving as seductions for assimilation into the larger society. That is to say, the economic relationships, for example, have tended to help the plain people survive and become more autonomous, at least culturally, rather than making them more dependent and interrelated.”


   The five points of the *Privilegium* granted freedom from military service, freedom from swearing oaths, religious freedom, educational freedom, and freedom of property.


   In 1966, the Canadian Embassy in Mexico commented: “... scattered conversations with Mexicans disclosed less ill will towards the Mennonites than we would have anticipated. They were described as a hard working, sober people who did not get into fights, traits not typical of other residents in that area. ... The Mennonites mix very little with the Mexicans.” They were also described as being better off than most neighbouring Mexicans.

   Helen Ens, interview by author, Winnipeg, Saskatchewan, 16 October 1996.

   Cuauhtémoc holds a Festival of Three Cultures, celebrating the Mexican, Tarahumara Indian, and Mennonite cultures. The General Conference people often represent the Mennonites in dealings with Mexicans. While this once would not have been well accepted by the Old Colony, by the mid 1990s the Old Colony identified more with the more liberal group.


   Jacob Friesen, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 19 December 1996.

   In 1996, one Mexican, who had married a Mennonite, lived on the Durango colony.

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The total of mixed marriages numbered less than ten from the colony. Most left the colony.


9. Isaac Ens, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 16 December 1996.

10. In 1996, the cooperative cheese factory of Durango colony had an office in downtown Nuevo Ideal where several Mexican women did business's bookkeeping. A telephone also was in the office. A less modern office, without telephone, electric typewriters, or computers was at one of the cheese factories where some of the book work was done by Mennonites.


13. Franz Wiebe, interview by author, La Batea colony, Mexico, December 1996. One colony where this has occurred is at La Batea.


14. Nuevo Ideal had about 10,000 residents and Cuauhtémoc had about 100,000 residents.

15. Helen Ens, interview by author, Winnipeg, Saskatchewan, 16 October 1996.

    Helen Ens has said that this highway did more to dispel the isolation in the colony than anything else.


    In 1986, a Mennonite man from Santa Rita colony was killed by Mexicans when he went fishing.

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   In October of 1995, several weeks after a bank had opened at Lowe Farm, it was robbed by armed men.

   In one case in 1986, robbers threatened a watchman and his family on the Manitoba colony and then loaded up over a dozen cattle.


   In November 1992, a Mennonite man from the Cuauhtémoc area was kidnapped, beaten, and held until $11,000 ransom was paid.
   In 1994, several men were hit by gunshots while riding in their buggies near Nuevo Ideal, Durango.

   In 1994, several men were hit by gunshots while riding in their buggies near Nuevo Ideal, Durango.
   In 1993, some Mexicans were responsible for a seemingly random shooting spree in the Swift Current colony, resulting in two Mennonites being injured.
In another attack in the Durango area, one Mennonite man died in 1994.

29. Bishop Franz Wall and Isaak Fehr, interview by author, Buenos Aires colony, Mexico, 29 December 1996.


34. Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 327.


Food was delivered and distributed by the Mennonites to various Indian communities.


In the 1950s, the colonies were called on to help pay for the highway from Chihuahua to Cuauhtémoc, which did not go through any colonies, and for the highway to Rubio, which ran through the Manitoba colony. The four lane highway through the Manitoba colony when later built in the late 1980s or early 1990s, resulted in a levy on the Manitoba and Swift Current colonies of $450,000.


41. Abraham Friesen, "Emigration in Mennonite History With Special Reference To The Conservative Mennonite Emigration From Canada To Mexico And South America After World War One" (masters thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, August 1960): 188.


In 1992, the governor of Chihuahua state, Francisco Barrio, was unimpressed when he and his family encountered rude youths on the street in a village near Cuauhtémoc.


There has been a belief, often heard, that Mennonites were only to be farmers and that doing other things would endanger the Privilegium. The origin of this belief is not known and it certainly is not spelled out in the Privilegium. It may have been based on some verbal interactions with the Mexicans or may have been an interpretation of the Privilegium clause that gave Mennonites the right to control their own internal economic system. One possible explanation for this belief is that the Privilegium may only apply to those who continue to be part of the original Mennonite community that went to Mexico in the 1920s.


In 1968, an article entitled "Mennonite Privilegium to Expire in 1972" appeared in the Chihuahua El Heraldo. The article said that an Old Colony commission was "... to present their case to President Diaz Ordaz and Governor Giner."


In 1971, Excelsior reported that the Privilegium had expired and that the agraristas were reclaiming their land for themselves. The article pointed out that the Mexican people were split over this, as the Mennonites had never been any trouble in the fifty years that they had been in the country. It was also mentioned that the Mennonites did not want to be Mexicans.


One possible explanation of the Mennonites' legal status was offered by George Rempel. An official in the Chihuahua passport office told him that the Mennonites, in order to maintain the Privilegium should have registered their children as "in Mexico born foreigners." This was said to have been verbally agreed to by the Mexican government and the Mennonites and that the Mennonites had been reminded many times of this, but had not complied with it. This shortcoming had apparently been used as grounds for a temporary suspension of the issuance of Mexican passports in about 1960.
According to R.A. Helling, in order to become a Mexican citizen, those born in Mexico would only have to declare allegiance to Mexico, but few had done so. R.A. Helling pointed out that ministers in Mexico had to be Mexican citizens, yet many held Canadian passports.

Others have said that military service has to be fulfilled to become a citizen. It also has been claimed that it was necessary to declare, in 1976 or at the person’s eighteenth birthday, whether they wanted to be a Mexican or a foreigner, although this law was not enforced.


Franz Wiebe, interview by author, La Batea colony, Mexico, 21 December 1996.

The conservative colonies still have little compliance with the Urjesta militar. In 1996, one knowledgeable resident in La Batea knew of no one who had the card.

Smaller groups of persons had tried unsuccessfully to convince the government that the Mennonites should not need the military card to obtain a pass. In 1986, the Vorsteher from the six Cuauhtémoc area colonies wanted to approach the government, using a lawyer and possibly the state governor to help them. There also was talk of trying to involve the other colonies in the effort. The argument they wanted to use was the freedom from military service granted by the Privilegium.


In about 1984, the government was said to be experimenting with an alternate service program, but it did not seem to involve the Mennonites.


In 1985, the Chihuahua governor, Ornelas, advised the Mennonites make a proposal to the president about alternate military service. The issue was important partly because of Mennonite problems in obtaining passports without the military card.


On November 11, 1986, district presidents of Chihuahua state met to discuss how Mennonite youth could perform alternate service. The government was aware of the issue and of the citizenship and passport problems of the Mennonites.


These minutes indicate that Mexican citizenship was needed to make some land purchases.


Renato Irigoyen, Consul of Mexico, Vancouver, B.C., letter to Mrs. Annie M. Ariss, Constituency Office, Morden, Manitoba, 1 February 1983, MCC Canada files, Ottawa.


One official of the Banco Nacional de Credito Ejidal said: "This land belongs to the Mexican farmers and now if they return it to our hands, we will have the solution to the old problem of the lack of land to grant to the authentic campesinos..." He went on to
describe the Mennonites as not offering any advantage to the region or its people but that they only benefited themselves.

66. “Gran Exodo de Menonitas al Canada,” El Heraldo, 2 April 1957, pages 1 and 3. The report said that about 20,000 Mennonites would emigrate to Canada or British Honduras if they were forced to join Seguro Social. Reportedly the Mennonites had said they did not need Seguro Social since they had an unlimited fund to pay for medical care better than could the government program.

67. Based on personal interviews with officials in various colonies, December 1996. Possibly the greatest single demand on the colonies’ Armenkasse was paying medical bills for destitute colony members.

“Record of Proceedings,” of meetings held between MCC and conservative colony Mennonites on October 25 and October 26, 1995 in Mexico, page 3, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

In 1995, Manitoba colony delegates to a meeting with MCC reported that “... they had managed to reduce the drain on their ‘armenkasse’ by getting many of their people enrolled in the ‘Seguero Social’, the national health insurance scheme.”


It was noted that the number of Mennonites enrolled in the program grew rapidly in the spring and fall when enrollment was possible. Those enrolled did not have a choice of doctors and were faced with waiting for service.

69. Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 135.

70. Hedges, “Plautdietsch and Huuchdietsch in Chihuahua,” 301.

71. Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 314.


72. Sawatzky, Sie Suchten eine Heimat, 257.


74. Internet address: http://www.angelfire.com/bizlbanrural/

BANRURAL is the acronym for Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural.


76. PRONASOL is the acronym for the National Solidarity Program.

“Geld für Kleinbauern,” Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau 1, no.18 (1 April 1993): 19.

78. PROCAMPO is the acronym for Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo.

79. For crops seeded in the fall of 1993, payments of 330 pesos per hectare were available. For crops seeded in the spring of 1994, the payment available was 350 pesos per hectare. Payments in 1996 were about 450 pesos per eligible hectare. Mennonites have been involved, with some success, in negotiations to try to extend this program to crops that were not included.

80. Some were suspicious of the Mexican motives in bringing in the program, thinking that enrollment in the program might lead to higher taxes, and others did not apply out of opposition to taking part in government programs. It appears though that the vast majority of farmers did apply, often with the help of the colony bookkeeper.

Johann Wall, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 19 December 1996. In 1996, in Durango colony, payments were only received for about 4,200 to 4,500 hectares, even though about 10,000 of the about 14,000 hectares of cropped land had been applied for. A delay in application may have been to blame for the discrepancy. Enrollment in El Capulin had been high, with only two or three farmers not taking advantage of the program.

81. FINAPE is the acronym for Acuerdo para el Financiamento del Sector Agropecuario y Pesquero.

82. George Neufeld, interview by author, El Capulin, Mexico, 28 December 1996.

83. In that case, many of the people wanted the power while the leaders did not. The leaders and others who were strongly opposed were likely to quietly leave for South America.

84. Johann Wall, documentation agent, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 19 December 1996.

85. Fretz, Mennonite Colonization in Mexico, 35.

In 1985, two policemen were fired from their positions after mistreating Mennonites in the Swift colony.
Three other police lost their jobs after hitting a vehicle with several gunshots.
In 1994, the police reported that two policemen mishandled two Mennonites working in a field, leading to one man needing medical attention. The police were upset after their vehicle hit a horse on the road.


In 1979, R.A Helling of the University of Windsor saw three areas that the Mexican government had neglected with the Mennonites. They were citizenship, land holding, and education. He thought at least some of these areas would need to change. Helling had also pointed out that some of the Mexican Mennonite land holdings were illegal, as under Mexican law individual land holdings were limited to 100 hectares. (Many Mennonites have held more land than that, although it would not show up possibly due to the method of the Mennonites holding land titles.) Helling is only one of many who have questioned how long the situation can go on as it has been.


See Regehr for discussion of the concepts of assimilation and accommodation.
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

1. Abraham Friesen, "Emigration in Mennonite History With Special Reference To The Conservative Mennonite Emigration From Canada To Mexico And South America After World War One" (masters thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, August 1960), 37.


   "Then the progressives frequently, in a mood of ungratefulness, either reviled the conservers for being too conservative, or tried to convert them because they seemed to the progressives to be lacking in spiritual, expressive faith."


5. Friesen, "Emigration in Mennonites History", 162-165.


7. Helen Ens, interview by author, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 16 October 1996.

   In 1996, Helen Ens, who had worked with the Mennonites in Mexico for about forty years, still felt that it had been right for other Mennonite groups to not leave the Old Colony alone. An obligation was felt to do something. One reason given was that without the outsiders efforts, the Mexican Mennonites would disappear into the Mexican culture.


   Other Mennonite groups have often talked about building understanding with the Old Colony group. Verney Unruh said: "We must repent of the attitude we have had toward the Old Colony Mennonites. . . . We need to learn to listen to them for what they have to teach us. . . . Our concern should be to work for renewal in individual lives, not a change of their lifestyle." He then goes on to say "We need to recognize that we are agents of change and, therefore, we will inevitably cause some conflict. . . . We need to challenge them to recognize and work with their neighbors (non-Mennonites)." The natural question is for what was repentance needed, if not for causing conflict and unwanted change.

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In 1975, at a missions retreat in Mexico, where new ways of reaching the Old Colonists were being explored, a General Conference missionary from Cuauhtémoc in referring to the Old Colonists said: “How does one work with people who think they are Christian?” At the same retreat, a Mennonite Brethren missionary said that: “Saying they are pagan is not bad.” Another participant said: “They are very religious, but they do not know that they have life eternal. They are taught that they never know if they are saved.”


In 1995, the Janz evangelistic team from Canada spent about two weeks in northern Mexico conducting services, supported by the General Conference, EMC and EMMC churches.


17. William Janzen, “Now we see through a mirror dimly: A report on a ten day visit with Kanadier Colony Mennonites of Mexico,” 20 May 1977, page 13, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.


MCC came into existence in 1920. A precedent for MCC was the *Hilfskomitee*, founded by Dutch Mennonites in 1725.

MCC soon helped Mennonites in and from Russia with various problems and over time built an international reputation for helping Mennonites and others in need.


The Canadian Embassy wrote a report on the colonies. Much of their information came from “… a representative of the liberal General Conference Mennonite Church, who has been sent down as a missionary to convert the more old fashioned Mennonites to modern ways. His efforts are resisted and viewed with extreme dislike by the orthodox. They tried to have him thrown out with the help of one of the few Mennonites to come directly from Russia after the First World War, who has built up a small fortune handling the agricultural produce of the Mennonites.”


George Rempel, interview by author, Cuauhtémoc area, 13 December 1996.

Helen Ens, interview by author, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 16 October 1996.


This article gives some background information.


32. Helen Ens, interview by author, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 16 October 1996.


34. Philip Dyck, interview by author, Manitoba Colony, Mexico, 11 December 1996.

In 1972, he and the work moved to the Mexican Department of Agriculture, the
National Agricultural Research Institute (INIA), later called the National Forestry and Agricultural Research Institute (INIFAP). After retirement in 1992, he still continued working part time.


36. The Kleine Gemeinde is descended from the Russian settlement of Molotschna, which traditionally has been quite separate from the Old Colony group.


41. Jacob Unger, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 18 December 1996.
   In the 1990s, the Kleine Gemeinde made rapid inroads at Durango. The Old Colony had excommunicated a Mrs. Guenther for not selling and using the car her deceased husband had bought. Her children and others dissatisfied with the Old Colony then asked the Kleine Gemeinde to come into the community. A popular Old Colony minister, Jacob Unger, was also pushing the limits of the Old Colony and questioning various things about the church. He had started holding Bible studies in his home and also started attending an evening school others had started. He questioned excommunicating for rubber tires and vehicles while other more serious moral and behavioural transgressions went unpunished. Soon after he attended a meeting called by MCC in Chihuahua, he was told not to preach anymore. He was excommunicated in early 1996 for making an uproar, and by April 1996 was preaching for the Kleine Gemeinde. Prior to that Kleine Gemeinde ministers had come from Chihuahua or La Honda. By December of 1996, the popular minister was attracting 350 to 400 persons to Sunday services. A new school and church had been built, partly with money from supporters from outside the community. Only about one third of the money came from within the colony. The Old Colony preaches against the Kleine Gemeinde, calling them false prophets.

42. Partly based on personal observations. For some details about K.G. see:

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In 1981, Reimer commented on the inroads the Kleine Gemeinde was making at Santa Rita in the wake of the Old Colony leaving for Bolivia. “The process of inviting Kleine Gemeinde teachers to be followed by their spiritual ministry, is very similar in Lowe Farm (Manitoba Plan), Swift Plan, and Santa Rita.”

43. The Kleine Gemeinde had a four classroom school, a church, and a power plant for the community at Campo 82 by 1981. Some from other villages came to the church and school there as well. The Kleine Gemeinde was so resented that some moved to other villages and from there planned to move to Bolivia.

After a second migration to Bolivia of the Old Colony from Swift Current colony in the mid 1970s, the Kleine Gemeinde came into that colony. At one point they also attempted to start a school at Campo 2B of the Manitoba colony, but were asked to leave by the Old Colony leaders. Later on, a more successful effort was made and a school ended up at Campo 2A, Gnadenthal. They now has two churches and schools on the Swift Current colony. For some further details see:


Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG8 B94, Schmiedehaus papers, file 23, William T. Snyder and Cornelius J. Rempel, “Report to MCC Executive Committee of Negotiations with the Government of Mexico and the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico concerning refugee migration.”

They approached President Aleman asking for the same privileges as the Old Colony had received in the 1920s. The area favoured for settlement by the MCC representatives was in northern Mexico.

The Old Colony people were sympathetic to the problems of the refugees but did not want to receive them into the colonies. They were willing to help though with the settlement of the refugees in other sites chosen for them.

45. Fretz, Mennonite Colonization in Mexico.


Dr. C. W. Wiebe’s report on the Mexican colonies painted a dismal picture of the nutrition and health situation there. Few fruits and vegetables were eaten, milk was sold and not used enough by some who raised it, trichina infested pork had caused fourteen deaths the previous winter, gastroenteritis was a serious killer, maternal care was deplorable and morbidity high, and many of the people lived in unsanitary conditions. Wiebe recommended an education program to help remedy these deficiencies and the engagement of a nurse and a doctor to help with the problems.

47. Fretz, Mennonite Colonization in Mexico, 4.

There was no hospital in the community at the time MCC brought its health services to Cuauhtémoc in 1947. The nearest one was in Chihuahua, about sixty-five difficult miles away. Initially a seven bed hospital was opened. By 1954, it had thirty to forty beds and was a joint effort with the Mexican government.

MCC had reopened the hospital in about 1951, which had been closed due to lack of personnel. In 1959, there were 4 General Conference and numerous Mexican workers at the hospital.

In speaking of the early MCC work in Mexico, Bill Janzen, MCC worker in Mexico, said: “The Old Colony leaders were set against MCC at that time and wanted their people to stay clear even though they were not able to provide them with necessary provisions through their deacon fund.”

George Reimer commented about the early MCC and early General Conference work: “Resistance to interference in Old Colony spiritual affairs was widespread.”

Mennonite businessman Aaron Redekop told MCC workers they had twenty-four hours to get out of Mexico. Two of the workers, Tina Fehr and Helen Ens, only went as far as the border at Juarez where they discovered that they did not have to leave and then returned to Cuauhtémoc.

People thought MCC was trying to start a church, which was not really the case.
58. Warkentin, “Projections for MCC Canada Kanadier Work.”
Mennonite Heritage Centre, vol. 3121, file K-09, Arthur Driedger, MCC Winnipeg,
“MCC stance toward Mexico,” memo to Kanadier Mennonite Colonization Committee, 24
September 1980.
MCC did not have any further program in Mexico until 1976, when it asked the
Mennonites in Mexico to help with a flood in La Paz, Baja California, although some MCC
workers did visit some of the colonies in the 1960s and 1970s.
Still in 1980, MCC said it did not have a program in Mexico, although at that time
they were considering placing a staff person there.

The Old Colony representative, Abe Rempel threatened to resign if women were
allowed on the committee. Abe Warkentin said that the Old Colony had controlled the
agenda of the Kanadier Concerns Committee. Rempel also is said to have said that there
are no problems among the Mennonites in Mexico.


61. “New newspaper for Mexican Mennonites,” Mennonite Reporter 13, no. 17 (22
Mennonite Heritage Centre, vol. 2535, file no. OS-31, Abe Warkentin, “Die
Mennonitische Post”, a report prepared at request of Frank H. Epp, chairman of the
Kanadier Sub-Committee, Mennonite Central Committee, 19 June 1976.
The Welt Post of Omaha, Nebraska had bought the Steinbach Post’s subscription
list and had published some Kanadier correspondence, but the large readership in Mexico
fell off due to a “change in style and content”.

62. George Reimer, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 12 December 1996.

63. “The conservative colony Mennonites,” a pamphlet of Die Mennonitische Post,
In 1992, MCC provided $100,000 of the Post’s and Das Blatt’s $242,000 budget.

64. “Die Mennoniten mancher Kolonien,” Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau 3, no. 6
Abe Warkentin, “Latin America a potential powderkeg, greatest enemy is
In 1985, subscriptions were reported to be 2,400 for Mexico, with total
subscriptions at about 6,400. This was said to represent about 30,000 readers.


67. Based on personal observations and readings.


   When the Beilage finished on June 30, 1986, the Post said that its successor was to be locally owned in Mexico. A local committee was in place to look after a new publication. The *Menno-Zeitung* had gone through several earlier names, including *Mennonitisches Nachrichten Blatt* and *Mexikanische Menno Zeitung*.


72. Abe Warkentin, interview with author, Steinbach, Manitoba, 17 October 1996.

73. Victor Fast, “Issues affecting the Low German colony system in Latin America,” a report presented at the KMCC meeting in Winnipeg, 18 October 1991, from MCC Canada, Ottawa files.


76. Abe Warkentin, Director, Kanadier Concerns, letter to various MCC and Kanadier Mennonite Concerns Committee members, 12 July 1995, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.


79. There are two William Janzens involved with the Mennonites in Mexico. The one will be referred to as William and the other as Bill. William is the long time MCC worker from Ottawa, Ontario. Bill worked as an MCC worker in Mexico in the 1990s.

80. Janzen, “Now we see through a mirror dimly,” 10.

81. Abe Peters, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 9 December 1996.


   The Durango colony borrowed $5000 U. S. from the Manitoba, Canada Mennonites so that they could buy feed for their milk cattle. Also in these years, the Comité Menonita de Servicios, directed by the General Conference, was introduced in the Cuauhtémoc area to distribute seed and necessities of life.


Bill Janzen, interview by author, Calgary, Alberta, 9 November 1996.

The Old Colony also was involved in providing this aid. In spite of Bishop Loewen’s objections to the aid, ministers overturned his decision not to help and became involved. This help is said to have led to a reconciliation between Manitoba and La Batea colonies. La Batea had long shunned Manitoba colony because of its liberality.


86. “Record of Proceedings,” of meetings held between MCC and conservative colony Mennonites, 25-26 October, 1995 in Mexico, page 4, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

87. Abe Peters, interview by author, Cuauhthemoc area, Mexico, December 1996.

88. Bishop Franz Wall and Minister Isaak Fehr, interview by author, Buenos Aires colony, 29 December 1996.

89. Bishop Franz Banman, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 24 December 1996.


In 1996, Saturday afternoon sessions were begun by Bill. Some Old Colony and Reinlander teachers and other community members attended. In July 1996, Campo 8, Reinland, wanted sessions for teachers and parents. Five training sessions were held for them. Three ministers and a deacon attended to see if the sessions were appropriate. Interest was shown in using the curriculum developed by Fast. At least one Old Colony school in Mexico had begun using Fast’s materials, although it is said that the parents did not know about this. Bill was optimistic that, with parents pressuring the Bishops, that educational change would proceed.


95. Dan Penner, interview by author, Nuevo Casas Grandes, Mexico, 27 December 1996, and observations of author.

Comments about Dan and his family from Old Colony leaders and other people

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were positive. One visiting minister had criticized MCC or Dan Penner one Sunday. The next Sunday, another minister had corrected the false information given the previous week.

96. Abe Warkentin, Director of Kanadier Concerns, letter to Henry Bergen, Durango, 21 April 1992, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

97. Larry Kehler, Acting Associate Director for Overseas Services, letter to Glendon and Rietha Klaassen, 26 February 1981, MCC Ottawa files.

   Already in 1981, MCC recognized that: “Some of our mission boards have seen the Kanadier as objects of mission, rather than as brothers and sisters in Christ.”


   In 1977, William Janzen commented on the Mennonite churches’ mission efforts: “But usually these projects have been resisted by the Old Colony people. Considerable bitterness has resulted. Several projects have closed down after operating only a few years.”


   In 1975, showing an understanding of the processes involved in making inroads among the Old Colony, Martens saw the outsiders’ possibilities of making inroads into the Old Colony as improving. Before that, the Old Colony leaders, with the help of a: “... Spanish-speaking Russian Mennonite businessman, and local Mexican politicians ...” had sometimes managed to close the schools of the excommunicated Mennonites and exert other pressure on them. The newly elected Chihuahua state governor was expected to “... be favourably inclined towards the schools of the excommunicants.”


   In 1992, he said “The conservative Mennonite churches in Mexico (with the exception of a Kleine Gemeinde invitation for an education worker in 1992) have never asked MCC or other Mennonite agencies to come and help them, though individuals or smaller colony groups have asked for assistance many times, always or nearly always, against their religious leaders’ wishes.” Warkentin then went on to recognize the importance the Old Colony places on separation from the world and mentions the Old Colony stand on intermarriage, preservation of traditions, and education and describes the lengths the Old Colony has been prepared to go to in order to follow its ideals. Instead of concluding that harm had been done to the Old Colony he concluded: “Given the above, one can understand why MCC and the General Conference moved into Mexico in the 1940's against the wishes of the conservative Mennonite leaders and began working in the spiritual, educational and medical areas.”

100. Abe Warkentin, “Update on meetings of North American mission agencies reps. to discuss closer working together in Mexico,” to MCC Canada executive; The Kanadier Mennonite Concerns Committee, 28 September 1992, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

102. Abe Peters, interview by author, Cuauhtémoc area, Mexico, 8 December 1996.


The clinic later became privately owned and operated.

In 1974, Paul and Mary Poetker of Edmonton, Alberta started a day school for about thirty children of former Old Colony families, and in 1976, David and Mary Niessen from Saskatoon continued this work in rooms in the new church building near Schoenfeld.

It was noted that Maria Schulz Elias, an MB missionary, had worked at the clinic for about twenty-five years.


A BOMAS representative saw the need for community development work but recognized that with the resistance from the Old Colony leaders that this should not be initiated. They also saw the need for a public health program. In view of resistance encountered, he recommended to continue working with individual cases. In its summary, the representative said “Because the resistance to outside influences in of paramount importance to the OC church elders, a comprehensive program of aid for the settlement is not feasible at present. But the pressures of population growth and the probable change in government attitudes to their isolation may bring a crisis to the settlement within the next decade. . . . I would encourage Bill and other personnel to continue contacts with influential persons in the church in order to be prepared for open doors in the future.”

The EMMC also had made inroads among the Mennonites in Belize and more recently among the Mennonites at Seminole, Texas. The EMMC was part of the General Conference presence for years prior to coming to Mexico itself.


111. Johann Wall, EMMC minister, interview with author, Durango colony, Mexico, 18 December 1996.
112. Johann Wall and Mervin Kornelsen, interviews by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 18 December 1996. In December 1996, the EMMC school only attracted about forty students compared to the more than ninety that the Kleine Gemeinde already had attracted to their school in a short period of time. The EMMC were only attracting about sixty people to their Sunday morning services compared to the Kleine Gemeinde’s 300 or so.

113. Bishop Bernhard Bueckert and Gerhard Klassen, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996.


118. Bill Janzen, interview by author, Calgary, Alberta, 9 November 1996.

119. The first Gemeinde Gottes missionaries arrived in 1975. They apparently were helped into the community by three Old Colony ministers, including Elder Rempel, after the more conservative part of the Old Colony left for Bolivia. The presence of the teachers who came from Canada primarily to work as missionaries caused divisions among the Mennonites as their beliefs and practices were questioned by the outsiders. For some details see:


120. Based on personal observations, December 1996.


The Reinländer came into being in Manitoba in the mid 1950s when they broke from the Sommerfelder church. As the Old Colony in Canada no longer used the name Reinländer, they were free to use it.

123. Bill Janzen, interview by author, Calgary, Alberta, 9 November 1996.

Reimer, “Survey of Mennonites.”

Gives 1979 as the date of the Reinländer coming.


Reimer says that the Reinlanders ordained the new bishop and preachers in February 1979.

125. Reimer, “Santa Rita Colony.”
The only Old Colony minister remaining in 1981, also planned on leaving the next year for Bolivia with some followers. For the time being, he was holding rotating services in three villages.

The Reinländer kept things as they had been initially, except that they allowed cars.

Bill Janzen, interview by author, Calgary, Alberta, 9 November 1996.
George Rempel, interview by author, Cuauhtémoc area, Mexico, 11 December 1996.

In 1981, there were 699 members and 2,021 persons in the Reinländer group in Swift Current colony and 199 members and 647 persons in Santa Rita. As of the end of 1992, in the Swift Current colony, they counted 3045 persons of whom 1202 were members. At Santa Rita, they had 1511 people of whom 540 were members. The Reinländer also had some members in Nord colony in 1996. The Mexican and Manitoba Reinländer work as partners.

127. George Rempel, interview with author, Cuauhtémoc area, Mexico, 11 December 1996.
The Swift Current ministers also gave up the high boots, while the Santa Rita ministers did not. They were able to take over the Old Colony churches in the Swift Current colony but not in Santa Rita. One church still sat empty there in 1996. Some Old Colony people still live in Santa Rita but belong to the Old Colony on Nord colony.

It has been privately owned by a group of persons.

129. Abram Siemens, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 14 December 1996.

Already in 1963, a radio program was broadcast over two stations in three languages.

In 1964, the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions from Hillsboro, Kansas planned to broadcast a thirty minute Low German program, that could cover Mexico, from Monterey, Mexico. It was said: “An estimated 25,000 Low German speaking Mennonite people reside in Mexico and present a tremendous challenge for gospel broadcasting . . .” The broadcasts were to be followed up with a program of Bible courses.

In 1967, a five minute program was offered in Spanish from Monday to Saturday, along with a half hour program, at least partly in German, on Sunday.

“Mexican church approves congregational autonomy,” The Mennonite, 8 February
Beginning in about 1972, the Mennonite Church of Mexico (General Conference) began to provide seasonal radio programming in Mexico. In 1977, it decided to begin weekly fifteen minute programs in Spanish. Beginning in 1976, the EMMC from Saskatoon put on a half hour program every week.


In the early 1980s, Gerhard Ens of Winnipeg, Manitoba produced thirteen Low German programs on Mennonite History, which were aired on the local station.


A group of Mennonite businessmen bought the German program, which was sixteen hours per week at that time.

133. George Rempel and George Reimer, interviews by author, Cuauhtémoc area, Mexico, December.

In the past the Old Colony of the Manitoba Colony favoured a more conservative bookstore and printing shop over one less so. George Rempel (Senior) had operated a printing business in Campo 22, that in time was taken over by his sons George and Peter. A Mr. Loewen, a former employee of the Rempel shop, went into business on his own and received the substantial Old Colony church business, likely because of being more traditional than the Rempels. Rather than compete with each other, the Rempels and Loewens reached an agreement whereby the Loewens would run the bookstore/print shop business and the Rempels would print calendars and have a retail store. That agreement is still honoured today. A problem has come up though as others want to print and sell calendars and religious books, very popular in the colonies. This has created ongoing frictions. The Rempel family left the Old Colony some time ago.


The building still was owned by COM. MCC staff, including Helen Enns and George Reimer, used the bookstore as a base of operations at that time.


Also based on personal observations.

They sent a worker to Mexico to work with a selected group of families with handicapped persons. Initially eight handicapped persons were worked with but due to rumours, divisions, and suspicions, the effort folded before the worker’s term was up. Hoped for additional workers did not arrive, and the Old Colony ended their involvement in the project due to the use of a tape recorder, rumours about questionable morals, and local people not having been trained to take over the program.

Jake and Ella Neufeld had come from Manitoba and had trained up to 40 persons to work with handicapped in the new facility and at home.

A complaint was lodged with immigration officials in the face of increasing acceptance of the outsiders “apparently to disperse the unit and halt work.” Visas, the nature of the work, and the source of the support for the work were checked by immigration officials. Two women workers were ordered to leave within twenty-four hours and some phases of all work were ordered discontinued, and programs were seriously curtailed after that. The medical and agricultural work was allowed to continue. Colony leaders did say that they did not complain to the government.

In 1968, several General Conference workers returned to Winnipeg after working in a clinic. They had used tourist visas and were refused permanent visas. Also based on interviews and observations.

One man had his house surrounded by men who threatened him for his children being in a General Conference school. In about 1974, the General Conference school at Kronsgart was closed due to threats of violence, and General Conference farmers also have
sometimes found that Old Colony cheese factories would not take their milk


The upheaval these other groups have brought “... is spreading and self-perpetuating, progressively fragmenting and polarizing, and, indeed poisoning relationships in the community more and more, in a manner reminiscent of comparable events in Russia in the mid-19th Century, and in Canada in the 20th.”


The presence of outside groups has let to “... an even higher degree of competitive economic individualism than that prevailing in Old Colony society.” The new groups are “... much more consumption-oriented, particularly in respect to goods whose acquisition and use carry with them little or no potential for the multiple recycling of wealth within the Mennonite community ...”
ENDNOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX


   William Janzen of MCC Canada estimated that: “... we can expect a maximum of about 1500 people per year for the next few years.”


   In 1981, William Janzen estimated that there were at least 10,000 Mennonites from Mexico in Canada.


20. National Archives of Canada, McDonell letter to Director of Immigration.


   The CPR spoke to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration about these settlers. The Superintendent of the Ontario Northern Railroad was encouraging of the Mennonites coming into the Matheson and New Liskeard areas, unlike the Acting Director of Immigration.


   Martens, “Mennonites from Mexico,” 45.

Machinery and possibly some cattle were bought with loans from other Mennonites.


34. Possibly the best statistics on the Mexican Mennonite movement to Canada have been kept by MCC. These statistics however only began to be kept once MCC set up programs to work with the immigrants, which leaves prior decades for which no figures are available. It is difficult to know what percentage of those coming to Canada are represented in the figures, although MCC workers have thought they see almost all who make the move. Those coming to Canada for the first time are more likely to seek the help of MCC than someone who has been in Canada repeatedly. Also, someone who has their papers in order before leaving Mexico also will be much more likely to not use the MCC services. Similarly, the prior presence of family or friends in Canada will reduce the need for help from MCC. The fact that MCC only offers these services in specific areas also limits the number of persons who will seek out MCC, even though MCC has located their services in the areas where most Mexican Mennonites do go. MCC figures are however useful as they do give some idea of the size of the movement and also of changes in the pattern of the movement.


Correspondence from the time shows speculation about the wisdom and implications of such a move. There was also discussion by MCC with Canadian government officials about making changes to the point system to make entry easier for many of the Mexican Mennonites.


42. Abe Warkentin, Director of Kanadier Concerns, letter to Henry Bergen, Durango, 21 April 1992, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

43. Bruce Wiebe, interview by author, Winkler, Manitoba, 17 October 1996.


As of November 1994, only about thirty-eight Kanadier families had come to Manitoba. Some of these had also come from Ontario, the U.S., and Paraguay.


By April 1995, an increase in the movement to Manitoba was noted.

47. Bruce Wiebe, interview by author, Winkler, Manitoba, 17 October 1996.

Of the Mexican Mennonites that have come to Manitoba, at least one spouse was a Canadian citizen in most cases. This percentage was higher in Manitoba than in Ontario.


51. Byron Rempel-Burkholder, “Couple helps Kanadier from Mexico find their way in Alberta,” *Mennonite Reporter* 27, no. 12 (June 9, 1997): 1. This article indicated that there were 1,500 Kanadier households in southern Alberta, and that Alberta had the second largest number of Kanadier after Ontario.

52. Abe Fehr, interview by author, Lethbridge, Alberta, 9 November 1996. The last three years had seen an increase in the number of young families with young or no children.

53. Martens brothers, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 9 December 1996. One had worked for Mennonites and one had worked for a Norwegian family, picking up a strong Norwegian accent as he learned English. Both sent money home to their family in Mexico and also returned to Mexico for part of the year.


57. Marvin Dueck, interview by author, Leamington, Ontario, 3 December 1996.


In the mid nineties, a private school and a church operated. A number of the conservative Mennonites spent some time at this group's Bible School at Carbon Hill, Ohio.

Janzen, draft of "A History of OMIAC, 2.


Marvin Dueck, interview by author, Leamington, Ontario, 3 December 1996.


Mennonite Heritage Centre, vol. 2566, file OS-48, William Janzen, chairman of OMIAC, memorandum to Art Driedger, for the Kanadier Mennonite Colonization Committee of MCC (Canada), 2 December 1977.


Indicates that with the filing of a "Notice of Intention", a private school could be established, without government funding.


In 1989, three other schools were started, offering grades one to eight, at Aylmer, Walsingham, and Wheatley, and by the fall of 1989, the three schools had 300 to 400 students enrolled.


In error Janzen says 1990 was the starting date for the schools.

By 1991, the Old Colony had five private schools in Aylmer, Wheatley, Dresden, Cultus, and Kingsville. Kindergarten to grade twelve was offered with a tuition fee of $67.50 per month. No government assistance was being received by the schools.


By 1996, a sixth school had been added. Most of the teachers were not qualified by public school standards.


This report says there were eight schools already in 1994.


In 1989, the seventeen year old male teacher at one of the Old Colony schools had no teacher training. He had sixty-seven Mennonite students whose parents paid forty-six dollars per month per child in tuition. Parents did stay to help the teacher. Both English and German were taught in the school. The school was able to pass the Ministry of Education requirements.


This source indicates some of the problems in Ontario.


84. “Valedictory address salutes Low German-speaking parents,” Aylmer Express, 2 November 1994, 22.


In 1973, in the Winkler elementary school, twenty-eight of twenty-nine teachers knew German. This made the adjustment easier for the Mexican Mennonite students, as did the fact that many of the other students were also Mennonite.

86. John Janzen, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 26 December 1996.

   In 1985 it was noted that machines had replaced many tomato pickers, that tobacco was in less demand, and that cucumber pickers were in demand.


92. Based on personal observations, December 1996.
   After about six months in Canada, they returned to Canada with less than half of what they earned, although still with a substantial amount of money.

   At the time the report was controversial, as evidence was offered for and against the charges. In her 1975 report, Hildegard Martens also pointed to the poor living conditions of the Mennonites from Mexico.

94. Martens, “Mennonites from Mexico,” 43-44.


   Help Centre, “Research and Analysis,” 22.


98. Mennonite Health Promotion Project fourth bi-annual report, 16 October 1992, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.


100. Abe Fehr, interview by author, Lethbridge, Alberta, 9 November 1996.


104. John Janzen, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, 26 December 1996.


108. Payne, "Trickle of Mennonites to Aylmer area."


One advocate for the workers said: "It's been known for years within the community that Mennonite farmers are taking advantage of their own people, but no one talks about it. . . . When I look at the way these children are living it makes me sick. And the fact that it is being done by Mennonite farmers makes my stomach turn."


118. Abe Fehr, interview by author, Lethbridge, Alberta, 9 November 1996.


General, Immigration, Ontario Region, 2 August 1979, page 5.


123. “Special services are unfair to immigrants,” Aylmer Express, 23 May 1990.


127. George Neufeld, interview by author, El Capulin colony, Mexico, 28 December 1996.

128. Henry Bergen, interview by author, Port Burwell, Ontario, 2 December 1996 is only one source for this information.

Some who sold land to move to South America priced their land in litres of milk to protect themselves from inflation. By the mid nineties, what rich people Durango once had were largely no longer rich while the Cuauhtémcoc area had many more well off people.


William Janzen wrote: “…the social system caused a significant number of people to become marginalized, meaning that they were economically impoverished, or religiously alienated, and educationally unequipped for other positive options, and -- of particular importance to us -- that it has often been those on the margin of Mennonite society in Mexico who have made their way to Ontario.”


Many have been ashamed to tell Canadians what their wages were in Mexico.


135. Jacob and Heinrich Unger, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 18 December 1996.

In 1991, Abe Warkentin of Kanadier Concerns wrote: "... these are refugees fleeing a system that has become bogged down in legalism and can no longer meet the economic, spiritual and educational needs of the people."


He goes on to quote Ezekiel 20:39 where it says: "O Israel, the Lord God says: If you insist on worshipping your idols, go right ahead, but then don't bring your gifts to me as well! Such desecration of my holy name must stop!" The translation from the German in this writer's. The Bible passage is taken from The Living Bible, Paraphrased, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois.

139. Personal interviews in various colonies, 1996.
Some would say they only needed to go to Canada for one more year but they said this year after year. Each time some return, they promise to stay in Mexico, while some already have arranged the next year's work with their employers in Canada. It is hard for the leaders to know who is honest and who is not.

140. Sawatzky, They Sought a Country," 320.


142. Based on personal observations, December 1996.
MCC had become involved and paid off the debt to his employer when his pay cheques had been stopped to recover the loan.

143. Jacob Unger, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 18 December 1996.


This outlines some of the history and roles of MCC in working with the migrants.


149. Janzen repeatedly over the years brought general problems with immigration and citizenship policies to the departments’ attention. He also repeatedly intervened on behalf of individuals who were having problems negotiating the bureaucratic maze. It is not an exaggeration to say that hundreds, and possibly thousands, of Mennonites from Mexico would not have been able to enter or remain in Canada had it not been for the work of Janzen and the MCC.


   Dennis Scown of the Immigration Department in Manitoba: “... encouraged MCC (Canada) to assign personnel in Mexico to assist Mennonites in acquiring adequate documentation.”


   In 1979, William Janzen concluded that MCC Canada should offer documentation work in Mexico.


   After a trip to Mexico, Janzen and Driedger also recommended working with the documentation agents in Mexico by giving them information, encouraging coordination of their work, and by keeping in contact with the Canadian Embassy.


   In 1980, such work was at least partly carried out when several MCC representatives travelled to Mexico and met and taught six documentation agents there. It then was felt that a separate MCC documentation worker was not urgently needed in Mexico.


   George Rempel, another long time MCC worker, also felt that MCC should be involved with documentation work in Mexico, although for somewhat different reasons. Rempel saw that Canadian documents served many purposes other than just allowing persons to come to Canada to live, including their usefulness to remain in Mexico or to live in other South American countries.


155. Minutes Number 4 of the Kanadier Colonization Committee, 2.
Mennonite Heritage Centre, vol. 2535, file OS-31, “Conclusions and
Recommendations of the Kanadier Committee of MCC (Canada) Meeting,” 3 June 1976.

156. William Janzen, “A Report on O.M.I.A.C. for the MCC Ontario Board of
Directors,” 1 February 1984, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

157. David and Helen Friesen, interview by author, Aylmer, Ontario area, 3 December
1996.


162. “Appoint advocate for immigrants from Mexico,” Mennonite Reporter 7, no. 7 (4

a Service Program among the Mennonites who have come from Mexico to Ontario,”
December 1976.

Canada, Ottawa, letter to George Reimer, MCC, Mexico, 1 September 1982.

165. In 1981, Tina Wiebe began to work out of Leamington, and various volunteers
helped out in the Aylmer area along with George Rempels work.

166. “Ontario expands ministries to immigrants from Mexico,” Mennonite Reporter 18,
no. 16 (15 August 1988): 3.

OMIAC staff increased from three to eleven from 1987 to 1989 and the budget
increased from $48,000 in 1986-87 to $249,485 in 1990-91.
Janzen, “An Outline of OMIAC History.”
By 1994-1995, the budget had increased to $462,557. Whereas in 1977-78,
government grants made up $15,000 of the $35,700 budget, in 1994-95 government grants
made up $396,076 of the $462,557 budget. The balance of the funds throughout the years
have come from MCC funds and donations.

Hilda Friesen, Mennonite Health Promotion Project third bi-annual report, 15 May
1992, Abe Warkentin files.


173. Warkentin, “Aus dem Mennonitenleben: Eine Untersuchung,” 7 June 1991, 3. In 1991, it was reported that the immigrants were helped mainly with documents, employment and employment related issues such as social insurance numbers and unemployment insurance, and finances including dealing with government assistance programs such as family allowance.


William Janzen, Director MCC Ottawa, letter to Mr. R.W. Nichols, Registrar, Canadian Citizenship Branch, Ottawa, 29 March 1977, MCC Canada, Ottawa files. Also see:

R. W. Nichols, Registrar of Canadian Citizenship, Department of the Secretary of State, letter to William Janzen, Director, Ottawa Office, MCC, 16 August 1976, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

"... for some time the Canadian government was ignorant of the Mexican law regarding marriages and certificates of proof of citizenship were issued . . ."


189. Ken Monteith, M.P. for Elgin, four letters to The Honourable Gerry Weiner, Minister of State, (Multiculturalism and Citizenship), Ottawa, 28 June 1989, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.


William Janzen, “Now we see through a mirror dimly: A report on a ten day visit with Kanadier Colony Mennonites of Mexico,” 20 May 1977, page 1, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.

An official of the Citizenship Registration Branch had visited some of the colonies.


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If someone who was a Canadian citizen, whether born before or after 1947, did not follow the proper steps to retain citizenship, citizenship then was lost. They then could apply for resumption of Canadian citizenship. They first needed to be “...admitted to Canada for permanent residence” and then live in Canada for one year as a landed immigrant.

George Rempel, interview by author, Cuauhtémoc area, Mexico, December 1996.

This had risen from $500.00 on March 1, 1995. Additional fees of $100.00 were charged for each child. Ministers permits, allowing the immigrants to receive medical insurance, were $175.00.

Once landed immigrant status has been applied for, work visas could be obtained at a cost of $125.00.

In addition, medical fees of about $125 to $150 needed to be paid for the required medicals to obtain the immigration papers.

Fees again rose at the beginning of 1997. The cost to obtain citizenship papers for a spouse rose to about $1,800.


213.  Director General, Immigration Ontario Region, memo, 29 January 1980, MCC Canada, Ottawa files.


National Archives of Canada, RG 25, Records of the Department of External Affairs, G1, vol. 1724, file no. 5CB, Laurent Beaudry, Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, letter to His Britannic Majesty’s Consul General, Mexico City, 29 October 1936.


220. Blair, letter to Dr. C.P. Brown.


231. Fortier, letter to Dr. J.G. Taggart, 23 April 1952.

232. “2,000 mile trip by 28 in truck wasn’t too bad, only too long, Mexican immigrant to Canada says,” Toronto Globe and Mail, 10 November 1966.


235. Abe Fehr, interview by author, Lethbridge, Alberta, 9 November 1996.

237. Based on personal interviews, December 1996.
   Rates of 100 to 150 dollars per person were commonly charged for the trip to
   Canada, although possibly less for children.
   Isaac Ens, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996.
   In 1996, the rate from Durango to Canada was said to be 200 to 300 dollars U.S. per
   person.

238. Canadian National Archives, RG 76, Records of the Immigration Branch, vol. 1428,
   file 209-24-1, J.D. Love, memorandum to the Minister (of Immigration), 6 November 1979.

239. Canadian National Archives, RG 76, Records of the Immigration Branch, vol. 1428,
   file 209-24-1, District Administrator, London, Ontario, memorandum to Director General,
   Immigration, Ontario Region, 2 August 1979, page 2.

240. District Administrator, London, to Director General, Immigration, 13.

241. National Archives of Canada, R.G. 76, Records of the Immigration Branch,
   vol.1112, file 554-22, Officer in Charge, Windsor, Ontario, memorandum to Regional
   Director, Toronto, Ontario, 23 March 1967.

   1428, file 209-24-1, Regional Intelligence Officer, J.G. Russell, Prairie Region, Winnipeg,
   memorandum to A/Director, Immigration, Winnipeg and other distribution, 19 March
   1976.

243. Officer in Charge, Windsor, to Regional Director, Toronto.

244. National Archives of Canada, R.G. 76, Records of the Immigration Branch,
   vol.1112, file 554-22, A/Officer in Charge, Sarnia, Ontario, memorandum to Regional
   Director, Toronto, Ontario, Subject- Mexican Mennonites...and Family, 10 April 1967.

National Archives of Canada, R.G. 76, Records of the Immigration Branch,
vol.1112, file 554-22, S/S R. Pritchard, memorandum to Officer in Charge, Windsor,

245. "Mennonitische Familie aus Mexiko Eintritt in Kanada verweigert,"Menno-


   1428, file 209-24-1, J.F. Dinsmore, Immigration Officer, London, Ontario, memorandum to
   A/Officer-In-Charge, Canada Immigration Centre, London, Ontario, 16 September 1977.

248. David and Helen Friesen, interview by author, Aylmer, Ontario area, 3 December
   1996.


   In 1981, a forty year old man, who was mentally or emotionally handicapped, was forced to return to Mexico, after living in Ontario with relatives for about one year.


255. Johann Wall, documentation worker, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 19 December 1996.
   Johann Wall had handled about 160 citizenship and passport applications in 1994, about 320 in 1995, and about 400 in 1996. He also handled some applications from La Batea and La Honda although some also have gone to Manitoba colony for their paperwork. January to May was the busiest time of year for the applications. Johann Wall had taken over this work since Henry Bergen and his son Jacob moved to Canada.

256. George Neufeld, interview by author, El Capulin colony, 28 December 1996.
   In 1996, George Neufeld handled about twenty to twenty-five citizenship applications and about fifteen passport applications. Some of his customers came from other nearby colonies.


258. George Rempel, interview by author, Cuauhtémoc area, Mexico, 13 December 1996.


Central Committee (Canada)," page 3.

   


4. Bram Siemens, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, December 14, 1996.


6. Bishop Bernhard Bueckert and Gerhard Klassen, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 12 December 1996.


10. Isaak Ens, interview by author, Durango colony, Mexico, 17 December 1996.


12. Abram Siemens, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, December 14, 1996.

13. Eighmy, Mennonite Architecture, 60.


The Mennonites in Mexico have long been criticized for not utilizing the potential of the milk production more. In 1966, it was said that they were losing large amounts of income because of incomplete milk use. Many think that they could produce a larger range of milk products than just cheese.


19. George Neufeld, interview by author, El Capulin colony, Mexico, 28 December 1996.

20. Bishop Franz Wall and Isaak Fehr, interview by author, Buenos Aires colony, Mexico, 29 December 1996.

Buenos Aires and El Cuervo colonies were under the same Lehrdienst. Two bishops remained there. Bishop Bernhard Wiebe, a grandson of the Fürstenland Bishop Wiebe who led the 1770s exodus from Russia, was retired from active work. The new bishop was Bishop Franz Wall. The leaders of the community were not really for electric power but no longer saw any alternative.


The 92 kilometres of power lines was to cost 12,500,000 pesos, which could be paid for over a number of years. It was thought that about sixty percent of the residents would take the power.

Personal interviews said the cost was to be 12,500 pesos per hookup, payable over a number of years.


This report said that the cost was 12,500 pesos per village plus 2,000 pesos per household.


The exact years of drought vary somewhat. The Cuauhtémoc area colonies experienced serious drought from 1992 to 1994, while 1995 was somewhat better and 1996 was back to about normal rainfall. Colonies farther north, including El Capulin,
Buenos Aires, and El Cuervo, even though largely dependent on irrigation, have had less than normal rainfall now for a number of years. Farther south, La Batea has also experienced intermittent drought in the past several years.

   “Bewässerungsbrunnen um Cuauhtemoc, Namiquipa und Riva Palacio”, Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau 1, no. 8 (15 October 1992): 9. In 1992, it was noted that villages that previously had not irrigated much in Los Jagueyes, Manitoba, and Santa Rita colonies were putting in new wells up to about 700 feet deep. Results in many cases appeared to be good.

   Sometimes both summer and winter crops were grown. Irrigated wheat and oats are seeded in January and harvested in May and June. Sorghum can be grown on the same land in summer. Corn, kaffir, beans, and cotton are grown as summer crops. Farm size was up to 200 hectares.

27. In spite of its low income levels, Mexico has for many years had higher prices for many agricultural products. Food has been made affordable for the masses by the fixed prices of many basic foods. NAFTA has also affected the agrarian subsidies paid to the farmers.

28. Cornelius Neufeld, interview by author, El Capulin colony, Mexico, 28 December 1996.

29. Based on personal observation.


31. Sawatzky, Sie Suchten eine Heimat, 250.

   Abe Peters, interview by author, Manitoba colony, Mexico, December 1996.

33. While the parents in the 1990s wring their hands over this, reports from the sixties report much the same occurrences. Some parents now likely were drinking teenagers then. Mennonite Heritage Centre, vol. 2989, file EO-74-1980, George Reimer, “Some Impressions of Mexican Mennonites Now,” 20 October 1980, page 5.
   In 1980 it was observed that due to drinking, “. . . about twenty youths were jailed every weekend . . .” Hedges, “Plautdietsch and Huuchdietsch in Chihuahua,” 245.
   Hedges has observed that “. . . before they have been baptized and become full members of the Jemeent, young people are expected to sow their wild oats, engage in roughhousing, and to stretch some of the rules of the oole Ordumh, especially those
regarding clothing and relations with the \textit{Welt}. The majority of the Old Colonists who attend Mexican circuses, concerts, and rodeos are young adults, and although drinking by the young people is universally condemned, it is usually tolerated as evidence of teen rebellion. It is expected that when the young adults are ‘converted’... confess their sins, and are baptized, they will, as full members of the \textit{Jemeent}, uphold all the tenets of the \textit{oole Ordnunk, including those about language}.


   Sawatzky has spoken of a malaise and has said: “... there is reason to suspect that among the large and increasing number who appear to be resorting to alcohol as refuge- and indeed at increasingly younger ages- there are also increasing numbers of those who perceive themselves as powerless... to attain that tangible level of accomplishment which would accord them stature and a position of equality and respect in the community.”

   Some people interviewed felt misled by the Fifth Estate crew. Some interviewees thought the crew was doing a story on the Mennonites in Mexico while they did a story on the drug issue. The associate producer of the show, Andrew Mitrovica commented on the openness of the Mennonites in Mexico. In an experience that he described as being “almost surreal”, the Loewen brothers, after responding to allegations of leadership in the drug trade, offered the television crew tea.
   Marvin Dueck, MCC Ontario, Chatham, memorandum to John Longhurst, 10 March 1992, MCC Canada files, Ottawa.


   Aiden Schlichting Enns, “Controversial coverage of drug smuggling scam,”

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The church said they had dealt with Banman. In May of 1993, after jumping bail and returning to Canada, Banman was sentenced, in the U.S., to five and one half years in jail.

MCC found itself the object of controversy and the target of charges of being soft on drug smugglers when it asked the Canadian government through Banman’s Member of Parliament to ask the U.S. whether he could serve his sentence in Canada. The Canadian government was willing to have this happen.

In May 1993, the Winnipeg Free Press reported that Mennonites from Mexico and Canada had one of the best organized drug smuggling rings.

From May 1 to 4, 1993, the Winnipeg Free Press six times ran the headline of “Bible belt is drug corridor: The Mennonite connection,” for a series of articles on the drug situation. It was reported that U.S. law enforcement officials were to come to Winnipeg to destroy the Mennonite drug organization. The article also said that it was thought that most of the drugs were raised by Mexicans in the hills near Cuauhtémoc and sold to the Mennonites.


After 1982, stricter restrictions were put on the import of vehicles. In spite of this, the payment of bribes would help these vehicles into the country. 1984 was called “the year of the pickups” for the Mennonites in Mexico, as thousands of vehicles were imported that year.

50. Personal observation, 1996.


It was noted in October 1980 that in the previous six months five people, probably all Old Colony people, had committed suicide.


At least five Mennonite men had committed suicide in Chihuahua since August 9.


(reprinted from Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau)

Suicide, once rare, was not uncommon in the colonies, and there apparently was no psychologist or psychiatrist in the Cuauhtémoc area dedicated to dealing with this.

53. Cornelius Neufeld, interview by author, El Capulin colony, Mexico, 28 December 1996.

This could be seen in 1996 at El Capulin, where the leadership had lost the support of many in the community. Hard economic times also might have played a role. When asked why attendance was poor, one person replied it was because “alles geht entzwei”, everything was coming apart.

54. Eighmy, Mennonite Architecture, 154-159.


56. Abe Fehr, interview by author, Lethbridge, Alberta, 9 November 1996.


In 1996, persons were leaving Buenos Aires and El Cuervo for Bolivia, not because of land shortages, as some land was vacant, but because of electric power coming into the community. They were led by Bishop Abram Thiessen from Buenos Aires and preacher Bernhard Wiebe from El Cuervo. This time Elder Bernhard Wiebe stayed behind.
ENDNOTES FOR CONCLUSION


2. Translated this means “we can still manage”.

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Mennonite Heritage Centre
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
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Mennonite Heritage Centre. Volume 2566. File no. OS-49.
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