From Separateness to Inclusivity: Mennonites in the Fraser Valley

By David F. Loewen

Introduction

Since the first arrival of Mennonites in this community, ninety years have passed and the impact they have had on the transformation of Abbotsford from a small, rural village to one of British Columbia's major cities is evident. Their initial stubborn persistence not only carved a home out of stump lands but generated a diversity of productive agricultural and commercial enterprises. In short, they transformed the landscape. They parlayed their business/commercial acumen, gained from decades of experience in Russia, into a wide variety of extraordinarily successful business ventures, including the establishment of a commercial and retail centre in what came to be known as Clearbrook.

Most importantly, the Mennonites did what their forbears had done for centuries wherever they lived – they built community. Historically, they were self-described as "the Quiet in the Land" (*die Stillen im Lande*), owing to their firm resolve to stay removed from mainstream society. Their community was exclusive, all-encompassing, and initially centred around their churches. Community, for Mennonites, included education for their youth, care for the weak among them – the elderly and the sick – a comfortable standard of living, and charity for the poor and hungry. Out of this common purpose, numerous institutions were established which have had, and continue to have, a significant impact on our community.

Events over which they had no control brought Mennonites in large numbers, first to Canada, and then to the Fraser Valley. The Russian Revolution of 1917 resulted in a mass migration to the Canadian prairies; the Great Depression resulted in new relocations and many of those already in Canada moved to the Fraser Valley; and finally, at the end of World War II, thousands of Mennonite refugees fled Europe, bringing even more to the Valley.

Alfred Siemens describes the arrival of sizeable groups of Mennonites in Abbotsford in terms of three time periods: the pioneer years of 1931-1939; the war and post-war years of 1939-1950; and 1950 onwards, characterized by large-scale centralization and urbanization. The initial Mennonite arrival in Abbotsford followed closely the mass exodus of Mennonites from Russia in the 1920s, who were joined by others from the prairie provinces who had immigrated decades earlier. They arrived with little or no money and amid a deep economic depression. Naturally, the low-priced land attracted them, and they were not intimidated by hard work and challenging circumstances. They arrived in small numbers in the early 1930s, but during the 1940s, they began arriving in larger numbers – a wave that extended into the early 1950s. The earliest Mennonite settlers gravitated to Yarrow and Chilliwack; however, the lower cost of land in the Municipality of Matsqui (Abbotsford) area soon began to attract them here.

Their growing presence influenced the geography of the land, the economic development of the region, and the social fabric of this community. Even as Mennonites helped transform this community, as a distinct group they too were transformed over the years, from primarily a rural to an urban, from an exclusive to a more inclusive people.

1. Geographic Transformation

The Mennonites who settled in Abbotsford originated from a rich ancestral history of relocating, settling, and successfully managing challenging environments. Their Dutch ancestors had been invited to Prussia, where they applied their proven skills in draining vast expanses of river delta and bringing it into agricultural production. Two hundred years later their descendants migrated to Southern Russia and tamed the wild steppes recently seized from the Turks by Catherine the Great. In 1870, the first large group of Mennonites left Russia, with many of them moving into the virgin Canadian prairie where settlement by Europeans had thus far failed. Due to their centuries-old village and social network system, suited to such isolated prairie landscapes, they succeeded where others before them had failed. That same perseverance and hard work would come into play upon their arrival in the Fraser Valley stump lands.

At the turn of the last century, the lands west of historic downtown Abbotsford were a primeval forest, extending from Matsqui Prairie in the north to the international border in the south. Starting in 1909 and through to 1928, the area was systematically logged by the Abbotsford Lumber Company. When the company mill closed in 1928, it left the relatively flat area west and south of the Village of Abbotsford an inhospitable expanse of giant stumps and tangle of slash, criss-crossed by abandoned rail spur lines and twisting dirt trails. In addition, this area suffered a forest fire soon after the logging came to an end, thus rendering it even more challenging to habitation.

Of these lands, two parcels were identified for settlement by Mennonites. "Municipal and provincial governments also had a hand in locating the Mennonites in the Fraser Valley. In 1931 Matsqui Municipality had specifically reserved a tract near the present Clearbrook settlement for these people. Later in the same year it offered for sale at public auction two sections of land in the Abbotsford area between the International Boundary and Huntingdon Road" (Siemens 51).

The former, an area along Clearbrook Road and north of South Fraser Way, was referred to by locals as "Poverty Flats." They maintained that any settlers not poor upon arrival, would soon be poor due to the land. The latter was bordered by McCallum and Clearbrook Roads and by Huntingdon Road and the US boundary.

The sections of land between Huntingdon Road and the American border were surveyed into twenty- and forty-acre lots. Of the initial 69 parcels to be sold at the initial auction, only fifteen were bought – two by Mennonites, and the other lots by agents who later sold them privately. Prospective buyers had expected to buy a twenty-acre lot for $100, but the auction opened with the price set at twice that amount.

Little did these early Mennonite settlers suspect that those stump lands would develop into productively valuable farmland and that Clearbrook would become a significant commercial centre in the future urban core of a sizeable city. As a result of their close family ties and strong group consciousness, the Mennonite settlers always purchased near one another; this was evident in the South Abbotsford area, and north and south of the junction of Clearbrook Road and the Trans-Canada Highway (present-day South Fraser Way).

Early pioneers did not have any money for down payments on property. Credit was hard to get, work was hard to find, and wages were incredibly low. Nonetheless, they needed homes to live in and farms to work on. Primitive homes were built with discarded railway ties. A typical pay for one day's work was $1.00, and in the case of one pioneer, half that dollar was paid in cash and the other half in baby chicks. Another settler worked for one chicken per day, trading eight for a used bicycle, thus obtaining his first means of transportation. It was common for these pioneers to buy their clothing from the Salvation Army in Vancouver for $1.00 per sack.

After clearing stump land, planting strawberries was the cash crop of choice due to its short maturing period, good prices, and very productive soil (in the south Abbotsford area). While seeking to establish a livelihood through dairy, poultry or berry farming, most families found that the most favourable time for developing their own farms needed to be spent working elsewhere, as, for example, picking hops in the Sardis-Yarrow hop fields. This provided the main source of income for most of them, and therefore their own farms were developed more slowly than they would have preferred. They worked for local farmers and businesses, pooled their resources, and worked their land after their hours of employment. For those who could prove that they were unable to provide for their families, the local and provincial governments devised a plan whereby each family could earn $40 per month by assisting ten days each month in the construction of roads.

Henry Willms arrived in 1931, settling on the north side of Huntingdon Road, west of Clearbrook Road, on what is now airport land, and where only three or four Mennonite families lived. He would later benefit from the sale of his farm for the development of the airport during World War II and acquire a larger acreage on Judson Lake at the south end of present-day Clearbrook Road. Willms was engaged in mixed dairy and poultry farming. In 1942 he, along with a group of fellow Mennonite settlers, formed a "Land Clearing Cooperative" and purchased a small bulldozer to help in the removal of stumps after they had been blasted with dynamite. "This venture gave the local economy a boost and within a short time more cattle were bought and raised, and better living quarters were built" (Riggins & Walker 155). Through another cooperative, this group of settlers operated a store for groceries and animal feed and provided fire insurance. Clearing the stump lands did not come without considerable threat to one's safety; one man lost his life due to a delayed dynamite fuse.

Another Mennonite pioneer, Heinrich Falk, arrived in the early 1930s. In his memoir he relates that a path for their vehicle first had to be hacked through the logged landscape from McCallum Road, along what is now Huntingdon Road, and finally to their newly acquired parcel of land (near present-day South Abbotsford Church).

Johann Friesen and his family of seven arrived in 1936 from Manitoba. He worked night shift at Evans Hatchery for $2 per shift, but during the Depression years any job was appreciated. He was able to purchase forty acres on Huntingdon, near Mt. Lehman, where huge stumps were laboriously cleared by way of digging and burning. In 1942, after just having built new barns and a house, his land was needed by the airport, and so he too was forced to sell at a price most felt was not fair market value.

The growth of the Mennonite community was relentless. Based on provincial census data, voters lists, and Mennonite Church records, the following observation of the growth of the Mennonite population is drawn. In 1931, 1,085 Mennonites resided in the province of BC; by 1951, there were 15,387 Mennonites in BC, approximately 13,000 of whom resided in the Fraser Valley. By 1958, that number had grown to about 17,000, with the two single largest concentrations of Mennonites living in Chilliwack and Matsqui. With respect to Matsqui, the voters list of 1952 indicates that 34% of its voters were Mennonites. In 1947, approximately 300 people resided in "Poverty Flats," or what became known as Clearbrook.

In 1940, Minter's Service Station and Store stood on the southeast corner of the Trans-Canada Highway (South Fraser Way) and Clearbrook Road. Apart from that, only a few other businesses existed on "Poverty Flats," including a lumber yard, a book shop, and a sheet metal shop. The name of "Clearbrook" became common usage by 1948, but no one appears to know how the name came to be adopted. By the late 1950s, Clearbrook was described in the *Canadian*

Mennonite as the fastest growing Mennonite community in Canada. By 1967, the population stood at about 4,000, with many new businesses being attracted to Clearbrook. As the population grew, so did economic activity, along with necessary services. Evidence of Mennonite dominance in Clearbrook in the 1950s is best illustrated by the fact that "… one may quite easily shop for most of one's needs here without having to speak English" (Siemens 121). Of the 43 commercial services in Clearbrook in 1958, only eight were either owned or managed by non-Mennonites.

Notwithstanding their role in bringing this land into cultivation, acceptance of the Mennonites by the wider community was slow in coming. In fact, public opposition to the influx of Mennonites was readily apparent, especially during and immediately following World War II. "An editorial in the *Abbotsford, Sumas and Matsqui News* even suggested that 'between Japanese and Mennonite settlers, the Jap was the lesser evil in building up the community'" (Regehr 111).

2. Economic transformation

Within thirty years of their arrival in Abbotsford, and from those very modest farming enterprises started in and among stump lands, a wide variety of enterprises emerged, some of which had not only local, but also provincial, national, and international significance. The economic activities of Mennonites would no longer be restricted to agriculture. A rapidly growing Abbotsford offered too many opportunities to ignore. In the post-war years there was "…a remarkable flowering of Canadian Mennonite entrepreneurship and economic diversification…. Almost all the Mennonites who took advantage of these new opportunities had grown up on farms. They knew and understood the farming community and were able to adapt and apply technological advances to solve specific problems and perform important tasks on the farm" (Regehr 149). From their earliest years in this community, Mennonite farmers gravitated to the "feather" industry. Not only did Mennonites play key roles in the development of the industry, but it is fair to say that, to this day, Mennonite farmers still dominate it. Today approximately 75% of all eggs produced in BC come from Abbotsford.

While farming was their initial focus, a growing population very quickly attracted entrepreneurial Mennonites to a wide variety of economic activities: farming and agricultural processing, retail and wholesale, transportation, construction, service industries, and professional services. This economic diversification materialized in the post-war years. "In the 1941 census almost 87 per cent of them [Mennonites] were still listed as rural residents. Thirty years later only 53 per cent were, and only a little more than half of those actually lived on farms" (Regehr 126).

This move away from the land, from the rural to the urban, would mark the beginning of the transformation of Mennonite society. The influence of the Church on individual lives weakened; interest in post-secondary education and the professions grew rapidly; and Mennonites involved themselves in the public square of the mainstream community.

Agriculture and agribusiness

An early inspection tour of the 1930s reported that there existed a demand for table cream, milk, and butterfat, and that any dairy man within reach of Vancouver "can do exceptionally well" (Epp 225). For those early Mennonite settlers looking for economic opportunities, this led to the

conclusion that berry-growing and dairy farming would provide a viable agricultural opportunity. In addition, egg and poultry production were immediately recognized in the same vein.

Some of our earliest Mennonite settler families left an indelible mark on this community. One such family is the Johann Friesen family which arrived in 1936. From very modest beginnings and only a few hundred dollars in his pocket, Johann, and eventually several of his sons, established thriving agribusinesses in Abbotsford, including poultry and turkey farms, turkey breeding, a chicken hatchery, hog farm, dairy farm, two feed mills, and a John Deere dealership.

After having been bought out by the airport in 1942, the Friesens relocated to King and Emerson (Gladwin), where the hatchery business was born. Johann converted his house basement into a modest hatchery where, twice daily, he would turn the eggs and sprinkle with water to maintain adequate humidity.

John Friesen (son) maintained one of the largest laying-hen farms in Abbotsford. In the 1960s, he and a Chilliwack farmer traversed the province, convincing farmers to join in creating the BC Egg Producers Association, without which farmers could not hope to receive fair price for their eggs. In 1971, John Friesen accepted an invitation to become the John Deere dealer for Abbotsford, a company he later sold.

Peter Friesen (another son) established a distinguished herd of Holsteins which received several awards for its volume of milk production. He hosted a weekly *Farm Radio Forum*, broadcast over the Abbotsford radio station, from his own home. The half-hour programs offered information and advice on all manner of agricultural issues, usually followed by a discussion involving Friesen's neighbours or invited guests.

During his farming career, Peter Friesen served on the board of the Fraser Valley Milk Producers Cooperative Association (FVMPCA), including a stint as president. He became a member and chair of the British Columbia Dairy Foundation, a member of the board of Dairy Farmers of Canada, and a director of the Dairy Bureau of Canada. Friesen was also active in the Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce, where for nine years he served as chair of the Agriculture Committee.

In addition to dairy, Peter Friesen also built up a thriving chicken business and was one of the founders and first directors of the British Columbia Egg Marketing Board. By the time of his retirement in 1990 his contribution to agriculture was recognized both provincially and federally.

From 1956, Jake Friesen (another son) had shared ownership in Clearbrook Grain & Milling, started in Yarrow by Cornelius Funk, and by the late 1990s, he had assumed full ownership of the company. Today it is BC's largest and oldest family owned and operated feed mill. It is one piece of the Friesen Group of Companies, which has over 150 employees and operates two feed mills, a premix plant, retail store, laying hen hatchery and seven farms producing table eggs, hatching eggs, and broilers.

In 1988, Jake Friesen, along with a partner, established Pacific Pride Hatchery in Abbotsford. In addition, he owned the only turkey breeding business west of Winnipeg for several years. It is fair to say that the Friesen family has played a significant role in driving major decisions that have improved the poultry and dairy industries in this province.

Processing plants

As a result of the rapidly growing importance of the feather industry in Abbotsford, others were quick to enter the "production chain." One such early settler was Aaron Wiebe, who had an impact not only on this community, but also on the global stage. Arriving in the Fraser Valley in 1949, Wiebe established a poultry farm on 24 acres of stump-land on Mt. Lehman Road, which he cleared just as earlier Mennonite settlers had done in the South Poplar area.

Wiebe was one of the first chicken broiler producers in BC and became a major supplier of live poultry to Panco Poultry. In the 1950s, he introduced the broiler industry and high-volume poultry production. He expanded his poultry farming operations, Brookside Farms, to include egg grading, egg processing, and feed milling. A pasteurization process opened a vast new market for his business, and his egg processing business became the largest in Canada, with plants in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario. His feed milling operation on Mt. Lehman Road was the base from which Ritchie Smith Feeds Ltd. was founded in 1968. He sold his majority shares in the firm in 1973.

Aaron Wiebe's entrepreneurship eventually impacted worldwide commercial achievements in the poultry, egg, biologics, and confections industries. Centred in Abbotsford, the biologics arm became a world leader with plants in Winnipeg and in Holland. It was eventually sold to a competitor.

Three different family enterprises arose from the base that Aaron Wiebe started. Rossdown expanded the live poultry production by integrating all the segments of breeding stock, broiler production, feed milling, hatching, processing and cold storage. Brookside took over the egg processing segment, developed high tech egg by-products for worldwide consumption, and introduced chocolate manufacturing (eventually sold to Hershey Corporation). La Belle used the egg-drying technology to produce dried colostrum and other egg by-products in California and Washington for distribution to world markets.

Aron Wiebe also left his mark on the social fabric of the community. He donated prime land and oversaw the construction and early management of Valhaven Home, a senior citizens complex, later to become part of Tabor Village, as well as the Sunset Subdivision Community for rural retirement.

Peter Funk arrived in Abbotsford in the late 1940s, moving to acreage on Walmsley Road, later expropriated for an airport improvement project. From a modest mixed farming operation, Funk transitioned to egg grading and established Fraser Valley Farms.

Based on a commitment from Woodward's to purchase his eggs, Funk started operations in a converted brooder barn with no refrigeration. As Woodward's grew, so did Fraser Valley farms, and over the next few decades, Fraser Valley Farms bought out the other three competitors. Together with their Vancouver Island depot, the Funks controlled eighty percent of the province's egg grading industry.

In 1972, Fraser Valley Farms, with no experience, began packing private-label jams for Woodward's, thus launching Funk and his sons into the jam industry. They later added peanut butter and honey. With the addition of Western Family and other private label accounts, Fraser Valley Farms developed a branded industry, resulting in the creation of Golden Valley Foods Ltd. in the late 1980s. In 1982 they moved the jam processing operation to their Marshall Road location. At their peak, the two enterprises employed approximately 150 and maintained a large fleet of trucks.

With the closing of Woodward's and growing interest from the BC Egg Producers Association to do its own grading, the Funks sold their egg grading business to BC Egg Producers, and, not long after, the jam business to E.D. Smith in Ontario.

Cooperatives

Cooperatives significantly affected the economic life of many North American Mennonite communities. Mennonite farmers tended to join marketing cooperatives to dispose of their products to their best possible economic advantage.

In the Fraser Valley, it was berries. Abbotsford Growers Co-operative Union was the leading processor and packer of small fruits, primarily raspberries, in the Fraser Valley after 1947. It played a significant role in the economic life of numerous Mennonite farmers throughout the Fraser Valley, especially in the early years of Mennonite settlement in the Abbotsford area.

On 4 March 1948, Abbotsford Growers Co-operative Union was incorporated. The list of ninety charter members included exclusively Mennonite individuals from the surrounding area, including Abbotsford, Aldergrove, Clayburn, Matsqui, and Mt. Lehman. In fall of 1967 the plant at 31825 Marshall Road was built, serving Abbotsford Growers well into this century.

Although strawberries as well as blueberries were processed and packed at Abbotsford Growers, the main crop was raspberries. A total of 80,000 pounds was processed in 1948, increasing to a total of 16 million pounds processed at the Co-operative's peak in 1987.

While Mennonites were the pioneers in this berry enterprise, eventually non-Mennonites also joined the Co-operative. A steady influx of Indo-Canadians into the Fraser Valley resulted in a gradual change in farmland ownership and plant management, beginning in 1974.

For most of the past seventy years, Abbotsford had been widely regarded as the "Raspberry Capital of Canada." Today, raspberries have been largely replaced by blueberries.

Transportation

In today's world, good transport connections are recognized as having direct benefits to people, businesses, the environment, and the overall economy. This would have been equally applicable in those early years of this community's history. Two Mennonite trucking companies come to mind – Lepp Trucking and Vedder Transportation.

In 1946, Jacob H. Lepp and his family moved to Abbotsford, purchasing a farm on Jackson Road. In time, Lepp acquired a three-ton truck, the beginning of what would become the Lepp Trucking Company. Initially, he hauled hay to local farmers as well as berries for the Abbotsford Growers Co-operative. Lepp trucks hauled flats of berries from the farmers to the plant, and processed fruits to markets in Vancouver and beyond, including Bellingham and Seattle. Supplying berry farmers with fertilizer added to Lepp's trucking opportunities. In 1948, the great Fraser Valley flood created more opportunities: hauling cattle from the flood-ravaged areas to holding barns at the Abbotsford Airport, and then hay to feed the animals until forage crops could again be harvested.

In 1949, his son Henry assumed ownership. Lepp Trucking soon added cattle feed hauling and repair of flood-damaged dykes to its business activities. Henry's younger brother George soon joined him in the operation, which became authorized to transport goods anywhere in the Fraser Valley. Their fleet now stood at seven trucks. The building boom of the 1960s, particularly in what had been referred to as "Clearbrook Flats," gave Lepp Trucking a significant boost in growth. Lepp purchased Caterpillar excavating equipment to fill the demand for

basement excavations. By the late 1960s, most of the new house basements in Clearbrook were dug by Lepp equipment.

Lepp Trucking acquired other contracts, such as hauling sand from Abbotsford to a foundry in Vancouver, returning with coal for Abbotsford. In summer, Lepp trucks were busy hauling fruits and vegetables, including the transportation of watermelons and potatoes from Washington State. (One of those customers was this writer's father, Martin Loewen – Hub Produce Ltd). With the further addition of heavy-duty equipment to its assets, Lepp Trucking contracted with the Municipality of Abbotsford, building roads in summer and removing snow in winter.

In the early 1960s the new company headquarters was relocated from Abbotsford to the corner of South Fraser Way and Commercial Street in Clearbrook. By 1970, the company employed ten drivers during winter months, and more than twice that number in summer. During the decade of the 1960s, construction in the Fraser Valley was brisk, resulting in Lepp's addition of several low-bed trailers to haul heavy excavation equipment. Subsequently, the company was awarded several contracts in the construction of logging roads as well as highways. Lepp trucks were busy building, graveling and seal-coating new roads throughout BC.

What had been a highly successful, growing family venture in the Fraser Valley came to an end in 1973 when the company was liquidated. The business had expanded to the point where, according to Henry Lepp, "it was too big to be small and too small to be big."

Another important company, Vedder Transport, was founded in 1956 by four men, brothers Neil, John, and Jake Wiebe, and Pat Jansen, who pooled $400 together, purchased one truck and proceeded to haul food goods from a local cannery to processing plants. Decades later, The Vedder Transportation Group's two trucking companies, Vedder Transport Ltd. and Can-Am West Carriers Inc., remain a family owned and operated company with its head office in Abbotsford. The firm owns a diverse fleet of over one thousand pieces of equipment that travel dedicated and irregular routes throughout Canada and the United States.

Vedder is probably the largest milk hauler in all of Canada, with the BC Milk Marketing Board as one of its largest clients. Vedder trucks pick up 1.4 million litres of milk every 24 hours, going on and off farms locally and throughout BC. In 2012, the company won an international award for implementation of natural gas trucks into its fleet, reducing its carbon footprint in excess of 27 percent.

Trades and professions

Prior to World War II Mennonites were conspicuously absent from many of the professions for a variety of reasons. Their European experiences of earlier centuries (persecution by state and church) drove Mennonites into a separatist and rural social life. "Professions were viewed as worldly pursuits of power, prestige, and status – at the very center of the worldly social system – and thus incongruent with the quiet values of humility and separation that were the hallmark of Mennonite life" (Kraybill 1). Cities were regarded negatively; they were regarded as a threat to the values Mennonites held dear.

While education had been quite widely promoted in the Russian colonies, schools were intended primarily – but not exclusively – for the purpose of teaching basic literacy. Some Mennonites were more progressive in terms of pursuing advanced education that might serve their local purposes.

Following World War II, there developed a growing rate of urbanization in Canadian society from which Mennonites were not immune. "The decline in farming (agriculture), the spread of urbanization, the rise in education and the cultural assimilation (acculturation) of many Mennonite groups in the last half of the 20th century nudged many members into professions" (Kraybill 1-2). Mennonite young people were drawn to post-secondary education, whether at Mennonite colleges or at public universities. Teaching and medicine, with their emphasis on humanitarian service, were the first professions to become widely accepted among Mennonites, since they were more aligned with the Mennonite service ethic. Soon thereafter, however, propelled by a variety of factors, Mennonites moved into virtually the full spectrum of professional life. As urbanization and educational levels grew, interest in farming declined, and by 1972 Mennonites had not only entered the professions but had penetrated them more heavily than the population at large. Likewise, their entry into the trades, which became their non-academic alternative to farming.

Construction

Following the war, the greatest rate of growth in the community occurred in the Municipality of Matsqui, where Mennonites had first settled and continued to take up residence. Residential and commercial development mushroomed, and it was individuals of the post-war wave with names like Redekop, Wiebe, Braun, and Dyck, who were at the forefront of that development.

Albert and Louise Dyck moved to Abbotsford from Saskatchewan in 1947. For his livelihood, Albert was employed by Dueck Ready Mix. In 1962, he became a partner with Catermole in his own cement mixing company in Abbotsford, named Valley Rite Mix. By 1967, he had bought out his partner and was joined by son Ed and son-in-law John Wiens. Over the next few years, the operation grew from one plant on Walmsley Road to four, with plants added in Port Mann, Langley, and Chilliwack. The fleet of trucks grew from six to fifty-two. Valley Rite Mix served approximately 35 to 40 percent of the market in Abbotsford.

Expansion on the company property had resulted in the excavation of a 36-acre lake, which was ceded to the District of Matsqui on 5 November 1979 as a community park called Albert Dyck Memorial Park. A waterski facility at the lake has become a well-known venue for local and international waterskiing events. In 1985, the business was sold to Lafarge.

Dietrich and Katharina Rempel arrived in Abbotsford in 1934, settling in the stump lands of the Huntingdon area where they farmed strawberries. Three of their sons, Clarence, Ewald, and Edward, started a concrete business in the mid-1960s, Rempel Concrete, which benefited from their "open shop" philosophy. The firm became known as the largest open shop concrete company in the province, thanks to the Rempels' persistence in bidding, advocacy for open shop, and belief in treating their employees fairly. During the pivotal negotiations over who would build the Expo 86 projects – open shop or building trades unions – a critical compromise was reached. It was the first time in BC history that union and non-union companies worked together amicably on a site.

Over the years the Rempel brothers developed several other construction-related companies and branched out to areas across British Columbia and into Alberta. At its peak, Rempel operated 88 mixer trucks and had eight plants throughout the Valley and Lower Mainland. In addition, it had portable operations at Tumbler Ridge, Trail, Port Hardy, and Hedley, with a combined workforce of over 250. The business pioneered the "tandem-tandem"

concrete mixers in Canada and was one of the first in Western Canada to implement computerized concrete batching. In 1988, Rempel Concrete was sold.

Jacob and Maria Redekop and their family of four arrived in Abbotsford from the USSR in 1948, following the end of World War II. They initially took up farming, but by 1960, all three sons, Jake, John and Peter, became involved in the land development and construction industry in Abbotsford and throughout the Valley and Lower Mainland. Their local construction activities revolved around several partnerships, most notably Triple R and Wall & Redekop. Notable developments included Evergreen Village in Clearbrook and single-family residential along North Clearbrook Road – Fairfield Estates – and lands west of there. To this day, members of those families continue to shape this community.

David Wiebe moved to Abbotsford from Manitoba with his parents in the early 1950s, and began framing houses during the 1960s, soon after leaving high school. Operating initially as a one-man operation, Dave Wiebe eventually became one of the most prolific residential home builders in Abbotsford, and particularly in the Clearbrook area. At a time when environmental issues were of little concern, Wiebe conscientiously avoided waste. "It is estimated that he built several thousand homes in Abbotsford, probably more than any other builder. Various streets in Abbotsford are graced by his impressive residential complexes with their distinctive architectural style" (Redekop "Wiebe" 1-2). His industriousness and concern for affordable housing resulted in him becoming Abbotsford's largest rental property owner. Not only did David Wiebe become one of Abbotsford's most prolific builders, but he has also left an indelible mark on this community with his philanthropic lifestyle, which he practised in private and with humility. George Braun, another post-war immigrant from Eastern Europe, arrived in Abbotsford in 1953 via Paraguay. Initially a labourer for a railway construction firm, he worked his way up to general superintendent, and in 1961 founded his own company, G. Brown Contracting Ltd., which later became Pacific Northern Rail Contractors Corporation in 1975. In 1979 George's four sons joined him as active partners in the enterprise and it eventually grew to become the largest railway contracting company in Canada. While the company's activities, for the most part, occurred outside this community, the firm did provide employment for locals.

Simultaneously, the Brauns and Peter Siemens were investing heavily in this community, developing a significant number of residential and commercial spaces, including McMillan Bowl, Glen Mountain, and the large block of land at the northwest corner of South Fraser Way and Clearbrook Road.

Commercial and retail

The establishment of the Clearbrook Board of Trade in 1949 is testimony to the sudden surge in population and economic growth that Clearbrook experienced in the post-war years. It is also further testimony to the increasing abandonment of farming as a way of life for Mennonites. Within ten years, the Board grew from the initial fifteen members to 75, and very quickly made its impact known, securing a new post office, incorporating Clearbrook Water Works in 1953, establishing a firehall, and successfully lobbying for sidewalks and traffic lights.

In keeping with a history of cooperatives within the wider Mennonite experience, the Clearbrook District Mennonite Savings Credit Union (CDM) was created and incorporated on 10 March 1958 to serve the growing Mennonite population of Clearbrook. Under its original bond, the credit union provided financial services exclusively to the Mennonite community. CDM was

founded by two key people, George Loewen and Jacob J. Klassen, former members of the East Chilliwack Credit Union; they had recently moved to the Clearbrook area.

By 1974, membership had grown to over 3,200. As CDM began to succeed and evolve, leadership instilled the credit union with community-first principles that ensured its original mandate to serve its members would not be forgotten.

In preparation for a possible merger, CDM publicly changed its name to Clearbrook Credit Union in 1970, and its bond to common, allowing non-Mennonite community members to join for the first time. This allowed the credit union to provide service to a growing constituency in British Columbia's Fraser Valley while still maintaining its local priority.

Following the name change, the Clearbrook Credit Union enjoyed more than a decade of successful operations in the Fraser Valley. Its assets grew rapidly, increasing from $8 million in 1974, to more than $50 million in 1982.

Due to the economic recession of the early 1980s, Clearbrook Credit Union and East Chilliwack Credit Union, which shared similar philosophical and cultural roots, merged on January 1, 1983 under the name First Heritage Savings Credit Union. This merger enabled First Heritage to provide service throughout the Fraser Valley.

First Heritage now served a member base of over 60,000. Through another merger in 2001, First Heritage joined with Delta Credit Union to become Envision Credit Union, and in 2010, Envision Credit Union merged with Penticton-based Valley First Credit Union, though both organizations continued to operate as divisions of the newly created First West Credit Union. By 2011, Envision Financial provided service to the Fraser Valley community through 21 branches and twenty insurance offices.

Peter G. Dueck grew up in Boissevain, Manitoba and moved to the Fraser Valley after World War II. He was a visionary and successful entrepreneur, co-founding Dueck Building Supplies with his father and brother in 1947, and establishing locations in Clearbrook and Chilliwack. Peter took over Dueck Building Supplies in 1956 and expanded the business to include Hope, Langley and Burnaby. At its peak, Dueck Buildings Supplies employed approximately 120 people. In 1977, Peter sold Dueck Building Supplies to Lumberland, which later became part of Rona.

Dueck also developed several other major businesses: Dueck Homes, which produced prefabricated homes sold throughout BC, and Dueck Industries, which manufactured windows, sold throughout Canada. He later branched out into commercial property development in the United States. As a developer, his vision led to the development of Seven Oaks Mall, West Oaks Mall and Clearbrook Town Centre in Abbotsford.

In 1944, Dietrich Wiebe and family moved to a farm on Mt. Lehman Road. After several years of farming, Dietrich entered the retail business, first operating stores on McCallum Road and then in 1952 on the Trans-Canada Highway in Clearbrook. In 1956, Dietrich, together with his children, purchased land and built the first shopping centre in this community, modelled after the larger Vancouver malls. In 1958, this shopping centre on the northwest corner of Clearbrook Road and Trans-Canada Highway (South Fraser Way), opened with the Wiebes' IGA store as the anchor tenant, and hosting the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the first major bank in Clearbrook. The Wiebes had introduced "cutting edge" marketing to the local area. The store was flooded with customers on opening day, and business surpassed all expectations. The local Abbotsford newspaper described their approach as "mass merchandising with personalized touch." The operation was a family affair, with seven children involved: Jake and Dick in the meat department; Hank in produce; Mary, Helen, and Ann at the checkout and stocking shelves;

and Chuck in the bakery and, eventually, as store manager. If the 1950s were a period of rapid economic growth in Clearbrook, the Wiebe family's shopping centre was a major driver of that growth. Chuck Wiebe went on to serve a total of fifteen years in local government, first on Matsqui Council and later, Abbotsford City Council.

Cornelius Funk had started a feed/grocery and feed mill business in Yarrow, and in 1955, sensing opportunities for expansion, the Funks decided that establishing a business presence in Clearbrook would be desirable. The business was moved to the corner of Clearbrook Road and South Fraser Way (then the Trans-Canada Highway). Three years later a new store was built on this property, and in 1967 the sausage operation moved from Yarrow to Clearbrook. The business became known for its sausages, cooked spareribs and other specialties. Local hunters could bring their game to be dressed and prepared for cold storage. Many Clearbrook residents appreciated the home delivery services and ethnic baking supplies which for years were Christmas staples for the community. The store in Clearbrook was sold in 2008, thus concluding a business that had been in the Funk family for four generations.

3. Social transformation

Historically, the Mennonite community had been centred around its churches, and during the earlier decades that was also true for the Mennonite church communities in the Abbotsford region. "The widely scattered settlements of the immigrants, and indeed of all Canadian Mennonites, reinforced their traditional dependence on the *Gemeinde*, the local congregation, as the ongoing source of that faith and culture without which they saw no meaningful future for themselves or for their children" (Epp 237). From two distinct conference churches (Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite), South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren (1932) and West Abbotsford Mennonite General (1936), numerous daughter churches were born.

Very soon after their establishment, these churches united around common social and religious concerns, resulting in the establishment of institutions that have played a key role in Abbotsford's social transformation: schools like Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI) and Columbia Bible College (CBC); personal care homes and retirement living like Menno Place and Tabor Village; care for the physically and mentally challenged through Communitas; and opportunities for social engagement through Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Mennonites were no strangers to the establishment of such institutions; they had been a long-established ethic and feature of their community life in Russia. The collective imprint of these institutions on the social fabric of this community is difficult to measure but nonetheless substantial.

The faith community

South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren (MB) Church has the distinction of being the first Mennonite church established in the Matsqui-Abbotsford area. The church formally organized on 1 May 1932, in a meeting at the Farmers Institute Hall on Clearbrook Road. After the congregation divided into North Abbotsford MB Church (Clearbrook MB Church) and South Abbotsford MB Church in 1935, South Abbotsford built its first structure on the corner of Huntingdon and Gladwin Roads. The church experienced continued growth and the congregation purchased property on the corner of Huntingdon and Columbia Roads, where a newly constructed sanctuary was completed in October 1954. A subsequent building program in the 1990s resulted from an additional surge in attendance.

This congregation's members helped establish numerous daughter churches: Matsqui, East Aldergrove (Ross Rd), Otter Road, Central Heights, Bakerview, and King Road Mennonite Brethren Churches.

The congregation started South Abbotsford Bible School in 1936, which later became Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute/Columbia Bible College; and in 1944, the Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI), which was first housed in this church. The church continues to have a significant impact on this community through its large membership and numerous programs. Today MB churches in Abbotsford number thirteen.

Early Mennonite settlers of the General Conference Mennonite Church affiliation initially met in homes or joined in worship with the Mennonite Brethren. The West Abbotsford Mennonite Church formally organized on 15 November 1936 and was initially called Abbotsford Mennonite Church, becoming the first congregation of that conference in the Abbotsford-Matsqui region, with a membership of 45. The church's first structure, on a piece of donated land at the corner of King and Townline Roads, was built with lumber from the dismantled Mill Lake Lumber Mill. Construction of a church building measuring 24 by 40 feet (7.3 x 12.1 metres) began in the fall of 1937.

Due to dramatic growth, two building expansions occurred in 1946 and 1949 to accommodate the influx of post-World War II refugees, and by 1952 it too was overflowing. During the next two decades daughter churches were established: Peardonville, Clearbrook, and Eben-Ezer. In addition, a Sunday school mission in Sumas Prairie grew into an independent Prairie Chapel. In January 2009, West Abbotsford and Wellspring Christian Fellowship churches dissolved and formed one congregation under the name, Level Ground.

From those initial two churches started in the 1930s, expansion has been such that today there are eighteen Mennonite churches in Abbotsford; church members are from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Education

Within years of establishing their congregations, Mennonites focused on the establishment of Bible schools, and, soon thereafter, high schools. Such institutions, it was felt, would shield young people from the prevailing secularism and provide a generous supply of workers for local church ministries. "Mennonite Separatism and denominationalism were at least partly rooted in the positive impulse towards self-preservation, through the winning and keeping of the young people" (Epp 447).

Their communities of origin (southern Manitoba and the USSR) contained well-established Christian schools. Mennonites "…believed that schools had a responsibility to prepare children for a productive life as adults and also to preserve and perpetuate the religious and cultural values of their communities and congregations" (Regehr 223).

This is not to say that the early Mennonite settlers of Abbotsford spurned all public education. On the contrary, their children attended local public elementary schools, and mostly public high schools as well. Mennonites recognized the role of public schools, whether intentional or not, to "… integrate children from many racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds into the mainstream of Canadian life" (Regehr 224). Church leaders, nevertheless, continued to maintain the importance of their private schools, particularly to the older youth.

While the educational institutions begun by Mennonites in the early years served almost exclusively their own youth, and were intended primarily to safeguard the Mennonite values so dearly cherished, political and social forces over time have worked not only to facilitate the

integration of Mennonites into mainstream Canadian society, but have also been at work to open up these institutions to be inviting and inclusive to those from outside the Mennonite community. In doing so, these schools have had a significant impact on the social fabric of the wider community.

Columbia Bible College

A vision for a Christian school, first expressed in 1932, came to life on 26 September 1936, with the enrolment of some thirty students. In 1943 a vacated tabernacle on Marshall Road was purchased and was moved onto the South Abbotsford MB church property.

In 1948 the first graduates of the Bible school provided the evidence that it indeed represented a valuable investment, as these students took on ministry responsibilities in local congregations and in the wider mission of the denomination.

The school moved from its location on the South Abbotsford MB church property to Clearbrook in 1955, when the Bible School Society purchased land on Clearbrook Road. By the end of the 1950s several smaller Bible schools ceased operations and merged into this one school, the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute (MBBI). During the 1960s, the School saw modest growth.

Within a few years of MBBI's founding, the other Mennonite Conference was also pursuing the establishment of Christian schools for their youth. Several local Mennonite congregations belonging to the Conference of United Mennonite Churches of BC had established *Religionsschulen*, or schools of religious instruction, and others were established throughout the Valley in following years. In 1940, a four-acre tract of land was purchased next to the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church on King and Townline, and Bethel Bible Institute (BBI) came into being in 1946.

Over the next two decades Bethel developed a strong school identity, with fluctuating student enrolment. BBI served some six hundred students, with one hundred of them graduating, and successfully achieved its goal of helping "the local church equip its members for work in the various avenues of Christian service" (Giesbrecht & Thiessen "Bethel" 2).

During the decade of the 1960s both MBBI and BBI experienced significant stresses, including rising operating costs, aging facilities, declining enrolment, and student demands for a more satisfying, relevant learning experience.

On 2 May 1970, the Mennonite Brethren Conference of BC and the Conference of Mennonites in BC amalgamated the two schools into a single institution, Columbia Bible Institute (CBI), under a five-year agreement. Enrolment increased notably.

Subsequently, a full partnership between the two conferences resulted in 1982. An ambitious offering of courses and programs was launched. Within five years, the school was upgraded to college status, with the school renamed as Columbia Bible College (CBC). On June 26 of the same year, the BC Legislature, with the passing of the Columbia Bible College Act, legally authorized the College to grant theological degrees.

During the early 1990s CBC also gained full accreditation with the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges. By the end of the decade a confident College was offering baccalaureate degrees in eight majors with a student enrolment approaching four hundred. Satisfaction inventories confirmed that the College was convincingly meeting student needs.

In 2009 CBC served a student population of 530 of which about two-thirds came from non-Mennonite traditions. The College offered six majors at the baccalaureate level, seven majors for the two-year diploma and four options for the one-year certificate.

In its seventy-year history the school has lost much of its earlier ethnocentric flavor, although it retains an evangelical-Anabaptist identity. Clearly, this institution bears witness to the enduring influence that Mennonites have had in this community.

Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI)

In his 1950s research, Alfred Siemens writes, "Probably the most important central point of attraction for the entire group [Mennonites] is the Mennonite secondary school in Clearbrook, known as the Mennonite Educational Institute" (110). It is not an overstatement that MEI was at one time the centre of Mennonite "culture" in the Clearbrook community, primarily as a result of being home to the largest auditorium not only in Clearbrook, but for much of the Fraser Valley. MEI's auditorium became the common meeting place for all Mennonite congregations in and around Abbotsford.

MEI had its beginnings in 1944 as a result of the concern of local leaders that "our studious young people are forced to seek their higher education in institutions that are not in harmony with our principles of faith" (Hugo Friesen "Mennonite Educational Institute" 1). With the support of seven churches, government approval from Victoria was sought and granted on three conditions: the government would give no financial support, qualified teachers must be engaged, and the English language must be used. With these agreements in place the decision was made to move forward.

The first students were accommodated in an addition to the South Abbotsford Mennonite Brethren Bible School at the corner of Huntington and Emerson (Gladwin) Roads, at the centre of the stump lands recently settled by Mennonites. Because of conscription, student enrolment was kept to 44, which made it difficult for the $80.00 per student tuition to cover costs of salaries, even though the teachers were paid fifty to seventy percent less than in the local school district.

In 1945 a two-acre plot was purchased in Clearbrook at the corner of Clearbrook and Old Yale Roads, where a series of construction projects grew the school to include Grades 7 to 13, with approximately 300 to 400 students. Initially religious education courses were taught in the German language, but the forces of assimilation into the general Canadian culture were ubiquitous. English became universal and French was introduced as a foreign language option in 1978, although German continued to be available.

Due to a steadily growing student population and availability of government funding in the late 1970s, the decision was made to build a new secondary school at the north end of Clearbrook Road on an eighteen-acre plot. It was ready for operation in the fall of 1980, with two more expansions in the following years, bringing enrolment to 790 by 1994. In 1997, an elementary school was built, followed by the construction in 2004 of a middle school. Today the combined enrolment stands at about 1,600 students.

Since the late 1950s, MEI has developed a reputation not only in academics, but also in competitive sports and in the performing arts. In addition, a Service-Learning program has resulted in hundreds of students becoming involved in community service projects both at home and abroad.

The composition of the student body changed from one hundred percent originating in supporting Mennonite churches to only 64 percent in 2000. Like CBC, MEI has lost its ethnocentric flavour; a considerable number of students come from other Christian churches, as well as other ethnic, religious, and non-religious backgrounds. In short, the school has become an inclusive independent school, with an International Program for foreign students begun in 1998.

Music

Already in Russia, congregational singing and renditions by choirs among Mennonites reached high levels of quality. After the Revolution, song festivals and choir schools were among the few church activities left to them. "Russian Mennonites" who moved on to North and South America, regardless of their conference affiliation, continued these practices on an even larger scale.

The tradition of multiple church choirs gathering for a *Sängerfest* (Song Festival)*,* first established in Russia and continued for many decades in both Canada and the US, was widely practised during the 1940s to 1960s throughout Mennonite communities in North America, including Clearbrook. A more recent development has been the organization of large community choirs, such as the Valley Festival Singers; its first director was Rudy Baerg, who continued in that role for decades. Another individual who garnered widespread attention for her choirs was Nancy Dyck. For close to 25 years she conducted the Pacific Mennonite Children's Choir which toured across the country and into Europe.

While music played an important role in church worship and in the various Mennonite schools, several individuals played key roles in promoting the arts through music outside those institutions. Two such were brothers Menno and Walter Neufeld, who moved their teaching studios to Clearbrook in the 1950s. Together, the brothers taught music to a whole generation of young people in the 1950s and 1960s. At one time all the registered music teachers in the Fraser Valley were former students of the Neufeld brothers. Menno taught piano and conducted the Bethel Choir he founded in 1951, while Walter taught violin and conducted the Valley String Symphony, which he founded in the mid-1940s. Both brothers were accomplished musicians, having studied in New York and elsewhere. Their studios, across the street from MEI in Clearbrook, were a magnet for aspiring musicians who sought them out for their incomparable music instruction in Grades 1 through 10.

Local Mennonite schools, both high school and Bible college, have cultivated music appreciation through their respective choral programs. During MEI's and CBC's formative years, C.D. Toews organized extensive music programs, including a high school marching band. His choir work was recognized in the CBC *Parade of Choirs* broadcasts. More recently, MEI choral groups have been often called on to sing the national anthem at major events such as CFL and NHL games. Of late, Calvin Dyck has become synonymous with musical entertainment in the Fraser Valley. He conducts the Abbotsford Youth Orchestra and produces popular regular musical performances throughout the year.

Health and social service agencies

"It was historically Anabaptist and Mennonite for the church to be concerned about the welfare of the whole body. In Europe, the care for the aged … had always been an integral part of the religious and social life of the total Mennonite body" (Shelly & Smith 1). The first Mennonite homes for the aged in North America were established in the late 1800s. Most personal care

homes emerged in the post-World War II years. Also following the war, an interest in hospitals for the mentally ill emerged. Many Mennonite young people had performed alternative service in mental hospitals during that war. Providing relief, service, and care for individuals with disabilities has been "… part of the particular Christian faith and way of life which has its background and origin in the Anabaptist movement of Reformation times" (Bender & Neufeld 5).

Menno Place

The Mennonite Benevolent Society (MBS) was formed in 1953 "to provide a haven and asylum and supervised care for the aged and infirm" (qtd in Les Friesen 1). The Menno Home opened the following year. It took many years to build up the membership roll, but by the year 2000 it had stabilized near the 650-member mark.

Although only four and a half acres (1.82 hectares) were originally purchased, fourteen adjacent parcels of various sizes were acquired over the years, bringing the property to a total size of eleven acres (4.45 hectares) in 2008.

Initially the 26-bed Menno Home was classified as a boarding home for aging and frail persons who could fend for themselves in most situations but wanted their nutritional needs met. Soon thereafter, five rooms were renovated to house those too ill to care for themselves but not warranting public hospital admission.

Then, in 1960, MBS completed the 36-bed Menno Hospital building, and in 1982, opened a 26-unit, independent-living wing. In 1992 this building was incorporated into a 60-bed addition named Menno Pavilion. While the Home and Hospital grew apace, Menno Terrace West (1998), Menno Terrace East (2005), and Primrose Gardens (2010) were erected for additional "independent living" space. The 2012 capacity of Menno Home was 196 beds: Menno Hospital with 151, and Menno Housing (the new name covering Menno Pavilion, Menno Terrace West, Menno Terrace East, and Primrose Gardens), with 318 units. All these buildings and programs are now operated under the name of Menno Place.

Levels of care have changed over the decades, to where there is little difference between the Home and the Hospital, although the Home has two floors intended specifically for those with dementia, and the Hospital has a number of wards fitted with overhead patient lifts. Meanwhile, Menno Housing has a mix of independent living, assisted living and supportive housing.

Capital costs for the first building in 1954 received a one-third subsidy from the provincial government. Today, Fraser Health Authority subsidizes the operating costs with an annual grant, and Menno Place has grown to be the largest personal care home in the province.

Tabor Village

The idea of a personal care home in Clearbrook was first considered by the Mennonite Brethren Church in the 1950s. In November 1957, following canvasing of the Mennonite community, the Findings Committee of Jacob J. Klassen, Jacob P. Martens, and Abram J. Friesen formed a society that would build a home for the aged.

Blueprints for the building were drawn up; a grant of $41,253 was received from the provincial government to help cover construction costs; and on July 18, 1960, sod was turned. Within three weeks of opening, all 39 rooms of Tabor Home were occupied.

Over the years Tabor Home has experienced several facility expansions. The first addition in 1963 consisted of 23 more rooms. Further expansions took place in 1970, 1972 and 1973, and in 1989 an independent living facility (Tabor Manor) with 39 units was completed. The last major development began in 2003 when Fraser Health Authority and British Columbia Housing accepted a proposal from the Tabor Home Society Board to construct a 104-unit assisted living facility. The government funded 88 units and 16 would be user-pay. The official opening of Tabor's assisted living facility, Tabor Court, took place on June 18, 2007. With this latest addition Tabor had become a full campus of care now referred to as Tabor Village. Over 240 residents were part of the Tabor Village as of March 2009.

In 1987 a government grant was given to upgrade Tabor Home so it could be registered as an intermediate care facility. The social makeup of the residents has changed over time. In its early years, Tabor Home's residents were mainly members of the participating Mennonite Brethren churches but, like Menno Place, the residents now represent ethnic, national and faith diversity.

With respect to both facilities, some things have not changed. The original motivation to provide care for seniors was rooted in the Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of the Christian faith. Members of both societies continue to believe that spiritual care is integral to caring for the whole person. Abbotsford is a "healthier" community in which to live due in part to Mennonite initiatives to care for the elderly and the weak through the establishment of these facilities that serve not just ethnic Mennonites, but any residents of the Fraser Valley.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

MCC spontaneously grew out of the desire of the Mennonite brotherhood to respond to the call of Christ to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and to testify by loving service to the Gospel of peace and love. Relief and peace services were an integral part of the Mennonite witness and way of life in the world. To that end, MCC BC has existed, and thrived, with its provincial offices in Abbotsford.

Originally, MCC BC was headquartered in Yarrow, but in the 1970s moved to Abbotsford. Its focus during its formative years was solely international, but more recently, local programming has included service to the disadvantaged within our community, broadly including our Indigenous neighbours, newcomers to this country, the physically and mentally challenged, and the homeless.

The associated fundraising activities, including thrift stores, Ten Thousand Villages, and especially the annual relief sale, have provided an invaluable vehicle for building an awareness of and response to the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized people in the world. They have drawn the wider Abbotsford community together in the common purpose of "feeding the hungry and clothing the naked," both at home and abroad.

MCC facilitated the breaking of Mennonite denominational barriers and thereby served to counter the generations-old feeling of "apartness" within the Mennonite community. Secondly, it helped build relationships with its non-Mennonite neighbours, including our local and provincial governments.

Communitas

Communitas has been richly influenced by its Anabaptist forebears with their tradition of service. Responding to parishioners' concerns about their children's care after they were gone, David A. Friesen, Peter D. Loewen, and Henry Born established the Samaritan Society of Comfort and Cheer. They in turn requested help from MCC BC, which established two group homes. The first, located in Rosedale, was established in 1974. The other, Twin Firs, was built the next year in Abbotsford on ten acres of land situated at Huntingdon, and became home to twelve occupants, each with a developmental disability. In 1992, a separate legal entity called MCC Supportive Care Services (MCC SCS) was established; in 2007, MCC SCS officially changed its name to Communitas Supportive Care Society.

In 1984, MCC BC was invited to collaborate with the BC government in its de-institutionalization process. As a result, the first of some twenty homes throughout the province was established to support individuals in their home communities. With three to five individuals per house, a family-type home living environment was nurtured.

In the early 1990s, support for people who have a mental illness was initiated by providing services in the areas of semi-independent living, vocational training and peer support. Several drop-in centres for people surviving an acquired brain injury were also initiated during this decade.

In 2010, Communitas continued to look for new ways of addressing the needs of adults and seniors who have a disability of one form or another. Supporting individuals who live with the effects of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), creating employment through social enterprises, and the establishing of Matthew's House (a respite house for children and their families) are the more recent initiatives. Today, hundreds of individuals and their families are supported with the help of some 450+ staff.

The mission statement of Communitas Supportive Care Society reflects that ethic of the Mennonite community to care for the whole person and to serve them with dignity and respect; and to be a service provider, advocate, and resource for persons living and dealing with mental, physical, and/or emotional disabilities.

Archway Community Services

In the 1960s, Walter Paetkau was under the employ of Mennonite Central Committee and the Conference of Mennonites in BC. Part of his work was to establish service projects in the Lower Mainland that would engage local Mennonite congregations. In 1967, he chaired a committee to explore the feasibility of establishing a community services organization, initially called MSA (Matsqui-Sumas-Abbotsford) Community Services.

The committee was approached by the district welfare supervisor to coordinate Christmas hampers which were previously organized by multiple organizations. From the initial seventy hampers in 1968, this program has grown to help over 3,000 people annually with food and toys for under-privileged children.

After working part-time on the agency and with the Mennonite Central Committee over the prior two years, and after successfully securing a three-year government grant, Paetkau accepted a full-time role as project manager starting January 1, 1971. He would become the first executive director of the organization and continued in that position until his retirement in 2000.

The organization, known as Abbotsford Community Services for most of its history, has added programs over the years: a food bank, family life counselling, a recycling program providing employment for people with disabilities, free legal aid clinics, immigrants services,

and seniors services, to mention only a few. Today, under the recently rebranded name, Archway Community Services, over ninety distinct programs serving vulnerable Fraser Valley residents are carried out.

An integrated community

When Mennonite settlers first arrived in the Fraser Valley, they were a separate people, and residents were suspicious of them; they were resented. Today, no longer separate, they are engaged in all facets of this community's life, and their contributions are appreciated. Their German language, once regarded as core to their identity, is all but forgotten. Their integration with the non-Mennonite population is a fait accompli. While Mennonites have played an important role in transforming this community, they themselves have been transformed from a separate, exclusive community to one that is inclusive. "In 1971 Canada had half as many Mennonite farmers as it had had thirty years earlier. For a people who for generations had looked to farming as an almost sacred vocation, that was an exceptionally important change" (Regehr 146). They were the "Quiet in the Land" no more.

      In the sixteenth century, Poland's King Sigismund II Augustus, who had a tolerance policy toward minorities, is quoted as saying, "We are all well aware of the manner in which the ancestors of the Mennonite inhabitants … were invited here … to areas that were barren, swampy and unusable places.... With great effort and at very high cost, they made these lands fertile and productive" (Klassen). Like their distant ancestors, the Mennonites who settled the South Poplar and Clearbrook tracts of land, along with those who followed them, with similar effort and high cost, brought productivity and prosperity, not only to the land itself, but to this community at large. Abbotsford is a stronger, more vibrant community because of its Mennonite pioneers and residents.

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