Russlaender and Siksika Encounters: Privilege, Race, and Intercultural Connections at Namaka Farm

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In early 1925, the Canadian Colonization Association (CCA) accepted an offer from the Mennonite Land Settlement Board (MLSB) to settle twenty-five families[1] of German-speaking Russian Mennonites (Russlaender) on Namaka Farm. Formerly known as Namaka Ranch, the settlement evolved from a grand colonization scheme and flanked the western border of the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation in southern Alberta.[2] With their arrival, the area became home to three disparate cultures and languages with distinct, entrenched belief systems that disrupted existing power relationships: Siksika Nation, one of four Indigenous Nations that make up the Siksikai'tsitapi (Blackfoot confederacy); British colonial settlers; and Mennonite settlers.

Drawing on material from extensive oral interviews[3] and primary document research, this article proposes that the experiences of Mennonites prior to arriving in Canada influenced their adaptation and the development of intercultural relationships, particularly with the Siksika, their closest neighbours. Well-intentioned interactions appeared amicable, kind, and harmonious, yet closer scrutiny reveals damaging undercurrents. Tightly held Russlaender values created unforeseen and inadvertent repercussions, including the perpetuation of systemic injustices and racism.

History of the Land

Siksika

Before the arrival of any British colonists, Americans, or Mennonites, the "vacant wilderness" of the Great Plains was for millennia the traditional home of the Siksikai'tsitapi and other Indigenous groups.[4] The traditional territory of the Siksika stretched "from the North Saskatchewan River in present day Alberta and Saskatchewan to the Yellowstone River in the state of Montana, from the Continental Divide in the west to Regina in the province now known as Saskatchewan."[5] After Treaty 7 was signed, "the Siksika homeland shrunk to reserve number 146, and in 1910, this was reduced by nearly half in a surrender scheme aggressively pursued by the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA)."[6] The hastily contrived Home Farm Experiment, a scheme to encourage Indigenous peoples of the North-West to farm by providing instructors, seeds, implements, and provisions, came into being in the fall and winter of 1878 and 1879.[7] Once Indigenous groups were on reserves, however, the government showed little interest or willingness to honour promises of support. Sarah Carter writes, "It was vital to the enterprise of establishing colonial rule in western Canada to cast First Nations as the antithesis of agriculturalists—as hunters, incapable and ignorant of farming, and thus having no concept of true land ownership."[8] Non-Indigenous people believed that, despite their history of prairie farming, Indigenous people were uninterested in agriculture. The corollary to this belief was that Indigenous peoples did not need much land.[9] While the Home Farm Experiment on prairie reserves got off to an auspicious start, Indigenous leaders insisted they were not given enough implements or advice and the implements they received were inadequate.[10] A pass (permit) system controlled their movements, constraining their travels off the reserve—a control not imposed on other farmers.[11] Bands suffered from a lack of adequate clothing and footwear, making it difficult to work.[12] Hayter Reed, a lawyer with the Department of the Interior, enacted policies under the guise of humanitarianism and sincerity. In actuality, they were intended to abolish reserves.[13] Hugh Shewell writes that "the government attributed the failure" of the home farm program "to the Indians and to their 'inherent, restless disposition' and 'idleness.'"[14] By the turn of the century, Indian Affairs was promoting land surrenders.[15] By the time Mennonites began settling next door on Namaka Farm, independent, resourceful, and resilient Indigenous people known for their exceptional ability to adapt to change had no choice but to become largely dependent on government rations.

They would much rather have secured their own food as they had done since time immemorial, but their means of survival were taken away from them.

Elsie Thiessen Nikkel was born in the late 1930s on what was, at that time, part of Namaka Farm, where she and Peter Nikkel currently live. As August breezes blew across the open prairie, Peter and Elsie led me through the pastureland surrounding their home. "You're standing on original prairie,"[16] said Peter as I stared, transfixed, at the earth beneath my feet. We were standing on wild prairie wool—land deemed unsuitable for cultivation that had never been "broken." We headed for a nearby vantage point while keeping a close eye on a herd of cattle grazing in the distance. "The Siksika had a wagon trail that ran across these fields to Calgary prior to fences going in," Peter said, pointing to barely discernible parallel indentations wandering northwest across the land. Nodding his head to another area close by, he said, "Over there you can see all the dips and doodles where the buffalo must have taken dust baths."

Plains peoples, like those of the Siksika Nation now living on a reserve a few miles east, had always thrived on these lands. They understood the natural cycles of the land and the beings that inhabited it. They migrated with the seasons, knowing how and where to draw sustenance during each season. Settlers, like my ancestors, arrived to occupy this land recently taken from the Siksika. They were there to "break" the sod—which they and the government viewed as a necessary step to produce crops and survive. Developing agriculture required massive interventions that ravaged the water, the land, and its peoples, and inextricably altered their relationships. They struggled.

Namaka Farm

Successive owners of the land that became Namaka Farm ran into financial trouble and the property changed hands several times. In 1913, American-born George Lane purchased it. Lane would go on to become a wealthy rancher and Canadian politician. His mixed farming success depended on high prices and sufficient rainfall. Following a prolonged dry cycle beginning in 1916, leading to financial difficulties, the Dominion Bank took control of Namaka Farm in 1922. They continued to operate it as George Lane Ltd. even after Lane's death in 1925.[17] Here, on an eight-mile tract of land between the hamlet of Namaka and the Bow River, bounded on the east by the Siksika Reserve, sat a 12,265-acre ready-made farm needing to turn a profit.

At the same time, thousands of Mennonites, including my ancestors, were awaiting emigration and speedy removal from the Soviet Union.[18] Combined with their faith, their engrained attributes would serve them well in Canada. One of the most important assets aiding their migration was the existence of a solid network of experienced and savvy negotiators who mobilized to assist with their settlement. Over and above their reputation as loyal, hardworking, industrious, and thrifty people, they were esteemed as prized agriculturalists—exactly what the colonial government sought to expand a fledgling economy. Despite their impoverished situation on arrival, they knew how to achieve social and economic success. They could rebuild their communities. Eventually, thirty-six Mennonite families, including mine, would be settled on Namaka Farm. My father's Namaka story began in March 1930, when his widowed mother, Elisabeth (Liese) Klassen, married Namaka Farm settler Peter Jansen. Dad lived there until 1937 (between ages four and eleven). It was the place he spoke of his entire life.

Mennonite Settlers

The large ranch that became the settlement of Namaka Farm would have been sparsely populated before Mennonites arrived in the mid-1920s, but the Siksika people were aware of white settlers colonizing and "breaking" land that had been their home since time immemorial. To me, the Russlaender culture was distinctly different from that of the surrounding British colonial settlers. Russlaender came from a different background, spoke a different language, and had different beliefs. Until recently, I held them in a class of their own. After all, they were known for practicing peace, compassion, and charity. Even the Province of Alberta classified them differently by identifying three nationalities in their reports of families settled: British (whom Mennonites referred to as "the English"), Mennonite, and Other.[19] Russlaender arrived under different circumstances following years of social upheaval in their homeland. Americans and British colonial settlers, who responded to Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) marketing of opportunities on wide open land, chose to come to better themselves, but not because their lives were threatened. These *other* colonists were settlers who had displaced Indigenous people, not my relatives who *needed* to leave, unwillingly, under desperate circumstances. They would gladly have stayed had the political climate remained as it was at the turn of the twentieth century, before the rumblings of social and political change culminated in a revolution.

I have had to come to terms with, accept, and acknowledge my ancestors as settlers, not "immigrants" or "refugees" in search of a new home after leaving a country where life had become untenable. Some of their well-intentioned acts perpetuated systemic injustices, white supremacy, and racism. Although they could be considered marginalized, they had resources available to them through the colonial hegemonic structure into which they assimilated that were not available to others. They were also privileged (especially when compared to the Siksika). They used that privilege for economic, social, and cultural benefit at the expense of their Siksika neighbours—privilege of which I, too, am a beneficiary.

Intercultural Relationships

Initial Encounters

The demise of the bison in the late nineteenth century and the subsequent destruction of the Blackfoot economy led to dire conditions on the Siksika reserve, including "overcrowding in low log huts, widespread malnutrition, opportunistic infections and a dangerous erosion of health."[20] Yet, few statements of relief policy were issued between 1873 and 1912, although Indian agents received regular direction from the DIA. The government's tenor is reflected in one circular issued in 1903 to individual agents: "The Department desires that economy shall be exercised in supplying relief (as well as grain) to Indians of your Agency . . . [Indians] should be given to understand that they must rely [on their] own exertions for their support, and when possible [provide for] their own poor. [Relief] should not be given except in cases of illness [or when] the applicant is, on account of other infirmity [unable to provide] the necessities of life; or in cases where the [provision of relief will] prevent actual suffering. Pork and [ ] to be . . . allowed. No tea, tobacco [are to be] issued."[21]

In 1920, an inspection by a DIA doctor found children at Old Sun Residential School were "'below par in health and appearance' and 70 percent had enlarged lymphatic glands of the neck."[22] Jim Bremner grew up on Siksika reserve after his father Art became the DIA farm instructor in 1922. Jim recalled that there were not enough horses to pull implements. Lack of feed grain meant horses were turned loose on the road allowance to graze. Siksika people received rations of meat, flour, tea, and soap weekly.[23] As recently as February 1964, deplorable conditions on reserve were raised in the House of Commons after "a statement made by a Blackfoot Chief of

the Gleichen Reserve (Siksika) to the effect that the children are facing starvation, are badly clothed, and cannot attend school."[24] While the minister denied the allegation, it prompted a revision in how social assistance funding was allocated between federal and provincial governments and a reduction in the share to be paid by the bands.[25] Even today, many people are unaware of the atrocities, rationing, broken promises, and attempted assimilation sanctioned by the Canadian government.

What did Russlaender, having a different history and speaking little English, know or understand about life in Siksika Nation next door to them? It is impossible to speculate with accuracy, but some things are certain. All of them would have recognized the look of starvation and the behaviour it cultivated. They would have comprehended what it was like to be robbed of basic means of survival. Whether they understood it consciously or not, they would have possessed a knowing that prompted them to act from compassion, kindness, and gratitude. Never did I hear Dad, or any Mennonite interviewed, express fear or malice towards Siksika people and their ways.

Siksika didn't distinguish Mennonites from other newcomers. Everyone on the other side of the fence was a white settler on stolen land. Partly, it was semantics. Elder A explained,

> I think to our people anybody who was not Blackfoot was just white. I don't know if they differentiated between Mennonites, Hutterites,[26] all the different French and English. They were just white people. They referred to a lot of the Mennonites, the Hutterites as *Otaksistoyiiks*. It means whiskers/moustache, hair around the mouth. Our people lumped them into one group, including women. They did not distinguish amongst these "religious sects." I didn't realize that some of them were Mennonites. To me, they were all just English people.[27]

Herman Yellow Old Woman told me there was no Blackfoot word that separates non-Native people. He said,

> Our language is very descriptive. So, immigrants are white people. That's why a lot of our people here on the Nation didn't know how to distinguish Mennonites from all the newcomers. They didn't read, they didn't understand. They thought, well, they all came on boats, and they all came over to Canada. They all came from the same country. They didn't know that they were all different. German people in our language are called *Otaksistoyiiks*, which means bearded men. So, if you're German here, you are labelled the same as Hutterites, Mennonites—anybody that comes from Germany is called that.[28]

It is easy to understand the perception that Mennonites originated in Germany. Between their migrations from the Netherlands in the sixteenth century to imperial Russia beginning in the late eighteenth century, they lived in Prussia, then a German state. It was here they began speaking German, a language and ethnic identity they retained. The use of Low German (Plautdietsch) dated back to the sixteenth century, with words and expressions added from cultures through which they migrated. It was an oral language spoken in the home. The more formal High German was used in church, schools, and writings.[29]

Agriculture

Despite their reputation, not all Russlaender were experienced agriculturalists. Even those who were would learn that although the prairie terrain looked familiar, the soil and climate differed from that on the Ukrainian steppes. It would require different methods of cultivation and implements to become productive. Herman shared information that was new to me. Herman said,

> Back in the day I think they [Mennonites] really appreciated our people because our people knew everything about the land, from water, from the environment, the animals. Everything. And they knew how to doctor themselves, even the animals. And the Mennonites didn't know how to do that. A lot of the skills of doctoring came from Native people to help with their pets. They learned skills off our people because our people learned off the animals of the land.

It made so much sense that these newcomers could learn from those who knew how to live on the land, even in the absence of a common language. I felt immense gratitude that the Siksika people, whose land and way of life had been stolen from them, were now helping these settlers learn to live on this land.

Many of the settlers, like Nicolai and Maria Janzen, arrived on Namaka Farm with young children, and more were born soon after. In time, those children sought out farm work to help the family economically. Alan West, who married their daughter Gerta, told me, "As the family got older, first Gerta's brother Jake, and then brother Herb, rented land from the Siksika on the reserve. They developed good relationships with a few of the families on the reserve."[30] When I questioned why this came about, he said, "Because there wasn't enough land to start new farms of their own, but it would get them a grubstake. It gave them land to farm, and they would do it on a crop share basis. They would even hire some of the Siksika to work with them." Under the Indian Act, it was forbidden to lease uncultivated

reserve land to non-Indians.[31] Crop sharing may have been a way to circumvent this legal constraint.

Elder A's recollections contribute a different perspective. Elder A said,

> I remember my dad used to say, "Well, our farmers on the reserve, none of them had large tracts of land. At the most, maybe somebody would be farming a quarter section. It was very difficult to make ends meet with that quarter section." They would say if only they would allow us, but the government rules and regulations didn't. Our farmers used to say if only we were able to get more land, then we could make a go of farming. I remember my dad saying these farmers that lease land on the reserve, when they come in, their implements are bound together with wire. And he said within a couple of years of farming on the reserve, suddenly, they're all driving brand new equipment. They used to envy how these non-Indian farmers that came on the reserve got big tracts of land, and so were making a good living off our land.

This provided further evidence of the systemic injustices that the Namaka Farm settlers were perpetuating at the expense of the Siksika people.

Social Connections

When I first became interested in Dad's Namaka stories, I wondered what perceptions these Mennonite settlers would have brought with them to this new country. How did those who settled on Namaka Farm, separated from Siksika by a porous border, feel about their Indigenous neighbours? Liese, my grandmother, whose family had lived in the Terek colony, recounted frightening encounters with "Tatars," who had been displaced from traditional homelands during imperial Russia's colonization. She would regale Dad with stories about how she stood up to the "Tatars" when they raided their Terek homes or stole their livestock. Yet none of the white settlers I interviewed spoke of fear or described adversarial relationships with the Siksika, even on potentially contentious and stereotypical topics.

The farm Dad lived on lay immediately adjacent to Siksika Nation's western border. "Were you ever afraid of the Blackfoot people?" I asked. His reaction was swift. "Absolutely not!" he said. "They were a first-class tribe. Highly regarded and very skilled. Professional. Well organized. Very knowledgeable and resourceful."[32] He relayed stories about their famous and respected Chief Crowfoot, esteemed by other tribes and "the English," and signatory to Treaty 7. David Wall, whose grandparents Aron and Maria Wall

and their family lived one farm south of the Jansens, bordered by Siksika and the Bow River, had asked his father the same question. David remembers hearing stories about Blackfoot people appearing at the house occasionally and his grandmother giving them food: "My impression was that they arrived at the house looking hungry. My family certainly never felt threatened by them, but because their appearances weren't what we were used to seeing, there may have been a bit of apprehension."[33] Indeed, the stories I heard conveyed positive relationships.

Heinrich M. and Anna Willms farmed across the road from the Walls, closer to the Bow River. Their daughter Mollie and Dad were the same age and destined to become lifelong friends. In a journal entry shared at the seventy-fifth reunion of Mennonites in Namaka in 2000, Mollie wrote:

> We had frequent interactions with the Blackfoot Indians from a reserve not far from us. They would often drop in for a chat, or sometimes to trade with us. The government gave them farm supplies they often didn't use. They traded their wagons and other tools for grain and wheat sheaves. One noon Mom had made dinner of pasta and fried ham, and my father invited Indian Jim and his wife to join us for the meal. He wore his hair in typical black pigtails, each tied with a red ribbon. We could understand his English, but his wife remained silent as she shyly ate and studied how we handled our cutlery and food. We children were fascinated with the event as our eyes darted from one to the other.[34]

Susan McMillan, Mollie's daughter, told me that when the Willmses left for Ontario in the late 1930s, "Indian Jim" and his wife came to see them off. His wife had made moccasins for every person in the family.[35]

Memories of day-to-day interactions with the Siksika people usually involved food, visiting, trading, and farm work. Milt Willms, whose father had died in a tractor accident, remembered the extra-large garden his mother planted. He said,

> Blackfoot people would come in and Mother would share the garden with them. I'd tell her, "Mom, you don't really have to do this," but she kept doing it. In the late 1940s, my mother had a car, but she liked to take my little half-ton pickup to town to shop. We could see the road half a mile north of us where she would come in and we'd see Mother going by with three or four people in the back of that truck. Blackfoot. She had picked them up at home or wherever they were and was taking them to where they wanted to go. Or three or four had been walking and she had picked them up. People would say, she's crazy doing that by herself. But she never thought it was crazy. That was just her. One man, George Fox, really liked her. He was very well-spoken and wrote a biweekly column

> in the *Strathmore Standard* for years. I found out later that he was very disappointed that we didn't ask him to speak at Mother's funeral. You're getting ready to have this funeral and you're trying to think of everything, and I missed him all together. When he saw me, he said, "Aw Milt, I sure wish I could have talked at your mother's funeral." He was really disappointed. That's the feeling that was pervasive in that area between us and the Blackfoot.[36]

Irene Morrison called her Blackfoot neighbours the Crowfoot, possibly conflating the name with their famous chief. "I remember going to the reserve with Dad. Why, I couldn't tell you. I know Blackfoot people came to the house, and I know Mom fed them many, many times because they were working on our farm. They would come with their lunch, which wouldn't feed a sparrow, so Mom would always give them a big, hefty meal as well."[37]

The main east-west road heading from Siksika to Calgary ran by the northwest tip of the reserve and between the Janzen farm and the hamlet of Namaka. Alan West remembered, "They [Siksika neighbours] would stop with car trouble or be nearly out of gas. And there would be the mom with one or two little kids. Gerta's mom would give them something to drink and maybe a snack, while her dad or older brothers fixed whatever needed fixing to get the vehicle going again, be it buggy or car or truck."

The only personal story I recall Dad sharing happened before Stampede time. A Siksika man came to the yard, wanting to trade his horse for cash so he could get to Calgary. In the end, Peter Jansen gained a horse, and the Siksika man had four dollars to pay for his travels.[38] Vera Penner also holds memories of Siksika people stopping on their yard. "Every year at Stampede time, colourful processions would make their way to Calgary," she said. "They always stopped at our place for the night. They would ask if they could stay, and Dad would always let them overnight in the yard. Dad would give them water and hay for their horses, so they were well-fed, and the next morning they could continue to Calgary."[39] Vera recalled Siksika people stopping by at other times as well. She said,

> They would want potatoes, they would want eggs, that kind of stuff or any garden stuff you had. And they would always say, we'll pay next time. The next time they'd come, it would be the same thing, another sack of potatoes or eggs or whatever. And then they started wanting meat. They never paid. Finally, Dad said, "Give them potatoes, eggs, whatever they want, but don't ever expect that they're going to pay you for it." Dad said, "It's just not in their blood to pay. It is to beg." In those years they were poorer than they are now. Later they used to come for gas. They were always out of gas by the time they came to our house, which is only one and a half miles away from home. Lots of times Dad

> would give them gas too. Mom liked some of those women that came and went. So did my aunt. They came and asked for vegetables. The men that worked for Dad always had meals in the house at the same time as the rest of us. Once, in the middle of the night a Blackfoot man came in without knocking, walked into Mom and Dad's bedroom and woke them up. We never locked our doors in those days. Dad asked what he wanted, and the man said he wanted some meat. My dad said, "I don't have any meat to give you." And the man said, "Oh, yes, you do. You have a deep freezer downstairs." Dad finally got up and gave him a roast or something. We had all kinds of interactions with them, but none of them were dangerous.

When I asked Vera why she thought this man had been driven to obtain meat in this way, she told me that was their way. She, like other Mennonite participants I asked, lacked awareness of how dire living conditions were on the reserve during the years Mennonites were settling on Namaka Farm. I wondered if her parents had thought otherwise, but the response she attributes to them suggested they, too, thought the nature of these transactions was due to "their way."

Elder C, unaware of Vera's story, described what it was like for the Siksika, no longer able to live on the bison which had sustained them for thousands of years:

> We lived on rations. I think it was on Thursday that beef were slaughtered, and the choice cuts went to the agency, or to the stock man, or to the farm instructor. And we got the meagre pieces. And the tripe, the intestines of the animal, to eat. And so out of necessity, folks that had produce to sell, we went to them. In the west end, we went to your people.[40]

Women stood at the forefront of an exchange of knowledge, culture, and friendship between a group of Mennonites and a small community of Siksika in one area on the reserve by extending meaningful help and outreach informally in a manner inaccessible to the church. A. A. Töws, leading minister of the Namaka Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church, expressed his desire, and inability, to establish a mission on Siksika in his December 1932 column in *Der Bote*. He wrote:

> On November 27, we celebrated a mission festival, where the dear speakers commemorated both the Home and Foreign Missions. There were preacher brothers from Crowfoot, Gem, and Munson who shared the precious Word of God with us. The mission call that day and the associated collection amounted to over 100 dollars. The Jewish mission in Winnipeg and the Indian mission in Oklahoma should be remembered in particular. The former is important to us because the salvation we are looking

> forward to comes from the Jews, and the Indians are our closest neighbours here. Unfortunately, this Indian reservation of Blackfoot Indians has been taken over by the Catholic Mission. I wonder if there is no Protestant mission among the Indians in Canada. Could any of the readers of *Der Bote* shed some light on this?[41]

Siksika Elder Herman Yellow Old Woman said,

> They [Mennonite women] taught them [Siksika women] how to milk cows. They taught them how to make butter. They taught them how to bake, because our people couldn't read, let alone speak English. Our people, their bodies, were used to the old way. There was no salt. There was hardly any sugar. And so their cooking was all natural. So, the Mennonites communicated with them and taught them right in their homes. In residential school, they learned how to clean. The Mennonites came in and they taught them how to sew. They had nights where they would have Bible study and the women would be taught how to do quilts. My mom remembers that. She's a sewer herself and has many quilts. I'm honoured because I'm the last generation that had direct contact with these Mennonites and there is no more that I know of, that we have contact the way we did with my mother and my grandparents. I'm the third generation, but there's no more after this. A lot of stuff that that they [Siksika] do came from the Mennonites and that was sewing, cooking, preparing foods, and canning. The Indian agent didn't do that.

Herman's mother, now ninety-four, whom he consulted prior to our conversation, reminded him of experiences of Siksika women. Herman recapped,

> The Indian agent would teach our community people how to farm, how to garden, all that stuff. But the Mennonites, they didn't move in with them, but they pretty much came right to their homes, to their yards. Back in the day, ladies learned skills, because back then, ladies didn't really go into the workforce. They were at home, like the Mennonite women that stayed home and sewed and cooked and worked hard for their families. They taught the Blackfoot women that they were close to the same thing. At the same time, the Blackfoot women in return taught them the skills they had. The only thing is a lot of Mennonite women didn't take up the skills that the Native women offered, which was quill and beadwork. Some of them learned how to tan hides from the animals they'd raised. But as far as dyeing cloth, trade cloth,[42] all that was shared between Blackfoot and Mennonite.

The practice was appreciated by Siksika women but not reciprocated by the Mennonites. I had never heard those stories. Their actions served as a blend of charitable work and missions. Nonetheless, as Herman suggests, their help in developing relationships and vital skills was well-received by the Siksika. They were making a

tangible and heartfelt difference to families on both sides of the fence who were undergoing massive social and economic transitions. However, when the Siksika women offered to teach Mennonite women, the Mennonite women did not accept this gift. While discussing this with a cousin, we recognized the underlying value system and its unintentional implications. Offering charity and compassion, as these women did, was a core Mennonite tenet, and one I hold in high esteem. What was unsettling, however, was that the Mennonite women would not accept reciprocity from the Blackfoot women. Mennonite charity was directed to those less fortunate economically and socially. Self-sufficiency and independence from outsiders, especially those considered less fortunate, was a weakness and a detriment to developing rich intercultural relationships. In this case it was Siksika people, but it could be any other non-Mennonite group. This behaviour was unintentional but unquestionably racist and reflective of white supremacy.

Herman Yellow Old Woman said,

> Unfortunately, they [government and its agents] paint a real beautiful picture from 1910 on, of our community as being one of the most successful tribes. The Indian agent didn't leave this community till I was about ten years old [in the mid-1960s]. And they [the agents] lived in beautiful two-story homes with garages and drove nice vehicles.

I wondered what, if any, understanding Namaka Farm settlers had of this legacy.

Alternative Perspectives

Siksika stories about their interactions with Mennonites portrayed some of the same interactions from an entirely different perspective. My first revelation while listening to their stories was when Siksika people referred to my ancestors as no different from other "settlers." Siksika initiated contact and got to know these newcomers just as they would have with other white settlers. Mennonites and other colonists described Siksika coming onto their yards most often using the terms "wanting," "asking," or even "begging" for food. Some did refer to "trade." Giving Siksika visitors food happened in the context of a charitable act. Siksika Elders, however, were clear that they were trading or buying and described reciprocal, balanced transactions. The choice of terminology reveals very different perceptions about the power dynamics assumed by each group. Siksika people also combined "trading" with visits, interacting with and getting to know their new neighbours, as the Siksika had always done. Perhaps it was memories from some of these

transactions that prompted Gwendora Bear Chief to comment, "Their interactions were sometimes negative. It's not all nice and good, from the stories I've heard."[43] She chose not to elaborate, but her words carried conviction. Mennonites were capable of disrespectful behaviour, just like any other settler. Herman Yellow Old Women told me, "The people that lived on the border of Siksika, on the west border of the reservation, were all influenced by Mennonites." If the Mennonites ever acknowledged the same thing, I never heard it.

Elder B recognized the Eitzen name on the map of Namaka Farm. "I remember we used to stop there, and my mom would buy eggs from them. And we used to visit them. I was just young so I never got a chance to visit but my mom would visit with Mrs. Eitzen."[44] Elder B then remembered another favorite destination. "We always stopped at that very first farm where Highway 901 is, just as you go off the reserve. I don't remember her name, but they used to call her the Egg Lady. We'd go there to buy eggs and then of course my parents would visit with them. Further down, there was another farm on the south side, and they used to buy eggs from them too." Elders B and A, siblings, recalled their grandfather trading rations they wouldn't use. Elder A said, "My mother's parents lived at the west end, so they used to trade with them as well when they got rations. Our grandfather would go to Strangmuir Farms by wagon to trade some of our rations that we wouldn't use, like the flour, sugar, and dry goods, and they'd give them vegetables and eggs."

Gwendora Bear Chief's family originally lived at the west end of Siksika reserve. "My family also used to get eggs from the Egg Lady, but we bought, not traded. Then we'd go to the General Store in Namaka to buy things and about once a year, I'd get a treat, like pop."

Bryan Little Chief's story reminds us of changes in relationships over time. "Our parents interacted and made friends through trading, but it was different for the young ones like me. We were taught to be cautious around non-Natives, so we were kind of scared of it."[45] Bryan described how he was always listening to stories and learning:

> I've been around old people since I was an inquisitive child. I used to sit under the table when we were supposed to go play. Dad would visit with them. And even now, to this day, I still interview Elders. One of the old people in the '70s would say there's no such thing as a white man. There's no such thing as a black man. Or a yellow man or a red man. We're all tribes. I am not an Indian. I am *Ni'tsitapiikowan* [one with Creator] he would say. You are Siksikaikow [a Blackfoot man]. That white person over there is Dutch and that's his tribe. He's got his own distinct

> language we're given. So, everybody in the world is his own tribe. It's just that people started applying names. When you think about things, even in the Bible, it says the tribes. English is just a tribe with their own language. So, if these guys don't want to be labelled as English, they're still immigrants to this country.

Unlike most of the others who had grown up on the west side of Siksika, beside Namaka Farm, Bryan grew up on the east side of the reserve near a Hutterite colony.

> I never even heard of the name Mennonite. It was always Hutterites. Their interactions with Siksika were because of the vegetables and all those kinds of things. But one Elder, he is no longer with us now, I visited him quite a bit, and we talked about a broad range of things. He'd mentioned that I'm waiting for my friend. He's a Hutterite. Then he started to talk about them. And he says they're almost similar to our way because these are religious people. They're structured like us and it keeps order. And they're Anabaptists.

That Bryan knew about Anabaptists, and Mennonites originating from Anabaptists, surprised me. Few people know that history.

Elder C also knew about Russlaender and Anabaptist history. He offered sobering insights into the nature of the intercultural relationship. Elder C said,

> In Ukraine, they were under intense religious persecution. That's why they had to leave, emigrate, sometimes to the point of violence or genocide kind of persecution. So, the history of your people, their roots are in Ukraine. An agricultural breadbasket of the world and it still is today. So, their life vocation, their life skills were based on the land, producing the land. The land to produce crops for our nation's existence was an agriculturally based economy. And then there's also the spirituality or the religious component of your people as Anabaptists. And so, when Canada was being colonized, I understand where you're at in the '30s when your people came into our territories. But for us in terms of relationships, not only with Mennonites but with all of Canada, and the governments of Canada and prior to the recognized governments of Canada, under the British monarchy, Canada, Turtle Island is our home. It's our homeland. It's not yours. And in our stories of creation, and where God chose to put folks, we were given North America with its hosts of different tribes. I think we may romanticize the credibility of those treaties. The underlying factor was land, land that had a price to it, its real estate. Whereas for us, the land was part of that whole system of relationships, whether it was the land, the waters, or the cosmos. There was a very intricate relationship between the cosmos, the sun, the moon, the stars, the galaxies, and the earth. Currently we say Mother Earth, but the understanding in terms of Blackfoot epistemology is that the earth is like the mother who provides for our sustenance, and it is in our spirituality,

> it is incumbent upon us to be good stewards of the land, the waters, the earth, the sky, and the seas. And we only harvested what we could use without over exploiting the natural resources. And so, the British Empire, because they didn't have the people to come to these new lands that they had discovered, contracted folks to come as settlers into Canada. They were given that liberty, certainly not a burden, to purchase land.

Elder C expressed a deep understanding of Russlaender history and even a knowledge of their Anabaptist roots. Elder C articulated a spirituality and perspective that pervaded the Blackfoot way of being that would have been foreign and inconceivable to the newcomers. Russlaender experienced hardships but purchasing land or moving to another location was their choice. This choice was not given to the Siksika people.

Understanding a Common Language

Numerous interactions between Mennonites and Siksika demonstrated that positive, respectful, and even fond relationships can develop in the absence of a common spoken language. Bryan Little Chief told me, "These people didn't know English, while our old people, too, were very vague on the English language, but they somehow still communicated. Because, our old people, they were like that." Elder A added,

> Back in my father's day I used to think that they got along better with those communities like those in the Namaka area, the Strathmore area. My parents knew lots of people. And they were friends with lots of people. I don't know if they were necessarily Mennonites, many of them probably were because where they used to meet a lot was at the grain elevators at Namaka. My dad met lots of other farmers at the grain elevators, so they all knew each other. He took his crops in and there were often other farmers there. They all kind of knew each other. So, the Siksika farmers were in the mix.

The absence of a common language was not a deterrent to interactions between Indigenous peoples and newcomers. Their common agricultural occupations and the need to sell their produce drew them together. The pool tables in the basement of the general store drew the men. Terry Peterson, whose family settled north of Namaka Farm, recalled his father's stories: "The men would congregate there on Friday nights. One of the Mennonites would come and cut hair and the rest of them would play pool while they were waiting."[46] However, Siksika men could not participate. The Indian Act banned Indigenous people from pool halls. Owners and managers who allowed them entry were subject to fines and potential

thirty-day imprisonment.[47] When I asked Herman Yellow Old Woman why this was, he told me it was so they wouldn't drink alcohol.

Settlers and Siksika people interacted socially in other ways, too. "Some of our people mingled with them [settlers] in other ways, but I don't know all of them," said Elder A.

> Some of them played hockey together. My brothers used to play hockey in Strathmore. And I don't know how many of those we played with, those boys from any of the Mennonites community, played hockey as well. I know my parents made lots of friends from those relationships. A lot of the off-reserve fellows used to come to our rodeo grounds. And a lot of them joined in the rodeo, and I don't know if any of them were Mennonites.

Milt Willms began rodeoing at age fifteen with Blackfoot riders. He said, "The Blackfoot ran a lot of horses, and they would gather them up and we'd go there to practice on the reserve. We got along really well with them."

Children learn quickly and can adapt more easily to new environments than adults. This makes them assets in facilitating an immigrant family's acculturation. The arrival of Mennonite families necessitated the establishment of Namaka Farm School District No. 4249 in 1927 to accommodate the swelling number of settlers.[48] Because of its location, most of the students were Russlaender, but Mennonites mixed with non-Mennonite settlers at other schools. Blackfoot schoolmates were rare. Those living on the west side of the reserve attended Old Sun Residential School run by the Anglican Church. Those on the east side went to Crowfoot Indian Residential School in Cluny, run by the Roman Catholic Church. Nellie Janzen Wojtaszek and her sister Ellie Janzen Jantz were two of the few who remembered Blackfoot children in their classroom at Namaka School[49] in the hamlet of Namaka. Ellie said, "There weren't always Blackfoot children in the Namaka school, but there were two girls in one of my grades. One was Rachell Many Heads or Many Bears. I have forgotten the other girl's name." Fellow student Milt Willms said, "We were all people. I never heard the word 'racist' or understood the concept, until probably in the '80s. We had a very good relationship with the Blackfoot people."

All indications are that connections with the Siksika people were initiated by the Siksika getting to know these newcomers on what until recently had been Siksika land. Their interactions proved that they did not need to learn English to build congenial relationships. During the Siksika Elders' Circle I attended, convened to share stories of Siksika-Namaka settler interactions, those present were

curious about what a Mennonite was. It occurred to me that if these Elders were unclear, then how could the Siksika of 1930, when the two groups spoke different languages, possibly understand Mennonite spirituality, other than through their actions? Likewise, how could Mennonites, whose religion and beliefs were key to their adaptation, understand a spirituality that was so foreign to them and assess their need for "conversion" before even getting to know Siksika ways? Spirituality, to me, goes beyond religious beliefs and dogma. It is characterized by a sense of connection to a Higher Power and a oneness with all other life. It is reflected in how one lives their life.

Herman Yellow Old Woman expressed his memories of conversations with Mennonites. He said,

> One thing I've heard from Mennonite people is that they really appreciate how much our people were very religiously respectful. That our people really respected religion, no matter if it was Catholic, or Mormon, or whatever. As long as it had to do with praying, they respected that, and the Mennonites, they were very faithful people. They called themselves pacifists! Well, the Blackfoot people learned to be pacifists, because they were overruled by newcomers. They knew that they couldn't fight anymore. Our people were very vicious, and fighters, protectors of the land. Well, now their hands were tied behind their backs. And here were these Mennonites that kind of taught them their way. And they were very amused about the pacifist ways of the Mennonites.

Perhaps that respect the Siksika observed from Mennonites was why they were open to teaching them how to live on the land.

It has been my experience that Mennonites do differentiate between religion and spirituality, something Elder C also observed after commenting on the origin of Mennonites in Ukraine. Elder C said, "There's also the spirituality or the religious component of your people as Anabaptists." Semantics aside, it appeared the Siksika focused on how Mennonites lived their life, including how they respected others. They accepted that external behaviour as Mennonite spirituality, but Mennonites did not appear to appreciate the pervasiveness of Siksika spirituality in their interactions.

This had not been the Siksika experience with other organized religions who professed Christianity but acted abhorrently. Bryan Little Chief said,

> They all practiced religion, but how religion hit the North American Indigenous people, like, we had our own belief systems, and everything like that, and these people came and tried to convert us. It was an imposition on a healthy culture. And a lot of Indigenous cultures were erased as a result of that approach. Those are just facts that we know.

I was shocked to hear that Mennonites did not try and convert the Siksika people, because that was a key priority of the Mennonites with whom I had grown up. They were always trying to convert anyone who was not "of the faith." Even the two Mennonite denominations on Namaka Farm (Mennonite Brethren and General Conference) could not agree with one another on how their beliefs were interpreted and practiced. However, these differences that had originated in imperial Russia appeared to be kept as an internal issue, indiscernible to outsiders.

One reason for the relatively favourable perspective of Russlaender by the Siksika was the seeming absence of proselytization and campaigns to convert "non-believers," especially Namaka Farm congregation next door. "Outsiders" were welcomed to their church services, weddings, funerals, and picnics at the beaver flats by the Bow River. Proselytization, forbidden under the terms in which they were allowed into imperial Russia, was accepted in Canada and Namaka Farm presented a perfect launching point to convert Siksika. A. A. Töws's December 1932 column in *Der Bote* both confirmed and allayed my fears. He wrote, "Unfortunately, this Indian reservation of Blackfoot Indians has been taken over by the Catholic mission. I wonder if there is no Protestant mission among the Indians in Canada. Could any readers shed some light on this?"[50] Töws neglected the Anglicans who ran Old Sun Residential School, possibly because he may have viewed them as close to Catholics. Reading this through my eyes of today makes my blood run cold for the arrogance, racism, privilege, and disregard for the beliefs of others it portrays.

While preacher Töws was eloquent and fervent, it appears that members of the congregation were keener to live their spirituality rather than preach it. Herman Yellow Old Woman told me,

> It wasn't so much of them [Mennonites] trying to convert our people from being Blackfoot, or from being Catholic and Anglican. The people of my grandmother's age, and these other people, their families from this area, had already left the Anglican faith because of the abuse that happened at the residential school, and it was going into the homes. So, they didn't want to have anything to do with the Anglican faith and they went on their own. And that's where the Mennonites and the Three Hills (Prairie Bible Institute, now Prairie College) came in and assisted them. They didn't actually start a Mennonite church, but they assisted our community, especially my family, my extended family, my grandparents, and some of their friends.

Again, Herman, who remembered his parents interacting with the first Russlaender on Namaka Farm, was describing them living

their spirituality in a meaningful way, not preaching it or trying to convert Siksika people. That is what I value about how the Mennonites lived their faith. In an obituary story published in *Canadian Mennonite*, Alvin Lepp (1932–2018) was held up as exemplary of one who lived his spirituality. Born on Namaka Farm, he and his wife were honoured in 2010 by Siksika Nation for their service. Herman Yellow Old Woman, quoted in the article, says Alvin was remembered for his exceptional ability to build relationships and had become part of the Siksika community. He farmed near Rosemary and drove a school bus, but he loved to "spread the gospel," and could read scripture in the Blackfoot language. He always tried to help those in need.[51]

Bryan Little Chief shared more insights. He said,

> So, when these immigrants came, there were the unscrupulous ones. And then there were the religious ones, like the Mennonites or the Hutterites. They weren't like that, you know? So, we weren't aware of their arrival here. You know, it's just the Treaty opened up this thing, and then you've got all these unscrupulous people surrounding the reserve. We've had more unscrupulous relationships with ordinary settlers, rather than those that seem to have respect, like the Hutterites and Mennonites, those who seem to have gotten along. These guys didn't push anything on us. That's how my parents, grandparents say they interacted. The other Europeans that were not in that, those are the ones [that were unscrupulous].

Injecting levity into the conversation, Elder A said, "One of the ones I was speaking to said, 'Oh, what we can remember is they would come on the reserve and take all our berries and try to sell them back to us.' [Laughter.]"

Siksika understood reciprocal relationships. In the 1930s and 1940s, they wanted to participate, at least to some extent, in Mennonite culture. Although it was an unintentional oversight, George Fox was disappointed not to be invited to speak at Milt Willms's mother's funeral. Siksika people regularly visited Mennonite farms for social calls and to purchase, barter, or trade for vegetables or gas. I wonder how many of the Mennonite families, unfamiliar with this practice, saw that it was intended as a balanced transaction. Some of them may have, but the language used by others to describe such transactions reflects Mennonite perceptions of their superiority to, rather than equality with, the Siksika. Actions like listening, learning Siksika history, and appreciating their spirituality could have been interpreted as respectful and receptive, but none of the stories from Mennonite participants conveyed that.

Wisdom for Today

The strengths the Russlaender embodied helped them through the transitions of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, some of the values they held tightly had unforeseen and inadvertent repercussions. Whether they were aware of it or not, at the same time Mennonites gave thanks for the land where they lived in "peace and freedom," they were reinforcing the colonial hegemonic structure and perpetuating systemic injustices and racism. They did not see that at the time, but we have the advantage of looking back at the history they were creating and contributing to. Prior to this research, stories from Russlaender settlers, non-Mennonite settlers, and Siksika people had not been analyzed through the lens of settler-colonialism. I saw the Mennonite culture as distinct from other European settlers, because of their origins, language, beliefs, and history. Yet that is not what I heard from non-Mennonites. Siksika people saw them as more white settlers. Non-Mennonite school children saw their Mennonite cohorts as "the kids from Namaka Farm." I viewed them as either refugees or immigrants, revered for the experiences they had survived during the revolution in Russia. I certainly had not identified them as settlers complicit, even if inadvertently, in perpetuating systemic injustices.

Nonetheless, their lived spiritual practices of non-resistance, integrity, and charity earned them the respect of the Siksika people, an advantage not accessible to their British neighbours. Mennonites were occupying land stolen from them, yet Siksika were teaching them how to adapt and sustain themselves. Elder C said,

> Certainly, there were those good relationships. It wasn't violent because you folks preach nonviolence. And so, you know, there was certainly that goodwill. And up until, I would say, ten years ago, our agricultural technology for the farmers here on the reserve always lagged with your people, you know, the big tractors with the four-wheel drives and forty-foot cultivators or whatever the length is. And we've always lagged not because we're not smart enough, or we don't have those attributes of ingenuity and accommodation and all those kinds of things.

Mennonite farmers benefitted from privileges not accessible to Siksika, but their gratitude does not balance the scales.

Mennonite settlers would never have considered that they were showing disrespect to people, animals, or the land through their actions. They were "breaking" the land so it could produce crops for food and they could pay their debts. Their courage and persistence in the face of adversity were admirable and are traits I hope I carry and emulate. None of their actions would have been motivated by

malice or harm. Food, shelter, and income were sorely needed for their survival. Yet their actions *did* cause ecological and cultural harm. Today we have more knowledge and awareness of structural injustices, along with the responsibility to rectify them.

Bryan Little Chief spoke of the ongoing unfulfilled need to be respected, recalling an invitation he once received from the province's lieutenant-governor to speak at a celebration of Alberta's centennial. After careful thought, he observed,

> This province is built by prominent people like Peter Lougheed, and all these other people, Guy Weadick, and George Lane. It is a rich province. We even have a heritage account that should have been shared with us. But the thing is, that kind of history is in the museums. They forget who owned that land before. We helped to establish Alberta the way it is, but nobody gives us credit. Hopefully, reconciliation will bring some light to us because we're important. We were here. And we signed that treaty and that's how Alberta became prominent.

Bryan's words demonstrated how short-sighted we can be when relating to others while intent on our own agenda.

Elder A, a distinguished and venerated scholar, added another example:

> They tried to bring us in as advisory people to help them develop strategies. And when they want me to sit on an advisory committee, I refuse. I'm too busy at home at my own institution because we want to develop the courses, we want to offer them, we want to collect the tuition. Whenever I speak publicly, I say, "Yes, you have good intentions, but you punt all those dollars to the public off-reserve, so they can do it. Why would I do it for you? We're doing it for ourselves."

Elder C highlighted how ongoing failure to reciprocate and respect the value of others harms interpersonal relationships. Moreover, we harm ourselves by not honouring the contributions of others. Elder C also spoke of our need to respect the land:

> For the sake of money, financial economics, what are we doing to the land? We've got these big things that dig away at the earth, or drill into the earth, or farmers who pollute the land with all sorts of chemicals to enhance productivity. And the watershed, precipitation, whether it is on Mennonite land, non-Mennonite land, all those chemicals flow into the Bow River. And downstream, there are disastrous consequences for us. Like we say, okay, we're dealing with the opioid crisis or the alcohol or the violence in our reserve. But the violence that has been committed off the reserves violates our health.

Relating cultural crises on reserves to environmental degradation we have created presents the issue in a deeper, more insightful way. The greatest lesson to me is the necessity of asking ourselves, "What is downstream from our actions when we do not focus on the whole?" If we adopt that consideration as a daily practice, we will all be better off.

Conclusions

Hearing stories of Russlaender-Siksika interactions through the generous participation of interview participants has revealed wisdom we would not otherwise have known. Knowing it means we must come to terms with it. Elder C spoke about a church group whose reaction upon learning about atrocities committed by their culture against Indigenous people said, "It can't be. We're not that kind of people." That is what I had said about the Mennonites on Namaka Farm. They were not the kind of people who would cause harm. They were not "settlers"! As Elder C said, "There's a denial that needs to be unmasked." Coming to terms with seeing my ancestors as settlers and acknowledging how their actions led to harm has been a long and painful process.

One action we can take is advocacy, especially those of us who have privilege and resources to act when we see injustices and imbalances. Elder C said,

> You've heard some of the dynamic, injustices that we continue to live with each day. You're a peace-loving people. And likewise, in our hearts, we're a peace-loving people who have been brutally assaulted in so many ways. If that's in your heart to tell that story, amen. Glory to God. I know you'll shake the foundations to start just because they're going say it can't be true. We're good Canadian folks.

Yes, we are. Yes, the Mennonites of Namaka Farm (and today) were peace-loving people. We're all good folks no matter where we are from and we want the best for ourselves, our families, and our country. That requires a regular practice of reflection, action, asking questions, listening, more questions, and action, not indolence.

Notes

[1] Henry C. Klassen, "The Mennonites of the Namaka Farm," *Mennonite Life*, Dec. 1975, 8.

[2] Frank H. Epp, M*ennonites in Canada, 1920–1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), 205.
[3] Interview participants are identified unless they requested anonymity.
[4] Ryan Hall, *Beneath the Backbone of the World: Blackfoot People and the North American Borderlands, 1720–1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 13–15.
[5] "Siksika Nation History," Siksika Nation, accessed May 2, 2024, https://siksikanation.com/about/.
[6] Sarah Carter, "Report on the Siksika Surrender of 1910" (unpublished report prepared for Maurice Law, 2013), 4.
[7] Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 79.
[8] Adele Perry, Esyllt W. Jones, and Leah Morton, eds., *Place and Replace: Essays on Western Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013), 15.
[9] Carter, "Siksika Surrender of 1910," 55.
[10] Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 115.
[11] Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 150.
[12] Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 190.
[13] Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 235.
[14] Hugh Shewell, *"Enough to Keep Them Alive": Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873–1965* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 71.
[15] Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 235–37.
[16] Elsie Nikkel and Peter Nikkel, interview by author, Carseland, AB, July 24, 2023. After the initial citation, subsequent references to interviews are omitted where the speaker is identified in the text.
[17] Simon M. Evans, "George Lane," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed Feb. 23, 2024, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lane_george_15E.html. Official records often conflate Dominion Bank, George Lane Ltd., and Namaka Farm.
[18] Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920–1940*, 152.
[19] "Family progress reports. 1931–1932," Canadian Pacific Railway Land Settlement and Development fonds, box 123, folder 1192, Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.
[20] Maureen Lux, "We Demand 'Unconditional Surrender': Making and Unmaking the Blackfoot Hospital, 1890s to 1950s," *Social History of Medicine* 25, no. 3 (Aug. 2012): 670.
[21] Shewell, *Enough to Keep Them Alive*, 89–90.
[22] Lux, "We Demand 'Unconditional Surrender,'" 672.
[23] Marg Watson, ed., *Trails to Little Corner: A Story of Namaka and Surrounding Districts* (Calgary: Namaka Historical Community Committee, 1983), 55.
[24] Shewell, *Enough to Keep Them Alive*, 314–15.
[25] Shewell, *Enough to Keep Them Alive*, 315–16.
[26] An established Hutterite colony adjacent to the east side of Siksika reserve predated the arrival of Russlaender on the west side.
[27] Elder A, interview by author, Siksika Elders' Circle, Old Sun Community College, Siksika Nation, Sept. 14, 2023.
[28] Herman Yellow Old Woman, interview by author, Siksika Nation, via Zoom, Nov. 27, 2023.
[29] Victor G. Doerksen, "German Language," in *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1990, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=German_Language.

[30] Alan West and Gerta West, interview by author, Strathmore, AB, Sept. 4, 2023.
[31] Robert P. C. Joseph, *21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act* (Port Coquitlam, BC: Indigenous Relations Press, 2018), 68.
[32] Ben Jansen, interview by author, St. Catharines, ON, June 2015.
[33] David Wall, interview by author, St. Catharines, ON, Sept. 25, 2023.
[34] Agnes Amalie (Mollie) Willms Froese, "Life Story from 1925 to 1943" (unpublished journal entry, 2000), 8.
[35] Susan McMillan, interview by author, Niagara-on-the Lake, Ontario, Sept. 25, 2023.
[36] Milton Willms, interview by author, Strathmore, AB, Aug. 14, 2023.
[37] Irene Morrison, interview by author, Abbotsford, BC, via Zoom, Aug. 30, 2023.
[38] Jansen, interview.
[39] Elvera (Vera) Penner, Mennonites of Namaka Farm, interview by author, Calgary, AB, Aug. 13, 2023.
[40] Elder C, interview by author, Siksika Elders' Circle, Old Sun Community College, Siksika Nation, Sept. 14, 2023.
[41] A. A. Töws, "Namaka, Alberta, Kanada, den 29 Nov. 1932," *Der Bote*, Dec. 7, 1932, 3. Translated by Alfred H. Redekopp.
[42] Mary Ann Levine, "The Fabric of Empire in a Native World: An Analysis of Trade Cloth Recovered from Eighteenth-Century Otstonwakin," *American Antiquity* 85, no. 1 (Jan. 2020): 51–71. European cloth was the most common object of exchange with North American Indigenous peoples. It was used to indicate individual and group identity, and social power.
[43] Gwendora Bear Chief, interview by author, Siksika Elders' Circle, Old Sun Community College, Siksika Nation, Sept. 14, 2023.
[44] Elder B, interview by author, Siksika Elders' Circle, Old Sun Community College, Siksika Nation, Sept. 14, 2023.
[45] Bryan Little Chief, interview by author, Siksika Elders' Circle, Old Sun Community College, Siksika Nation, Sept. 14, 2023.
[46] Terry Patterson, interview by author, Strathmore, AB, Aug. 31, 2023.
[47] Joseph, *21 Things*, 75.
[48] "Namaka and Namaka Farm School Districts fonds," Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, Aug. 10, 2013, https://mennonitehistory.org/namaka/.
[49] Namaka Farm School was located on Namaka Farm. Namaka School was in the hamlet of Namaka.
[50] Töws, "Namaka, Alberta"
[51] Donita Wiebe-Neufeld, "'That Is a Christian!,'" *Canadian Mennonite*, Jan. 16, 2019, https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/%E2%80%98-christian%E2%80%99. Unfortunately, I was unable to contact anyone in the Lepp family for this research.