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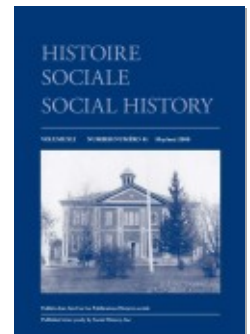
*Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and
Mid-Twentieth Century Rural Disjuncture* (review)

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Creole society of the colony, especially in the areas of Sinnamary and Kourou, where the few French-Canadian survivors of the Choiseul expedition took refuge, merging into the larger Acadian community. Here, he argues, the *Canadiens* became involved in small-scale agriculture and especially cattle-raising—though he gives no concrete examples — and contributed to the development of a Creolized *petit blanc* agricultural sector ignored by Guianese historians because it remained apart from the dominant slave-based plantation economy. Again, without offering examples, the author claims that some of these *Canadiens* lived in “une certaine prospérité” (p. 151) and that their survival is evidenced by the persistence of French-Canadian surnames into the nineteenth century. Larin even suggests that Guiana did not prove to be the white man’s grave, while conceding nevertheless that nearly half of the 92 French-Canadian immigrants perished shortly after their arrival, and that another third was saved only by rapid repatriation to France. In the end, Larin avows that only four members of the French-Canadian elite remained permanently in Guiana after 1770 and that only eight commoners stayed. Without further evidence as to what impact these eight commoners, morphed into Creolized *petits blancs*, had on Guianese society, one is tempted to accept the official French accounts of the 1820s to 1840s that depicted the few white settlers remaining at that time in Sinnamary or Kourou as surviving miserably on subsistence farming or wood-cutting.

In sum, one might say that there is really so little information provided on French Canadians once they arrived in Guiana that the title *Canadiens en Guyane* is a misnomer. Indeed, it would have been more appropriate to have entitled this book *Canadiens vers la Guyane*, for it is almost entirely a history of a migratory movement. It is in this sense that Larin has made his mark. The Canadian historical world can only hope that Robert Larin will soon conclude his larger study of the exodus of all French Canadians during and after the Conquest, of which this current book appears to be a preview.

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LOEWEN, Royden — *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth Century Rural Disjuncture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. Pp. 331.

In *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth Century Rural Disjuncture*, Royden Loewen traces the fracturing and dispersion of *Kleine Gemeinde* descendant Mennonite colonies in the period from 1930 to 1980. By the 1980s, these descendants of the 1874 migration from Russia had established themselves in Mennonite communities from Manitoba to Belize, varying greatly in their responses to the economic, environmental, and cultural stresses of the middle years of the twentieth century. While most historians tend

to assume that the trajectory from tradition to modernization involves fairly straightforward progress in a single direction toward modernity, the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonite experience does not fall neatly into this model. Some members of this group, and particularly those in Meade County, Kansas, moved fairly quickly toward integration into mainstream North American culture, but others resisted, moving south into settlements in Mexico and then Belize, searching for the right environment in which to pursue an older way of life.

The middle years of the twentieth century were not easy ones for farmers, between economic stresses and environmental challenges. Canadian Mennonite farmers in the rural municipality of Hanover and American Mennonite farmers in Meade County, Kansas, were not different. While the Canadian farmers lived with the strictures imposed by a very short growing season, those in Meade County lived with the constraints of semi-aridity, which, during the 1930s, became the Dust Bowl. In both areas, farmers valued land and nurtured it, in the hopes of maintaining a viable religious community. In both areas, conditions forced farmers to adapt themselves to new technologies, new farming methods, and agriculture on an increasingly large scale. This growing scale and increasing economic competition meant that, although Mennonites remained on the land in disproportionately large numbers, more moved into towns and cities each year, seeking economic stability.

As Loewen describes, the middle decades of the twentieth century did not just remake agriculture; they remade gender roles. In Meade, because of the increasingly commercial orientation of Mennonite farmers and the lessening economic role of farm women, women turned their attention toward children, women's organizations, and town. The eggs, chickens, milk, and cows that had once organized Mennonite women's lives had less and less of a role. In Canada, Mennonite men found their identity as strong, silent upholders of a patriarchal agrarian tradition challenged by a new model of masculinity that valued striving, accumulation of wealth, and athletic prowess. Mennonites who had once frowned at all athletic contests increasingly resigned themselves to that staple of Canadian manliness, hockey.

The events of the middle decades of the twentieth century also made it difficult for Mennonite communities to maintain their faith. Canadian and American participation in the Second World War, and American preoccupation with the Cold War, made maintaining pacifism a difficult proposition. Even more obviously, the growing appeal of evangelical Christianity made inroads into Mennonite congregations. The appeal of a personal, emotional, and joyous faith was hard to counteract. Increasingly, church leaders found it difficult to enforce discipline by way of shunning, the traditional means of encouraging adherence to community mores.

Faced with a changing world and a changing faith, *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites had choices to make. They could adapt their agricultural communities to changing conditions; they could move to more urban locations; or they could create new communities that would follow a more traditional path. Mennonites followed all three of these paths. In Canada, farmers in the regional municipality of

Hanover adapted to agricultural and social change, and those who wished even further change moved with their families to Winnipeg, creating an urban Mennonite community far more evangelical than that they had left behind. In Meade County, Mennonite farmers moved ever closer to the mainstream, and those who left agriculture often moved into cities, such as Denver, without identifiable Anabaptist communities. Those who wanted to maintain a more traditional way of life moved first to Los Jagueyes, in northern Mexico, and then Spanish Lookout, in the British Honduras (now Belize). There, Mennonites founded communities reminiscent of those in which their parents and grandparents had lived during the early years of the twentieth century, before the disruptions of the “great disjuncture.” Except for those who chose to adapt to the changes of the twentieth century by leaving, it became more and more difficult to see the differences between Mennonites and their neighbours.

Loewen has written an engaging and useful text, beautifully illustrating the many and varied Mennonite responses to economic change. Historians studying rural and agricultural change in the twentieth century generally expect to see that change moving in one direction — toward modern, technologically sophisticated market agriculture. They also expect their research subjects to move in a relatively predictable trajectory toward consumerism, higher levels of education, and eventually into new residences in towns and cities. Loewen has added a significant twist to that story, demonstrating the profound ways in which religious values may influence and complicate a group’s response to modernity.

Diaspora in the Countryside is a highly readable and very useful book that will be of interest to rural and agricultural historians as well as social and religious historians, both in the United States and Canada. My primary concern with the text is, perhaps, that there is not quite enough of it. Loewen is telling a complex story of economic, social, and religious transformation in four separate communities (Hanover, Meade County, Los Jagueyes, and Spanish Lookout). Two of these four communities had further offshoot communities in urban locations. While it is almost impossible to discuss a single Mennonite community without discussing its daughter communities, the ensuing examination of the range of changes and the relationship between various locations can become terribly tangled and complex. Loewen has done a fine job of managing these complexities and keeping the text readable, but, at the same time, there is so much more that I, and other readers, would want to know about the difficulties of creating new communities in Mexico and Belize. It is a fascinating story, and one that I hope will receive further elaboration in the future.

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