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Nourished by Rural Roots:
The Resources of Mid-Twentieth Mennonite Rural Identity for Renewed Commitments to Local Place

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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North American Mennonites have a long history in relationship to farming and rural life. The percentage of Mennonite farmers, however, decreased significantly throughout the twentieth-century, following broader North American trends. Decreasing numbers of farmers resulted from shifts towards large-scale, highly mechanized agriculture that cut back on the need for human labor, consolidated land under the ownership of fewer farmers, and made farming an increasingly expensive investment. These agricultural changes impacted not only farmers, but entire rural communities that had previously oriented much of their lives around small-scale models of agriculture. Many Mennonite communities retain memories of these former modes of farming, and of periods when community life was largely circumscribed by rural landscapes. Additionally, the history of Mennonite responses to mid-twentieth century rural disruption is still quite accessible. These memories are important for our present time, in which many of us are disconnected from farming and food sources and—more fundamentally—are disconnected from our local places.

This paper examines rural Mennonite experience during the mid-twentieth century. It utilizes the writings of The Mennonite Community Association, an organization that was concerned with maintaining Mennonite rural life. It also draws heavily on the Association's primary publication: *The Mennonite Community*, a periodical that offers a breadth of North American rural Mennonite experience and response. Additionally, the study focuses on the experiences of Franconia Conference Mennonites in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The sermons and writings of long-time bishop John Lapp provide a window into one church leader's response to rural changes. Twelve interviews with current Franconia Conference Mennonites provide living memories of the impact of farming and rural life on Mennonite life, and how changes in those spheres have impacted Mennonite communities. Through these sources, it becomes clear that many Mennonites enacted key faith values in relationship to the rural landscapes they lived and worked within. This intersection of faith identity and rural place was, in many ways, mutually beneficial for the community and the land. As we strive to strengthen communities and sustain our landscapes, we can learn much from the ways that mid-twentieth century Mennonites cultivated connections to rural places.

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Introduction of Thesis and Sources

Introduction

Many North American Mennonites have farming "in their blood." A 2007 Mennonite church survey revealed that nearly 23% of Mennonites remain on the farm and more than 40% of current North Americans Mennonites grew up on a farm.[1] There has been a significant decrease in farming, and yet nearly half of today's Mennonites still have strong connections to and memories of farming the land. These memories are increasingly rare, especially given that in 2009 less than 1% of U.S. Americans claimed farming as an occupation and about 2% lived on farms.[2]

Mennonite connections to farming are not just to an occupation, but to particular geographical places. During the periods when a higher percentage of Mennonites were farming, rural landscapes profoundly defined these agrarian Mennonite communities. Today, when it is quite trendy to be and buy "local", we sometimes forget that living locally was taken for granted only a few generations ago. This was certainly true for many Mennonites, whose family life, church life, work life, and social life all took place within their immediate geographical contexts.

Like most of the rest of North America, Mennonites of today are not only less likely to be farmers, but they also have a different relationship to local place. For one thing, many more Mennonites live in suburban or urban contexts than did their predominantly forebears.[3] They are also more likely to go beyond their local spheres for work, travel, relationships, or education. The boundaries of local, rural place are not nearly as strong.

Contemporary Mennonites cannot and should not undo these changes. However, as a young North American Mennonite who is increasingly aware of the importance of cultivating

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[1] Conrad Kanagy, *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press 2007), 58.

[2] "Ag-101: Demographics," *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,* last updated September 2009, http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/ag101/demographics.html (accessed March 25, 2012).

[3] Kanagy says that "the primary residential areas that Mennonites have migrated to when leaving the farm are small and medium cities and suburbs." 58.

healthy relationships with local places and landscapes, I believe we have much to learn from our forebears' strong sense of place. Through studying Mennonite history and listening to the stories of older Mennonites—specifically the history and stories that relate to place and the land—we learn lessons in how our communities of faith have articulated faith values, shaped personal relationships, and understood relationship to God in strong connection to their local places. This intersection of faith and place has, in many instances, strengthened both the community and the land.

The following engages Mennonite history with an eye for how place-based values and traditions have been at work in the past and might translate into our contemporary contexts. The study focuses on the mid-twentieth century (1940s-1960s) because of the period's significant changes within agriculture and within rural landscapes. As we will see, Mennonite engagement with these changes was undergirded by the longer histories of Anabaptist-Mennonite connections to farming and rural life. These historical narratives undoubtedly contributed to the idealization of and desire to maintain rural communities during the mid-twentieth century, a period that brought disruption to the ways many rural agrarian communities functioned. Through a variety of primary and secondary sources, we will illuminate and analyze this rural ideal, extracting particular faith and community values that many Mennonites associated with the rural sphere. As we encounter the articulation of these values within and in connection to rural landscapes, we will discover ways that place functions powerfully in religious and communal identity.

It is unhelpful to cling to an unquestioning and unrealistic rural ideal, yet we can and must find ways to carry a strong sense of place into the future, even if "place" looks remarkably different than it did several generations ago. Our human communities and the land we reside upon are both in need of renewed connections to place. This paper argues that by utilizing historical tools to cultivate ongoing knowledge of and connections to local places, we will strengthen community relationships and values, and will also nurture more sustainable relationships with the land.

Sources and Methodology

One could argue for the importance of place through theological or ethical discourse. In fact, a wide range of disciplines offer resources for communities who wish to strengthen their sense of place. Our landscapes, however, bear the marks of our history upon them, and it is impossible to gain a full knowledge of place without understanding its history and the history of its inhabitants. Historical resources, in this way, are particularly profound for the development of what Wendell Berry calls "living memory." Berry writes about the importance of living memory as it relates to farming and to the health of the land. He says we need to "lengthen" our memories of the land so that:

> Previous mistakes, failures, and successes would be remembered. The land would not have to pay the cost of a trial-and-error education for every new owner. A half century or more of the farm's history would be living memory, and its present state of health could be measured against its own past—something exceedingly difficult outside of living memory.[4]

In the same way, the "present state of health" of our faith communities should be measured against our pasts. This does not mean we romantically yearn for a former way of being, but that we shape our present lives of faith out of an informed sense of history, hopefully avoiding "the cost of a trial-and-error education" for our contemporary communities. Rural, suburban, and urban Mennonites of today should think critically about the benefits and shortcomings of how their forbearers related to local place, bringing this knowledge to bear upon intentionally-formed relationships with current landscapes.

This study focuses on North American Mennonite communities in the mid-twentieth century, thus examining the significance of local place during a period when place and agriculture were, in many ways, being disrupted. Of course, this disruption was not an exclusively Mennonite experience, and Mennonite history was hardly monolithic. Changing local places and agricultural practices impacted many North Americans, and each experience was distinct. Rather than trying

[4] Wendell Berry, "People, Land, and Community," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry,* ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), 193.

crystallize a single response to these changes, this paper follows the approach of Royden Loewen, who highlights specific communities as they "recrafted and regrounded their worlds"[5] in the face of massive change. By remembering and re-telling particular histories, themes and values will emerge that can be applied more broadly, both within and beyond the Mennonite church.

The study's sources hold varying degrees of particularity. One major resource is *The Mennonite Community* magazine, published from 1947-1953. This periodical includes voices from what were at that time the General Conference (GC) and Mennonite Church (MC) branches of the North American Mennonite body.[6] Representation of both branches in a single periodical was significant at a time when some Mennonite churches would not have approved of inter-marriage between GC and MC church members.[7] The magazine also includes writers from across North America, providing many unique regional experiences that, in combination, offer a broader picture of Mennonite experience.

Connected to and undergirding this periodical are the perspectives of The Mennonite Community Association, who first published the periodical. The Mennonite Community Association formed in 1946, aiming

> to support and strengthen the Christian community as expressed in Mennonite teachings and practices; to stimulate community interests—religious, social, cultural, economic—

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[5] Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities in Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 9. Loewen studies two Mennonite communities—one in Kansas and one in Manitoba—as a lens for rural and agricultural changes in the mid-twentieth century.

[6] These two branches merged in 2000 to become "Mennonite Church USA." The former branches of GC and MC were characterized in 1975 by J. Howard Kaufman and Leland Harder in the following ways: MC- "Guardian of the Tradition of the Fathers." The oldest and largest denomination; most concerned with being traditionally Mennonite. Strong historical consciousness. Earliest settled in Franconia and Lancaster. Later moved westward because of motivation of cheap land and perpetuation of rural communities.
GC- "Progress through Mennonite Cooperation." Organized in 1860; always known as the progressive Mennonite Church. Formed in what mid-western districts of Mennonite church. Characterized by sense of "beginning to be citizens of this world while still being pilgrims on their way to the world beyond."
From Kauffman and Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1975), 32-39.

[7] J.L., personal interview conducted January 9, 2012. All interview subjects referred to with their initials. See appendix for further information on interviews.

> among the Mennonite people; to publicize the Mennonite way of life through the medium of publications and any other means deemed advisable by the Association.[8]

As will emerge in examinations of the periodical and of other Association writings, many Association members believed that in order to support and strengthen "the Mennonite way of life," Mennonite communities needed to intentionally maintain and strengthen connections to the rural, agrarian sphere. The Mennonite Community Association, then, provides helpful resources in understanding some of the rhetoric used to argue for ongoing connections to rural places.

My other sources are from the specific geographical region of Southeastern Pennsylvania. Any relationship with local place involves the particularities and uniqueness of that geography, and so it makes sense to hone in on the narrowed history of one region. To reiterate Loewen's argument, the broader trends actually become more apparent when observed through local experiences.[9]

In this case, the experiences of Franconia Conference Mennonites in Southeastern Pennsylvania help us to understand how particular communities responded to local, national, and global shifts in place and agriculture. These experiences are grounded in distinct landscapes. Many mid-western rural communities—whether predominantly Mennonite, Catholic, or Lutheran—entered the mid-twentieth century from contexts that were predominantly agricultural and far removed from urban centers. Southeastern Pennsylvania Mennonites, on the other hand, resided in regions that were not as wholly rural or agrarian. John Shover highlights that, since the 19th century, the mid-Atlantic region of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey has always been quite economically diverse, including both urban centers and areas of intensive agriculture. By the middle of the twentieth century, Shover says it "would be a misnomer to draw sharp distinctions between rural and urban in the metropolitania that makes up the Mid-Atlantic

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[8] Guy F. Hershberger, "Mennonite Community Association," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online,* 1957. Web. http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M46617.html (accessed March 25, 2012).

[9] Loewen, 9.

States."[10] These mixed economies and the close proximity between rural and urban make the Southeastern Pennsylvania region a particularly interesting one for examining Mennonite communities' relationship to rural places.

This paper uses several resources from Franconia Mennonite Conference, each of which provides a partial glimpse into the experiences and perspectives of Franconia Conference Mennonites. One source is the writings and sermons of Franconia Conference bishop John Lapp. Lapp (1905-1988) was pastor of a Franconia Conference congregation beginning in 1933, and eventually served as bishop and moderator of Franconia Conference for 16 years.[11] His collection of sermons and writings[12], which span the period of this study, provide insight into how one Mennonite church leader responded to changing local spheres, farming, and industry.

The archived materials of the Franconia Mennonite Soil & Health Association provide another helpful resource.[13] This Association, formed in 1951 and running into the early 60s, consisted of farmers who were concerned with certain agricultural trends and methods. As we seek to draw on a history of place for more sustainable relationships to land, the Soil & Health Association reveals not only that "sustainability" has deeper historical roots than we might expect, but also offers creative options for current sustainable farming practices.

The third major resource from the Franconia Conference aligns especially with Berry's push for "living memory." Twelve current residents[14] within the Franconia Mennonite Conference region were interviewed about their personal histories in relationship to land and farming, and about how they perceive of changes within their local Mennonite landscapes. While

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[10] John Shover, *First Majority, Last Minority: the transforming of rural life in America* (Dekalb: North Illinois University Press, 1976), 26.

[11] Joyce Clemmer Munro, "Lapp, John Edwin (1905-1988)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online,* 1988, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/L3704.html (accessed March 25, 2012).

[12] Writings archived in the "Lapp Collection" at the John L. Ruth Mennonite Historical Library and Archives, Mennonite Heritage Center, Harleysville, Pa.

[13] Archived at the John L. Ruth Mennonite Historical Library and Archives.

[14] While each of these persons currently reside in the Franconia Conference region, they did not all grow up in this area. One grew up in North Dakota, another in Maryland, and two others in central Pennsylvania. These perspectives were helpful in comparing Mennonite experiences between different geographical regions.

this paper cannot pretend to be a thorough or complete oral history project, the twelve interviews do involve certain characteristics of oral history that function within this study.

Oral history offers a different point of access than historical archives or primary resources. Minutes from a Mennonite Soil & Health Association meeting may provide insights into the objectives and activities of that organization. An interview subject will not likely have precise memories of those minutes, but will bring forth the perspective of someone who has lived through that period, who may know about the success and failure of a range of organizations, and who has witnessed the meta-changes that have occurred throughout the decades. While an interviewees' memory may not always be "accurate," her or his personal memory is instructive precisely in revealing how certain themes or events have become most prevalent, how different memories are cast in a positive or negative light, and how a long-ago event appears within the present context. The "bias" of an interviewee can help us understand how history has shaped lived experience and formed particular persons.

Because of limited time and resources, the twelve interview subjects were chosen less systematically. However, each of their stories provided valuable illuminations of particular experiences within the Franconia Conference region, as well as diverse perspectives on the changes they witnessed throughout their lifetimes. Additionally, the interview process provided space in which to build relationships and bridge a generational gap. The interviews helped to, in the words of Paul Richard Thompson:

> change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside…it can give back to the people who made and experienced history a central place.[15]

If anything, the small number of interviews conducted for this study brought reminders of the importance for continuing to give a "central place" to the members of our community who have experienced history and witnessed a lifetime of changes. In further studies, interviewing a precise

[15] Paul Richard Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History, Third Ed.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

number of subjects within several specific categories might afford even more information. Beyond the scope of historical study, the stories of our elder members should be a primary resource as we strive to strengthen our current communities and our relationship to the land.

These interviews do not determine the structure of the entire paper; nor will they be examined to the extent that they would be in an oral history project. Instead, the interviews will come into conversation with and strengthen the other primary and secondary resources. Through this interweaving of sources, the aim of the thesis will be furthered, demonstrating the ways that Mennonite community values and faith identity were linked to a rural sense of place, and proposing the importance of—even within changing landscapes and times—discerning how communal values can helpfully interact commitments to local place.

Context of Mid-twentieth Century Mennonite Rural Life

Rural Agrarian Life in the Mid-Twentieth Century

This study focuses on 1940s-60s precisely because it was such a significant period of change for many North American communities and landscapes, especially rural ones. It has been called "The Great Disjuncture,"[16] described by Royden Loewen as a period when "rural society and culture was 'overwhelmed' by a broadly based transformation…[it was a] time of veritable agricultural revolution, in which agriculture became 'transmuted.'"[17] As is to be expected in any period in history, the experience of rural and agrarian North Americans in the mid-twentieth century was diverse and complex. There are, however, a few trends that characterized this "Great Disjuncture."

Many rural communities remained fairly isolated in the first few decades of the twentieth century, despite the fact that the industrial revolution had already left its mark on the American landscape at the end of the 19th century. Rural communities predominantly consisted of small, diversified, self-sufficient farm households. Loewen asserts that, beginning in the 1930s, there

[16] Shover, xiv.
[17] Royden Loewen, *Diaspora in the Countryside* (Urbana, Ill. : University of Illinois Press, 2006), 6.

was a more wholesale shift towards mechanized and chemically-based forms of agriculture that strove to meet the demands of larger market and economic systems.[18] John Shover, who names 1945 as the dramatic turning point, says that traditional farming was turned "upside down"[19] through technological developments. He names "concentration, specialization, a declining number of productive units, rational planning with considerable government assistance, scientific expertise, skilled management, large capital investments, technical rather than physical skills" as the defining characteristics of this new agricultural age.[20]

In Loewen and Shover's telling of history, the prevailing agricultural trends were towards increased scale and technology. John Hurt affirms these characteristics, but emphasizes that above all, "American agriculture in the twentieth century is the story of farmers' dependency on the federal government."[21] Throughout the century, federal intervention and regulation within agriculture became increasingly common until, by the end of the twentieth century, it is seen by most as the expected norm.[22] Federal government played and continues to play a central role in providing aid and subsidies and offering a degree of financial security within a fluctuating, unstable market. Each of these changes—towards increased scale, mechanization, and federal assistance—makes sense within economies that are shifting beyond the local and towards the global.

Agricultural changes reached beyond the lives of farmers. Loewen notes that rural culture as a whole was deeply impacted. New forms of science and technology resulted in a decreased need for human labor. Shover highlights the large migration of people away from farmlands between 1929 and 1965, and asserts that the primary reason for this mass migration is that the

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[18] Loewen, 6.
[19] Shover, 5.
[20] Ibid, 5-6.
[21] John Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: The American farmer in the twentieth century* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 2002), viiii.
[22] Hurt asserts that "although many farmers had been skeptical about federal intervention in the agricultural economy before the Great Depression, most now considered it an entitlement. The government itself now viewed control of the agricultural economy a matter of necessity and obligation." *Problems of Plenty,* 95.

number of human hands needed to run a farm had decreased dramatically. This, and the more diversified economic opportunities offered in urban areas, contributed to the results of a 1970 study in which "the small Minnesota town of Benson concluded that the community's major export was its young people, a generalization that applies to virtually every village and rural area in the nation."[23]

The Mennonite Community reveals specifically Mennonite responses to these trends away from the farm. Even within the magazine, however, there is awareness that it is not solely a Mennonite phenomenon. In August 1950, for example, the editors announce that

> recently the General Conference of the Methodist Church issued a bulletin from its Division of Home Missions and Church. The bulletin gives practical steps to aid local congregations to build rural communities. Ownership of family-sized farms is a foundation stone of "strong church and worth-while community life…We must have strong rural churches if Methodism is to continue to fulfill her God-given mission.[24]

One periodical also includes an article by E.W. Mueller, who for many years was the Secretary of Church in Town and Country, and who was also concerned about the disintegration of rural communities. These and other examples demonstrate the widespread nature of these concerns for rural faith communities, and that Mennonites hardly thought of themselves as the *only* rural people of faith. This was re-emphasized in several of my interviews with Franconia Mennonite Conference members. A few interviewees were keen to highlight that Mennonite farmers were not the only ones facing changes and challenges—Baptist, Catholic, and Schwenkfelder neighbors were also impacted.

Many farmers and rural residents in this period, then, witnessed rapid technological changes, increased scale in agriculture, decreased opportunities for farm work, population loss and demographic changes, and cultural changes in rural life. While these changes transcended any particular faith identity, there were ways that Anabaptist-Mennonite history and faith identity

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[23] Shover, 9.
[24] "Editorial," *The Mennonite Community* 4, no. 8 (1950): 16.

had become strongly bound up with rural life. Subsequently, the broader trends were felt as a particular threat not only to agriculture, but to Mennonite community life.

Anabaptist-Mennonite Histories in Relationship to Land

Mennonites entered this mid-twentieth century period with a long history upon the land. In 1950, Ira Landis writes that:

> we are traditionally a rural folk. May we be alert to encourage our youth to follow this life, our mission boards to project themselves rurally, and appreciate rather than depreciate our God-given heritage of agriculture. I feel it is still the best atmosphere for the Christian, for the rearing of a godly family, and a strong Mennonite Church. This is the silent attest of four centuries. Today we are at a crucial crossroads.[25]

Landis' "crucial crossroads" reveals the awareness of changing rural landscapes, and the threat posed by urbanization, mechanization, and industrialization towards a Mennonite sense of place and identity. In order to understand his perspective, it is important to briefly examine the history of Anabaptist-Mennonites and their connection to land and farming. Why, after all, does Landis assume that Mennonites hold a "God-given heritage of agriculture"?

Ties to rural agricultural existence can be traced back to earlier Anabaptist-Mennonite experiences in Europe. The Anabaptist movement began in urban centers in the 16th-century, and it remained a predominantly urban movement in the Netherlands and North Germany. The Netherlands held a particularly unusual tolerance of religious pluralism, a tolerance established with the formation of the Dutch republic in 1581.[26] Anabaptists were able to participate fully in the life of urban commercial settings without fearing persecution.

Anabaptists living in South Germany and Switzerland did not experience this tolerance. Many of the early urban Anabaptist leaders disappeared in the face of severe persecution[27], and

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[25] Ira D. Landis, *The Mennonite Community* 4, no. 3 (1950): 32.

[26] Mary Sprunger, "Dutch Mennonites and the Golden Age Economy,"in *Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith and Economics,* ed. Calvin Redekop (Waterloo, Ontario: Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1994), 21.

[27] Kauffman and Driedger state that: "Most of the urban leaders of clerical, intellectual, and noble background disappeared within two years (1525-27), through martyrdom, early natural death, recantation, exile, or some unknown destiny. Thus the Swiss Anabaptist movement was only one-fifth

surviving Anabaptists sought refuge in rural areas, turning to farming as a livelihood. Walter Klaassen is one amongst several voices who assert that the reality of persecution was at the heart of Swiss-German Anabaptist agriculture.

> [Swiss-German Anabaptists] because they were a small, persecuted group, struggling to survive. Their agricultural skills were developed to that end. And because agriculture was all that they did, all their inventiveness was lavished on it. It was subsistence agriculture, and they used every trick of the trade known or discovered by them to ensure survival and the goodwill of the landlords whom they served. By the time they became independent farmers, they had acquired the technical advantage that in large measure explains their success in Prussia, Alsace, Russia, and North and South America, even under difficult conditions.[28]

This account reveals that, for persecuted Anabaptists in Southern Europe, farming became an important mode of survival and of protecting the life of the community. Within rural regions, the Anabaptists found refuge from urban persecution and discovered a geographic isolation that enabled freedom of religious expression.

The first Mennonites to emigrate to North America were largely Dutch, and unsurprisingly many of these Dutch Mennonites were tradesmen or craftsmen.[29] Beginning in early 18th century, however, a wave of South-German Mennonites from the Palatinate began to emigrate. As persecution continued in Swiss-German regions, and as tolerance continued in the Netherlands, the numbers of Swiss-German emigrants began to far outweigh those of the Dutch. North American Mennonite communities quickly became predominantly Swiss and South German.[30]

Of course, not all of these Swiss-German Mennonites were farmers. There were diverse occupations in every community. Farmland, however, was at the heart of Mennonite emigration. Richard MacMaster asserts that, while religious freedom and a vision of a religious community

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urban to begin with, and almost completely rural two years later and thereafter." In *The Mennonite Mosaic* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991), 142.

[28] Walter Klaassen, "Pacifism, Nonviolence, and the Peaceful Reign of God," iin *Creation and the Environment: an Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World* (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010), 141.

[29] Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America 1683-1790* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1985), 34.

[30] Ibid, 48-50.

often take center stage in accounts of Mennonite emigration, it was predominantly land availability that drove Mennonite emigration and settlement patterns.[31] Acquiring large tracts of land ensured that family members and other emigrating Mennonites would be able to settle within the community. Even in Southeastern areas of Pennsylvania like Perkiomen and Skippack, where more Mennonites were involved in trade, "nearly all Mennonites who were in trades also farmed or at least owned farmland."[32] Even with diversified occupations, priority was placed upon farming and acquiring farmland.

It may be easy to read MacMaster's account as a solely economically-driven Mennonite settlement of North American rural landscapes. While economic factors were undoubtedly at play, the settlement of large tracts of land also enabled separation from those outside the community. That Mennonite immigrants desired such separation can be traced back to the aforementioned Swiss-German Anabaptist experience of persecution. Kauffman and Driedger, noting the ways that Southern European Anabaptist became more sectarian than their urban Northern cousins, attribute this at least in part to their flight from persecution into rural landscapes: "the terrain supports residential segregation, tranquil rural life, and parochial ethnocentrism."[33] They state that

> the Swiss experience contributed to the development of a 'two-kingdom' ethic, emphasizing the separation of church and state. The Swiss Anabaptists believed that the followers of Christ are 'called out' from 'the world' to lives of holiness as members of the kingdom of God.[34]

This two-kingdom theology carried over into the North American Mennonite experience, and into their desire to maintain geographically-bounded communities. Even in 1947, John Lapp, pastor, bishop, and church leader in the Franconia Mennonite Conference, reflects that:

> his heart was "more in the country than in the town," and he believed this was true for most Franconia Conference members…[in his] substantial brick house in the countryside along the Allentown Road, he, his busy wife, and the church

[31] Ibid, 79.
[32] Ibid, 101.
[33] Kauffman and Driedger, *Mennonite Mosaic,* 29-30.
[34] Ibid, 30.

> community had "had our children to ourselves." Yet a powerful trend bringing, "a distinct effect upon the church life as well as the economic life," was unmistakable. *Perhaps, in order to keep their way of life, some members of the conference would need to move to where there was still open, and cheaper, land*.[35]

Lapp's desire for separation holds both theological and sociological implications. Sociologically speaking, Lapp believed that the community would survive and cohere better if it was geographically centered and set apart from outsiders. His perspective also implicitly reflects this two-kingdom theology, in which God's holy people are called to live apart from the rest of the world. As we further engage mid-twentieth sources, this sociological and theological drive for separation will continue to be prevalent. Of course, such separation leans towards what David Harvey asserts as "an exclusionary parochialism."[36] As we move at the conclusion of the paper towards a renewed connection between place and Mennonite identity, we will need to grapple with this traditional two-kingdom theology, and with the exclusivist shadow side of being tied to place.

This history, however, does not just communicate exclusivism. It more fundamentally demonstrates ways that place—and in particular rural landscapes—played a pivotal role in Anabaptist-Mennonite communities throughout their histories. Experiences of persecution and migration combined with theologies of holiness and set-apartness, and all of this intersected with rural landscapes and agrarian vocations. This history, for better or worse, led to a profound attachment to farming and the land. As Mennonites entered a period in which farming and landscapes were changing, this attachment to rural places manifested itself in strong assertions for a rural ideal.

Mid-twentieth Century Mennonite Rural Ideals

Rhetoric of Rural vs. Urban as an Oppositional Strategy

[35] John Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship.* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press1984), 532-533.
[36] David Harvey, quoted by T.J. Gorringe, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 76.

Moving from this historical account of Anabaptist-Mennonite relationships to the land, it is unsurprising to find that, in the mid-twentieth century, many North American Mennonites claimed the rural sphere as the ideal "place." This ideal, however, was being challenged by some of the mid-twentieth century trends towards urbanization and industrialization. Particularly in the writings of The Mennonite Community Association members, we find strategies that, in response to perceived threats, strove to maintain rural ideals by posing rural life in opposition to its urban counterpart.

Of course, not all Mennonites idealized rural life. In at least one instance, we find a more complex picture in the conflicting views of Guy F. Hershberger and Paul Peachey. In 1946, Hershberger writes that "community agrarianism is an integral part of Mennonite faith and life because it reinforces the central doctrines of nonconformity to the world and nonresistance to inevitable persecution in the world."[37] This hints at Hershberger's perspective that, in many ways, rural existence is a non-negotiable for faithful Anabaptist-Mennonite living. Paul Peachey, writing in 1955, makes the opposite claim, asserting that

> Mennonites must be told simply and bluntly: not everything that is rural is for that reason Christian…if the genius of Anabaptism is the creation and perpetuation of the distinctly religious community, and is thus involved in social heterogeneity, then the urban environment provides a more congenial setting for a vital Anabaptism than does the rural.[38]

Peachey would not have been as threatened by urbanization, and may have even relished opportunities for Mennonites to move beyond their rural communities. Even Peachey's argument, however, implies that most Mennonites assumed rural life was better for living out Anabaptism, and that they needed to be convinced of the merits of the urban sphere.

Hershberger's perspective is shared by many of his colleagues in The Mennonite Community Association. As has already been cited in the Association's goals, this group was not limited to religious beliefs, but aimed to "stimulate community interests—religious, social,

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[37] Guy F. Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance (1946).* Quoted in Kauffman and Harder, 291.
[38] Peachey, quoted in Kauffman and Harder, 292.

cultural, economic—among the Mennonite people; to publicize the Mennonite way of life."[39] Many members believed this "way of life" was best enacted within the rural sphere. Not only was the rural life asserted as ideal, but urban existence was viewed as a real threat that could tear at the social fabric of Mennonite communities. Hersbherger writes that

> …social relations in a city environment are to a large extent impersonal and secondary…[this] prevents the intimacy so necessary for the type of life which has always characterized the Mennonites.[40]

Hershberger largely defines the Mennonite "way of life" by social intimacy, and believes this intimacy does not occur as easily within the city. If we reflect back to Shover's comment that many rural communities of this period were "exporting" their young people to the city,[41] we can understand why Hershberger and others would perceive the city and urbanization as a threat. It was drawing large parts of the community away for better economic options.

John R. Moomaw, another member of the Association, affirms an impersonal notion of urban life, and expounds further on the detrimental effects of urbanization. He includes "loose social relations," the "cold cash basis" of business transactions, a "high degree of stimulation," "sophistication," "social class distinctions," "experimentation," and "social freedom" as elements of the urban life that contrast Mennonite values.[42] In this way, Moomaw implies what he believes to be positive Mennonite values in opposition to the negative implications of urban life. Many of these positive values will be expounded upon in a later section, but for now it is helpful to note how the rural ideal was presented in opposition to its urban counterpart.

This kind of oppositional framework will continue to appear as we move into a thorough examination of the positive values many Mennonites associated with the rural sphere. It is helpful

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[39] See footnote 8.
[40] Guy Hershberger, "The Mennonite Rural Community," in *Mennonite Community Life: a series of papers read at the Conference on Mennonite Community Life, Goshen College, 1945* (Committee on Industrial Relations of the Mennonite General Conference, 1945), 19.
[41] See footnote 24.
[42] John R. Mumaw, "Current Forces," 37-38 in *Mennonite Community Life: a series of papers read at the Conference on Mennonite Community Life, Goshen College, 1945* (Committee on Industrial Relations of the Mennonite General Conference, 1945), 37-38.

to hold this against our brief background of rural life in the mid-twentieth century, in which many rural communities faced profound change because of less human-dependent forms of agriculture and subsequent migrations to urban centers.

As we have members of the Mennonite Community Association firmly asserted a continuing rural community ideal in response to these larger changes. This ideal largely shapes *The Mennonite Community* magazine, first published in January 1947. The periodical sought to engage the daily, material concerns faced by Mennonites, setting forth perspectives that would encourage faith-based approaches to such concerns. In the first publication of January 1947, Paul Erb states that the journal will focus on the more "secular" issues of home life,[43] in the hopes that the distinctive Mennonite home and community life will be maintained.

In light of the Association's perspectives regarding urbanization and industrialization, it is unsurprising to note that many editors of and contributors to this Association-published magazine assume that the Mennonite community and its way of life is characterized by its rural nature. Hershberger makes this assumption explicit in the first edition of the periodical. His article is entitled "Appreciating the Mennonite Community," although given his forthright assertion for the maintenance of Mennonite rural life, Hershberger easily could have named it "Appreciating the *Rural* Mennonite Community."

Hershberger's description of rural life is glowing, and it is undergirded by a strong desire to oppose and overcome any claims the glamorous urban life may have on his readers. Seemingly aware that some of his readers may criticize the primitiveness of rural life, he assures readers that:

> Modern scientific progress has brought all the conveniences of the city into the rural community. Since the coming of the automobile, rural free delivery, electricity, the telephone, and the radio, rural people are in as close touch with the world about them as city people are, and all the services necessary for a satisfying and attractive life are available to the community that wants them.[44]

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[43] Paul Erb, "A Vision and its Realization," in *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 1 (1947): 8.
[44] Guy F. Hershberger, "Appreciating the Mennonite Community," in *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 1 (1947): 6.

Rural people now have equal access to modern conveniences, and at the same time they are placed at the advantage of retaining the benefits of a rural lifestyle. According to Hershberger, the rural sphere is healthier than the urban one; rural is more positively oriented towards production instead of a consumption-driven urban environment; family-based rural life is more stable than the fragmented urban one; and the intimacy of small rural communities is more conducive to developing Christian values than the large, impersonal urban environment.[45]

While the visions of the staff are articulated as "visions of stronger Mennonite communities, both rural and semi-urban,"[46] this opening article by Hershberger clearly sets the tone for a rural community ideal. Throughout the journal, a rural bias is reinforced in explicit and implicit ways. Nearly every edition, from 1947-1953, contains an article focused on farming life. Some articles directly call for a resistance to urbanization and the protection of rural life, echoing the oppositional view of the Association members. At other points the message is communicated more implicitly. In both cases, the Association writings and the magazine it published communicate a resistance to broader trends of urbanization and industrialization. They insist that, even when so many others are leaving the country and the farm for urban economic opportunities, a rural, farm-based community remains and must be maintained as the most appropriate setting for Mennonite community life.

Even within the time frame of *The Mennonite Community*, however, contributors are aware that not every community can or will be rural, and that not every individual can or will farm. The editorial in April 1953 is entitled "A Lover of the Soil," and lauds the benefits of being closely tied to the earth, pitying "the man who has never had his hands, perhaps his face, covered with good, honest, clean dirt!"[47] In many ways, then, the editors of the magazine have not shifted all that much from their perspective seven years ago. The ideal life is one lived in close

[45] Summary of Hershberger's "advantages to Mennonite communities," "Appreciating the Mennonite Community," 6-7.
[46] Paul Erb, "Editorial: A Lover of the Soil," *The Mennonite Community* 7, no. 4 (1953): 10.
[47] Ibid, 16.

connection with the land. And yet, whereas Hershberger strongly asserted farming and rural life as the primary way of being connected to the land, Erb's editorial acknowledges that not all will be able to farm, let alone live in rural areas:

> But some can have the suburban acre or two, where they can indulge their love for the soil when office hours are done. Many town-dwellers can have a lawn and a garden: making the grass satiny smooth can soothe their cares, and keeping a garden clean can root out disturbing complexes. Some of us who must live in apartments can fortunately carry with us from childhood a blessed memory of mud oozing between our toes, or of long hours spent turning the turf with a sulky plow.[48]

This shift from farming to "making the grass satiny smooth" is striking. Erb, at least, has recognized that the Mennonite community cannot hinge on rural farming life quite so strongly as it has in the past. The Mennonite community must also include the suburban, town, and even city-dwelling life. And yet the push for a rural community ideal is still evident. Erb writes rather begrudgingly of the unfortunate reality of living in an apartment, and gives thanks that many still hold memories of plowing and being close to the earth. And at the end of his editorial, he ultimately asserts a continued desire to cultivate specifically rural communities, going so far as to imply that neglecting connections to the land and rural community life is a form of unfaithfulness. He writes that, in spite of the fact that many live in towns or suburbs…

> some people can invest money in land which younger hands can till. Some can promote causes which advance rural community living. But the man who hates God's good earth seems by that fact to give evidence that he lacks in love for God Himself.[49]

Ultimately, then, even near the end of its published life, *The Mennonite Community* continued to assert the rural sphere as in some way integral to Mennonite Community living. It remained largely in alignment with the oppositional rhetoric of The Mennonite Community Association, bemoaning things like an urban apartment and lauding pastoral, green spaces.

Pictorial and Poetic Idealizations of Rural Life

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

The writings of Association members, and the slant they give to *The Mennonite Community* magazine reveals oppositional rhetoric used to trump rural over urban life. While less explicit by nature, the argument for a rural ideal is powerfully reinforced through the photographs, poems, and advertisements presented in the *The Mennonite Community*.

There is a striking example of this bias in a competition held by the periodical in its first year of publication. The January 1947 edition announces that:

> How many generations can a farm stay in the same family? The Mennonite Community will welcome information from its readers on old farms that have passed from generation to generation. A free subscription will be given to the present owner of the farm that has been in the same family for the longest period of time.[50]

From this competition, it is not difficult to surmise that the journal does not glorify the wandering pilgrim, but rather applauds the farmer who remains firmly rooted in the same community and on the same piece of land.

This same message also comes through the journal's pictorial or poetic romanticization of nature. Every issue begins with a poem and corresponding full-page photograph. The majority of these poems and pictures praise the glories and virtues of the natural world. Photographs include rural farmsteads, scenes of butterflies and flowers, and pictures of young children playing in rural scenes. Just one example of the nature-centric orientation of the poetry is seen in the September 1947's publication of Paul E. Brunner's poem entitled "Meditations on Nature:"

> I feel the ground—the damp, warm ground,
> the soft and green spring sod.
> I sense a thrill—my heart stands still,
> to hear the voice of God.[51]

While it is certainly not uncommon for any Christian tradition to associate nature with experiences of God, the consistent reinforcement of nature as the primary site of joy, beauty, and experience of the divine through word and image reveals a clear bias for the rural and natural sphere.

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[50] Editorial, *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 1 (1947): 16.
[51] Paul E. Brunner, "Meditations on Nature," *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 5 (1947): 2.

Readers do not need to spend long with the journal to realize that its authors do not wish to limit a rural experience to farming. Hershberger is clear in stating that what is needed is "a community with a diversity of small industries so that those who cannot find room on the farm need not drift to the cities, but rather find employment in the home community."[52] However, while many articles in the journal encourage the development of non-farm industries and occupations, there remains a strong belief that farming should be at the heart of the community. This is seen in the fact that most of the periodicals include at least one, if not more, articles on farming. Additionally, farming is in some cases explicitly uplifted as the ideal vocation. Such a sentiment emerges in another of the journal's poems:

> …Among the sheaves far from the town's embroil—
> Bearded and grey, true sovereign of the soil
> A latter Boaz, at whose wise commands
> The harvest turns to gold. Lord of wide lands—
> Mellowed by cycles of unending moil—
> He typifies the dignity of toil…[53]

The poem is laden with implications: the town is cast as an undesirable, "embroil[ed]" location; far from the mayhem of town, the farmer is wise and almost god-like, comparable to the biblical figure of Boaz; while the farmer's work may be humble, it is a dignified labor, granting "lordship" over the land. The farmer, in this poem, is cast in mythic dimensions.

Another of the magazine's poems hints that farming is such a godly vocation because God the creator is ultimate agriculturalist. In January 1950, L.J. Lantz's poem entitled "My Father the Husbandman" is published. Lantz asks in the following excerpt:

> Has He a hand like man's that loves the worth,
> The smooth, dark velvet richness of good earth?
> --Mountain and prairie, grove and field and flood;
> Did He smile gently, when He called them "good"?[54]

The work and pleasures of a farmer and of those who work closely to the soil are paralleled with the very creating work of God, leaving no doubt as to the "goodness" of farming pursuits. The

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[52] Hershberger, "Appreciating the Mennonite Community," 7.
[53] Lloyd Mifflin, "Pioneer of Peace: The Mennonite Farmer," *The Mennonite Community* 4, no. 3 (1950): 2.
[54] L.J. Lantz, "My Father is the Husbandman," *The Mennonite Community* vol. 4 no. 1: 4.

poem calls us to be like God in loving the earth and valuing the worth and goodness that come from the soil. Particularly when read in light of the reality that many young people were leaving the farm for better economic opportunities, the divine affirmation of the soil's "worth" rings out as a call to join with God in recognizing value in farming that goes beyond economic gain.

If economic anxieties are overwhelming, Mennonite farmer-turned-hymnist Henry Gottshall writes that such anxieties will be lost in the beauty of the fields, where a farmer is a companion to God.

> The little cares that fretted me, I lost them yesterday,
> Among the fields, above the sea, Among the winds at play;
> Among the lowing of the herds, The rustling of the trees:
> Among the singing of the birds, The humming of the bees.
> The foolish fears of what may pass, I cast them all away,
> Among the clover scented grass, Among the new-mown hay;
> Among the rustling of the corn, Where drowsy poppies nod;
> Where ill thoughts die and good are born, Out in the fields with God.[55]

Gottshall's hymn reinforces this idea that farming and country life are spheres were the person is in close proximity to God's presence. While the rest of the world might bring anxieties, and might draw people into "ill thoughts," sites like "newly-mown hay" and sounds like the "rustling of the corn" offer reminders of God's goodness and provision. This hymn, as well as many other poetic texts and idyllic photos of farmsteads, draw readers towards a vision of rural life where God's presence is imminent and where the faithful farmer can more fully embody God's love and care.

Ecclesial Connections with Rural Life

If farming and rural life were embedded in conceptions of the divine, they were certainly also a part of congregational life. As resources from the Franconia Conference show, elements such as ordination and pastoral leadership, sermon content, farming-oriented congregational

[55] "Out in the fields with God," text of a hymn written by Mennonite farmer Henry Gotshall, 1938. Quoted in Dawn Ruth Nelson's *A Mennonite Woman: Exploring Spiritual Life and Identity* (Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing, 2010), 58.

traditions, and the general make-up of many Franconia Conference congregations was oriented around farming and rural life.

During this period, most MC Mennonite churches still ordained pastors by lot[56], and nearly all of these pastors were untrained in ministry and bi-vocational. All of the Mennonites I interviewed grew up with pastors who were also farmers. This undoubtedly impacted the forms pastoral ministry took, and the messages that pastors preached and taught to their congregations. J.L., reflecting on the experience of his pastor/farmer father, feels sure that farming impacted his father's framework. "That was his life, farming… I recall one specific piece of a sermon, where he was awed by the flower of a thistle, and noticed its beauty. A thistle, which from a farming perspective is a weed, and a bad one at that, but he saw beauty in that."[57] Another interviewee surmises that, although the impact of farming on congregational life would have been difficult to name at the time, it was undoubtedly present:

> We're singing songs like 'Bringing in the Sheaves', and today people think it's 'bringing in the cheese' because they don't even know what a sheaf is. And the fact that the preacher's were often times preparing their sermons while they were walking behind a plow; that is going to have something to do with the kind of message they're presenting.[58]

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[56] According to H.S. Bender, the lot "came into use fairly early among the Swiss Mennonites and was generally in use among them and their descendants…throughout the 17th-19th centuries. It was uniformly used in the following groups in North America since the beginning of settlement here: Mennonite Church (MC, Old Order Mennonite, Old Order Amish, and Conservative Mennonite, but by no other North American groups. Although the practice disappeared in the Mennonite Church (MC) by the 1960s it remained in use among the more conservative Swiss groups…The vote of the congregation or district was first taken for candidates, one or more votes being required for admission to candidacy, the number of required votes being determined from time to time by conference rules or tradition, or local congregational decision. Thereupon the bishop in charge, usually assisted by one or more visiting bishops, placed on a table in the sight of the congregation a number of hymnbooks or Bibles equal to the number of candidates, in one of which he or an assistant had hidden a thin slip on which was written the following verse from Proverbs 16:33: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." A special prayer for divine action was then offered. Each candidate in succession now took one of the books, which the bishop then opened in turn until he found the lot slip. It was assumed that the one in whose book the slip is found is the one whom God had chosen. The chosen one was then usually immediately ordained. In the Franconia Conference (MC) each book contained a slip, all being blank but the one "bearing the lot." "Lot," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online,* 1955.http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/L67.html (accessed February 29, 2012).

[57] J.L., interview conducted January 8, 2012.

[58] D.K., interview conducted January 2, 2012.

It is important to note this interviewees' acknowledgment that church members were not always conscious of the impact of farming on congregational life. While Mennonite Community Association members adopted and pushed rhetoric of the rural ideal, laity were less prone to view rural life as an explicit part of their faith identity. This came through during many of the interviews, in which subjects had difficulty naming or remembering the relationship between farming and faith. Farming was indeed woven deeply into the fabric of many Mennonite communities, and it impacted the rhythms and messages of collective church experience, but as the interview subjects revealed, many church members simply viewed farming and rural life as "the way things were." Whereas Mennonite Community Association members and certain church leaders like John Lapp believed that community cohesion and faithfulness depended upon maintaining rural existence, laity were more likely to take rural life for granted, but not necessarily view it as imperative for their life of faith.

The difficulty that interviewees had in naming connections between faith and rural life reveals another way that oral history and living memory provide important resources. The Mennonite Community Association writings, *Mennonite Community* magazine, and even Lapp's sermons often articulate a non-negotiable rural ideal. And yet when interview subjects remembered daily life on the farm or in the country, this conscious ideal was not present. Their memories complicate and challenge the picture we might get from primary sources alone.

And yet, even if interview subjects did not defend a rural ideal in the same way as other sources, their memories did reveal the ways that rural life was interwoven within congregational life. One example of this within the Franconia Conference region is the annual celebrations of "Harvest Home Services." These services were distinct to the Southeastern Pennsylvania region, and are in fact a German tradition rather than a Mennonite one.[59] The presence of this

[59] Lapp writes in a 1981 sermon that "the annual Harvest Home Service is a tradition of the Pa. Dutch culture of Eastern Pa…So far as I know it dates back to the early settlers who came to Germantown, then moved on to the rural areas." In a 1977 sermon he says that "[Harvest Home] services [were] rather particular to our eastern counties, even Lancaster County did not have nearly so much emphasis on the

celebration is in many ways simply a remnant of the area's history: early German settlers, of varied denominational backgrounds, brought with them their agrarian skills and harvest-oriented traditions. The long-continued observance of Harvest Home services within Franconia Conference, however, also demonstrates that farming continued to be assumed and uplifted as an important vocation within the life of the faith community.

This sentiment emerged in a few of my interviews with Franconia Conference Mennonites. One woman, when asked how farming interacted with the life of the church community during her childhood, was quick to remember Harvest Home services. She grew up in a congregation where quite a few of the members were farmers, and remembers the annual Harvest Home service as a celebrated, "sociable" time to take a break from the farm work on a Saturday afternoon and gather with the whole community for a service focused on the year's harvest.

John Lapp, aforementioned Franconia Conference and Bishop, preached many Harvest Home sermons, spanning at least the period from 1935 to 1982. In his earlier sermons, farming is clearly assumed as a primary vocation and central to the life of the community. Biblical agrarian images and metaphors are freely interwoven with current experiences of bountiful harvests or of difficult times of drought. Farming, and especially the period of harvesting, is uplifted as work which fosters dependence upon and gratitude toward the creating God. In a 1936 sermon, Lapp exhorts the congregation to glorify God in their plowing, sowing, and reaping[60]—and while his sermon outline is sparse, it is likely that his words were not metaphorical. Farming was a sphere in which faithfulness to God was cultivated and expressed.

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importance of this celebration…our neighbors were the Lutheran, Reformed, Schwenkfelders and Brethren, all German, [and] all observed this feast." Historian John Ruth, in an e-mail correspondence, clarifies that the services were borrowed from Lutheran and Reformed denominations. Services traditionally held every year in August.

[60] John Lapp, "The Feast of the Harvest," sermon preached first at Springfield Mennonite, Sep 19, 1936. Mennonite Heritage Center historical library collection, Harleysville, Pa.

In another sermon delivered outside the context of Harvest Home services, Lapp explicitly outlines the benefits of farming. The 1942 sermon is called "A Call to Honest Labor," and sets out a long list of types of work mentioned in the Bible. Farming is last on his list, and the only one (according to Lapp's outline) that is expounded upon. He provides the following reasons for viewing farming as a biblically based, honorable vocation:

1. First command to work was to till soil. Gen. 2:15
2. After fall, man was sent forth to till ground.
3. Faithful farming is encouraged. Ecc. 11:4, 6
4. Farmers are spoken of as serving nation from prince to pauper. Ecc. 5:9
5. Christian generosity is learned in farming. 2 Cor 9:6; Prov 3:9, 10
6. Beautiful parable of sower.[61]

In 1955, when this sermon was written, a good number of Franconia Conference area members were still farming. But the presence of Harvest Home services is in some ways peculiar, given that the region was much more diversified and less agrarian than other Mennonite communities. Lapp himself highlights this in a 1947 article he wrote for *The Mennonite Community.* Lapp says that "the geographical location of the Franconia Conference in one of the most highly industrialized parts of the country is responsible for the Mennonites in this area leaving the soil and finding their employment elsewhere."[62] The location is within close proximity to Philadelphia markets and commerce, and in Lapp's eyes, increasing urbanization and industry draw men away from the farm and into (perhaps) higher paying work.[63]

When Lapp prepared to write this article, he conducted a survey of Franconia Conference congregations, seeking to establish what vocations members were involved in and how congregation's viewed the relationship between vocation, spirituality, and the well-being of the church. Within the survey responses that have been archived, an approximate 631 men out of

[61] John Lapp, "Call to Honest Labor," sermon preached at E.M.S Institute, July 30, 1942.
[62] Lapp, "The Other Six Days…Occupations Among the Mennonites of Bucks and Montgomery Counties in Pennsylvania: A Variety in Occupations," *The Mennonite Community* 1, No. 1 (1947): 7.
[63] Ibid.

4228 members (men and women included) were farmers.[64] While a good number of couples were farming, many women and men were clearly involved in factory work or other vocations.[65]

Lapp frames the survey with a clear sense that certain vocations are better suited to the life of faith than others. His fourth question asks "which category of men succeed the best a) spiritually, b) [in] church loyalty, c) financially." His eight question asks which type of employment the responders would recommend. Quite a few, although certainly not all, of the responses fit with Lapp's presumed bias: farming is most conducive for spiritual life and church loyalty, and is the most recommended form of employment.

The assumption of Lapp and other survey responders that industrial work and urbanization are an issue for the church holds some of the same oppositional tendencies we found in The Mennonite Community Association. Like some of the Association members, Lapp asserted the rural and agrarian ideal over and against other geographic regions and work settings. In fact, it may precisely be that *because* Franconia Conference was an area with more forms of industry, and in closer proximity to urban centers, that the rural ideal was asserted so explicitly by Lapp. Even in 1981, long after the reality of urbanization and industrialization had been felt within Mennonite communities, Lapp continues to bemoan the woes of industrialization. He reflects in a Harvest Home sermon that:

> Until the time of the curse of the factory system, the industrial revolution—the commercialization of total society—people depended upon the soil for their life, and were a happy and contented people. With the regimentation of the total life by the commercialization and industrial development, the evils of competition, inflation, pollution and the easy life, people became forgetful of God and the source of life with all its blessings.[66]

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[64] Survey responses found in archives of Mennonite Heritage Center Historical Library, Harleysville, Pa. Box 11, folder 5, Lapp collections. Date unknown, although note included that Lapp was collecting data for his 1947 *Mennonite Community* article.

[65] Approximately 250 recorded as working in factories, 250 in "other" work, and smaller numbers spread across a range of other vocations.

[66] John Lapp, "Harvest Home Sermon," sermon delivered at Franconia Mennonite Church, September 1981.

Lapp preaches that when people depend upon the soil, they also depend upon and are presumably more faithful to God. And yet he is keenly aware that less and less church members are dependent on the soil for their living. This shift is evidenced in the decreasing congregational commitment to traditions like Harvest Home services, which are so explicitly centered on farming life. Lapp preaches rather nostalgically in 1977 that:

> Harvest Home service used to be the largest attended service of the calendar year. People from the town used to come out to this service which was traditionally held on Saturday afternoon…may be the time will come in our own fair land that people will begin to realize their dependence upon the harvest for their very life![67]

Lapp places industrialization in opposition to agriculture, but also realizes that agriculture is not exempt from the impact of industrialization. In fact, a large part of his distrust of industrialization is because it threatens the family farm. Farming itself was becoming industrialized, with an emphasis on more machinery, more specialization, and larger tracts of land. The form of farming in itself changed dramatically, and with new forms came the same purchase driven modes of competition, realities of inflation, and increasing pollution that Lapp named as part of the factory system. In the same 1981 sermon, Lapp regrets that

> Today the average Mennonite farmer has a tendency to look at farming as a way to make a living rather than a way of life. The world has gained such a hold on us that we are feverishly trying to make money, often at the expense of our children and the fine rich soil which God has given us. Too often our main concern in life seems to be to get as much as possible out of the land so that we might buy more land.[68]

Lapp articulates a profit-driven farming that objectifies the land and neglects other community members, particularly those of the younger generation. For Lapp, this was a betrayal of the older ways of farming that had nurtured community life and embodied dependence upon God and others.

Nearly thirty-five years earlier, Lapp preached a sermon entitled "Church Administration as related to Industrialism," revealing the ways he was already concerned about the impact of industrialism on farming and ecclesial life. His sermon provides a helpful example of how the

[67] Lapp, "Harvest Home: Exodus 23:14-17," sermon delivered at E.M. Home, September 17, 1977.
[68] Ibid.

older forms of agriculture are still uplifted, but there is simultaneously an awareness of the reality of industrialism and changing farming methods. Lapp's sermon notes state that:

> 1. The Great occupation of the Jews was grazing and agriculture (fitted their religious life).
> 2. The Mennonites who came to America found agriculture the most desirable occupation to fit the religious life and practices.
> 3. The trend away from agriculture to industry affected the Eastern Penna. Mennonites more than elsewhere because of the large industrial center nearby.
> 4. Agriculture is not a cure all for the ills of the church, however in rural communities many problems are avoided.
> 5. The Mennonite Church should carefully study this question in order to…give the answer for the solution of Industrial problems and to be prepared to help the Membership in every area of life.[69]

Lapp's rhetoric maintains this idealized narrative of an agrarian past, associating ancient Jewish and Mennonite agriculture with their religious lives. But he also recognizes the undeniable presence of industrialism, and that a return to more agriculture is neither possible nor even the best solution. It is important to note, however, that Lapp still asserts the rural community as the best environment for wrestling with industrialism's "problems."

In this section, Lapp's sermons, the very tradition of Harvest Home Services, and other ways that congregational life intersected with farming life demonstrate the ways that Mennonite churches held a strong attachment to rural agrarianism that extended beyond career or residence. Rural farming life became interwoven with pastoral leadership, church rhythms, and the ways congregations related to one another and to God.

Each of the preceding sections evidences how Mennonites during the mid-twentieth century idealized, were attached to, or took for granted rural farming life. The writings of the Association and its magazine—as well as Lapp's sermons—reveal that this ideal was partially formed and argued in opposition to perceived threats of urbanization and industrialization. The poems, hymns, sermons, and Harvest Home services demonstrate the ways this ideal was grounded in a strong sense that agrarian living was godly living. In the next several sections, we

[69] John Lapp, "Church Administration as related to Industrialism," sermon delivered at Rockhill Mennonite, October 12, 1948.

will examine particular values that were associated with godly living, and how these values were connected to and communicated through the rural sphere.

Values Associated with the Rural Sphere

We have been examining the rural reality and ideal of many mid-twentieth century Mennonites. Embedded within rural existence—both in how it is constructed and how it is experienced—are particular values and community markers. It is important to distinguish between a constructed rural ideal and a lived rural experience because, as we have already noted, lived experience and memory often complicate an ideal. Some sources from this time—especially writings of The Mennonite Community Association—articulate idealized values in correlation with a rural ideal. Like the relationship between faith and farming, however, most of my interviewees struggled to articulate what values characterized Mennonite community life or distinguished it from other ways of life. In some cases, this may have been because the values uplifted by mid-twentieth century Mennonite writers and thinkers were in fact not as integral to the lived experience of most Mennonites. It may also be that, as asserted by Dawn Ruth Nelson, the ethos of Mennonite community is "imbibed almost by osmosis…forming a person spiritually into a member of the community, just as novices are formed into monastic communities, but perhaps less consciously."[70] In this case, values may indeed be functioning even when members of the community are unable to articulate them or reflect upon them. In either case, it is important to remember that ideals are rarely as simple and straightforward as they are presented, and to acknowledge that the values unearthed from various mid-twentieth century sources cannot provide a complete picture of Mennonite identity.

With this disclaimer in mind, we will delve more fully into our sources, looking for the values that were associated with Mennonite rural community life in the mid-twentieth century. The values are divided into broader categories—social, economic, and land-centered values—and

[70] Nelson, *A Mennonite Woman,* 51.

each of the values within these categories is examined in terms of its relationship to rural agrarian life. While the first category is explicitly social, we will see that many of these values have implications for community relationships. In the midst of trends that pulled young people away from rural community centers and shifted farms to large-scale mechanized operations, many Mennonites continued to assert values that were associated with and expressed through small-scale models of farming that had, in the past, fostered close-knit, interdependent communities.

Social Values

As noted, many of the values hold relational dimensions. This section, then, focuses on more explicit social values, highlighting the central role of family life and the importance of social life within the identity and structure of the Mennonite faith community.

Family Life

The family unit was at the heart of Mennonite social existence. In fact, one reason farming was viewed in such a golden light is because of the ways it is connected with stable, wholesome family life. Mennonites at this time were certainly not unique in emphasizing the role of family in maintaining the well-being of the faith community. Nonetheless, many Mennonites lifted up the family as a key part of their Mennonite faith identity and the unit upon which church community was to be modeled. Looking back to the church's Anabaptist roots, Hershberger writes in a September 1947 editorial that "the Anabaptists were the most community-minded of all the Reformation groups. Their entire society was built upon the home and community pattern."[71] Placing a "home" pattern at the center of a faith community means that the integrity of the family will be an essential component to the overall health of the church.

For many, the rural—and in particular the farm—environment were seen as the ideal setting to foster a healthy family. An article from 1949 lauds the "Values Received From Being Reared on a Farm," asserting that farming lends itself to learning such things as thrift, patience,

[71] Guy F. Hershberger, "The Christian Community at Work," *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 5 (1947): 16.

kindness, working together as a family, and developing a spirit of "enterprise." The author says without hesitation that "I recommend the country as the proper place to rear a family of boys and girls."[72]

This sentiment was echoed by most of my interviewees. D.K.'s father, for instance, struggled as a farmer and consistently worked 40-hours per week at a factory (on top of his farm work) in order to make ends meet. In spite of this struggle, D.K.'s father was fully committed to farming for the sake of his family. D.K. says that the "farm never really brought in much income. But Dad always felt that that's the kind of setting he wanted to raise his family; with the values you had in a farming situation."[73]

One of the values expressed by several interviewees was that, on the farm, families were able to work together. A.E. remembers that when he was growing up on his family's dairy farm, "There was more interaction with persons…it's changed to be more mechanical. That personal connection is lost, because [with] manual labor, people interact more."[74] Life on the farm lent itself to the family truly functioning as a *unit*, with daily interactions and clear ways for all members to work together and contribute to the well-being of the whole family.

It was assumed that, through this family work, wholesome and godly values were instilled in children. The value of hard work, the awareness of where one's food comes from, a simple lifestyle—these were seen as lessons gained by growing up on a farm. A.D., who grew up on a farm in Blooming Glen, Pa. in the 1920s and 30s, said that "a lot of town, city people don't realize the work that goes into raising food. And it's hard work! You go out and pull the weeds and plant in the hot sun no matter what. So I think that was a big lesson that a lot of people would profit from today."[75]

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[72] Clayton Keener, "Values Received from Being Raised on the Farm,"*The Mennonite Community* 3, no. 7 (July 1949): 25.
[73] D.K. interview.
[74] A.E., interview conducted on Jan 2, 2012.
[75] A.D., interview conducted on January 3rd, 2012.

A.D.'s perception of the downsides of growing up in town or in the city was an awareness felt keenly by many others as people began to move away from the farm. There may have been some fear that if farming lost its prominent place in the community, its very moral fabric would be threatened. I.W. Moomaw writes in February 1948 on the importance of maintaining the family farm, and cites what he sees as sobering trends towards absentee farm ownership. When this occurs, Moomaw believes that a sort of ripple effect is created: "farming as a way of life disappears. The family, school, church and other forms of community life suffer."[76] Moomaw does not specifically name how these other forms of community life suffer, but he likely would assert that children receive essential values on the farm that they do not receive in other environments. If they grow up without these values, they will not participate in the broader life of school and church in ways that contribute to the ongoing vitality of those institutions.

The childhood experience articulated by A.D. and Moomaw depends on a particular kind of farm. Several interviewees spoke of the ability for families to work together and the benefit of having diverse roles that people can be involved in. This is not a picture of industrialized agribusiness. Large scale, highly mechanized farms are not places where children can be easily involved in the daily work. It is not coincidental that many contributors to *The Mennonite Community* use not just the term "farm," but the "*family* farm," typically implying a small, diversified operation where family members can be involved in milking, tending to animals, tending to the "truck patch" garden, or harvesting out in the field. As farming moves towards increased specialization and mechanization, this vision of a family farm will become more and more of an anomaly.

The church-wide desire to raise families on the farm went beyond instilling values. There was also genuine concern that urbanization and flight from the farm would lead to inadequate reproduction rates, and therefore a dying church. A Mennonite Community Association paper presented at a conference in 1945 focuses directly on this perceived threat of urbanization to

[76] I.W. Moomaw, "Maintaining the Family Farm,"*The Mennonite Community* 2, no. 2 (1948): 20.

sufficient reproduction. Granted, the author of the paper, O.E. Baker, was not a Mennonite and was in fact the Senior Agricultural Economist for the United States Department of Agriculture. His perspective and his presence at the conference points to the ways that Mennonites were experiencing trends of the larger society and economic system, but also perceived these trends as a threat to their particular form of community life.

Baker asserts the family as "the basic institution of human society,"[77] an assertion that we have already seen to be in continuity with Mennonite thought of the day. His secondary assertion is that the main functions of the family are the reproduction of humanity and the transmission of wealth and culture from one generation to the next. After setting forth these premises, Baker then demonstrates how urbanization is a threat to the family unit, largely because of "the failure of our modern urban family to reproduce the race."[78] Baker lays out extensive evidence, providing graphs and statistics to show how urban environments fail to facilitate reproduction. While it is difficult to understand his anxiety in our own age of overpopulation and depleted natural resources, Baker communicates a real air of foreboding as he highlights that, while the "rural surplus" has been able to balance the "urban deficit" in population growth, there are increased trends towards even the rural sphere declining in their reproductive rates. He contributes this to the fact that "urban ideals, styles and attitudes evidently were permeating rapidly among the rural people."[79]

While Baker is not Mennonite, a 1950 article from *The Mennonite Community* reveals startlingly similar themes. Ira D. Landis, a Pennsylvania Mennonite, writes that

> with urban atmosphere we get urban problems as a church. Pennsylvania's population, being strongly urban, does not reproduce itself. The average family had three in 1890, but has decreased by 1940 to barely two. Among Lancaster Conference Mennonites the decline is not so steep. Prior to 1800 the average was 5.4 children per: in the next century 4.9; in this century it is 4, although the number may decline.

[77] O.E. Baker, "The Effects of Urbanization," in *Mennonite community life: a series of papers read at the Conference on Mennonite Community Life held at Goshen, Indiana, March 16 and 17, 1945* (Scottdale, Pa. : Committee on Industrial Relations of the Mennonite General Conference, 1945), 47.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Baker, 48.

> With about half of them remaining in the church, we would be scarcely keeping our own.[80]

Baker and Landis genuinely feared that the physical movement away from the farm towards urban centers, as well as the imposition of urban values upon the rural sphere, would threaten the vitality of the family, church community and society as a whole. In this way, we can see how not only the family unit was central to Mennonite faith identity, but family life as lived out within the context of small family-farms and rural communities. Rural agrarian communities were viewed as the best environment for maintaining reproduction rates, and also as a nourishing environment for stable family units that lived, worked, and fellowshipped together.

Social Relationships within the Faith Community

Small-scale, rural farms, then, were positively linked with strong Mennonite family life. At least in Hersbherger's perspective, family life was not an end in itself, but was the basis for a broader Anabaptist vision of community. Hershberger asserted that Anabaptists were the most "community-minded" because their "entire society was built upon the home and community pattern."[81]

If family life on the farm sets the "pattern" for broader community life, then important family values should also translate into the structure and values of the community. As we saw in the preceding section, several interviewees valued the ways that family farms enabled shared work and close relationships. Paul Erb, member of The Mennonite Community Association and co-editor of the magazine, articulates similar values in a paper entitled "The Religious Basis of the Mennonite Community." Erb, however, names the values as not only essential to Mennonite families, but to Mennonite communities of faith. Erb begins by highlighting the central place of the meeting house in every Mennonite community. But he quickly goes on to say that these meeting houses are not just for worship. Social life and relationships are key. "It is a common

[80] Ira D. Landis, *The Mennonite Community* 4, no. 5 (1950): 24.
[81] See footnote 70.

practice for everyone to shake hands as far around as time and opportunity permit. Oftentimes the handshake is accompanied by the kiss of love, and thus *the social fellowship is elevated to the dignity of a church ordinance"* (my emphasis).[82] Of course, any church can claim socializing as a central component. But Erb's statement is striking because, within the context of a non-sacramental tradition, he essentially makes a sacrament out of social fellowship.

It is also important to notice Erb's emphasis on intra-Mennonite socializing. Commenting on the life of young people, he says "the basic social life of the community is pretty well defined within denominational boundaries."[83] In Erb's depiction of a Mennonite community, social fellowship contributes so fully to the life of the community in part because socializing is confined within boundaried Mennonite circles.

Erb also talks about the importance of shared work, another primary value associated with family life on the farm. He writes that:

> Members of the church, most of whom are farmers, co-operate in their work. They help one another in threshing and corn picking, in butchering and barn raising. The women help each other with their artistic patch-work quilts and perhaps in drying corn and canning fruit. When someone moves, the work entailed is a neighborhood affair.[84]

At the heart of Erb's conception of Mennonite community, then, is the sense that community is not solely formed on shared religious beliefs. Religious life is crucial, but it is also essential to share everyday work and experiences with one another. This is undoubtedly a reason why farming was viewed as such an ideal vocation. Just as farming provides opportunities for families to work together and function as a unit, it also enables members of the community to share labor and spend time with one another. Many assumed that when persons began working in factories and offices, opportunities for inter-relationship and inter-dependence would be lacking. As we already saw, Erb and other members of The Mennonite Community Association carried this

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[82] Paul Erb, "The Religious Basis of the Mennonite Community," in *Mennonite community life: a series of papers read at the Conference on Mennonite Community Life held at Goshen, Indiana, March 16 and 17, 1945* (Scottdale, Pa. : Committee on Industrial Relations of the Mennonite General Conference, 1945), 7.
[83] Ibid, 8.
[84] Ibid, 8-9.

conviction over into their publication of *The Mennonite Community* magazine, investing much importance in maintaining not only Mennonite theological convictions, but also "secular" Mennonite habits of farming and rural life.

It is also important to remember that, for these writers, the secular and religious are not two distinct spheres, but the religious and secular are inextricably bound together in a life-encompassing practice of discipleship. Grant M. Stoltzfus writes in 1950 that:

> If our religion were a Sunday morning affair only, we would not have to show any particular concern about many of these matters. However, since all of life is sacred and subject to the lordship of Christ it means that we have a seven day-a-week religion. The church is concerned about what we do in the shop, at the desk, and on the farm since it is here that we are just or unjust with our brother. It is here that we obey God or mammon.[85]

This commitment to a "seven day-a-week religion" will undergird many of the values named in subsequent sections. In this case, Stoltzfus' comment highlights the ways that social relationships were viewed as an integral component to daily faith. Stolzfus asserts that the church cares about our work because "it is here that we are just or unjust with our brother." How a person relates to their families, how co-workers treat one another, and how well members of the church care for one another—each of these social interactions are a sphere in which we are either faithful or unfaithful to God.

While many *Mennonite Community* articles, as well as other sources, are aware that "seven-day-a-week religion" applies to all vocations, and that one does not have to be a farmer in order to subject all of life to the lordship of Christ, there remains a strong sense that farming (at least in the traditional ways it has been practiced) is a more natural setting for living out faith convictions in daily life and work. This section has demonstrated the ways that farming was positively associated with key social values within Mennonite faith identity. Many believed that small family farms enabled an entire family to share work together and enabled parents to instill important values in their children. Additionally, farm-based rural communities were spheres

[85] Grant M. Stoltzfus, "The 1950 Conference on Industrial Relations," *The Mennonite Community* 4 no. 5 (1950): 24.

where communities could share labor and orient their lives around common agricultural rhythms. In light of the ways these social values were enacted within the context of small-family farms, we can further understand why the mechanization and increased scale of agriculture, as well as trends towards urbanization, were seen by some as a threat to the social fabric of Mennonite rural communities.

Economic Values

Mutual Aid

Stoltzfus' asserts that Mennonites practice a "seven day-a-week religion," and he centers this daily faith on human interactions. He argues that how a person works and lives on a day to day basis matters precisely because "it is here that we are just or unjust with our brother." As we will see, Stoltzfus' concern for a faith lived out through social relationships also held implications for economic values. His language of justice asserts a communal reality where all members were uplifted and provided for. In interviews and in writings, the practice of mutual aid consistently surfaced as a primary marker of Mennonite community and way in which the community enacted economic values in order to care for its members.

Many mutual aid practices were oriented around farming and the economic concerns that went hand-in-hand with farming. The language of mutual aid was used explicitly in discussions of how well-established farmers and members of the Mennonite community could help young people get started in farming. Mennonites were aware that, as farming became more of a mechanized and specialized affair, it was much more difficult to go into farming without accruing significant debt. Additionally, in regions like Franconia Conference, land was becoming increasingly attractive to residents in nearby cities. As more people from Philadelphia became interested in purchasing and building upon land in the nearby countryside, the price of land

inevitably went up.[86] For many, it was essential that young people still have the opportunity to farm, and so there was a call to extend mutual aid in order to help young people purchase land and equipment. One Mrs. William H. Lewis of Bucks County, Pennsylvania is quoted in 1951: "I feel sometimes folks are making the mistake of selling for the high dollar when our own youth would be glad to take up farming as a livelihood if someone would give them a lift. The Lord knows whether or not we are good stewards of what we possess."[87] A few years earlier, an article by Oliver Snyder proposed beginning an official mutual aid program to provide assistance for young farmers. The heart of his concern is found in his hope that "if we can [practice mutual aid], then I feel we can hold our youth for the church and for a continuance of our way of life."[88] This "way of life" hinges on maintaining the rural sphere and lifestyle of farming.

A.E tells of a more classic experience of farm-based mutual aid—that of a barn raising. He and his wife had travelled a few hours away to attend a regional Mennonite relief sale[89] when they heard word that there had been a fire in the barn back home. They of course wanted to immediately drive home, but the person who called assured them that neighbors and community members had responded and that there was no need to rush back. Indeed, the community response was instant, and as the fire died down, neighbors arrived to help with clean up. One neighbor offered to keep A.E's cows in his pasture while the barn was being built. And by the next weekend, the churches in Franconia Conference had received news of the fire, and dozens—many of whom were also farmers—arrived to help with the barn re-construction efforts.[90]

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[86] May 1950 of *The Mennonite Community.* reports that in Franconia Conference, "a rapidly urbanized countryside among the Mennonite communities in what may become a suburb of Philadelphia. Farms are purchased by wealthy city persons who have taken a liking to Burks County farms. Surveys show a minority of Mennonites are on farms and the number is declining. "The 1950 Conference on Industrial Relations" by Grant M. Stoltzfus, 25.

[87] Mrs. William H. Lewis, *The Mennonite Community* 5, no. 8 (1951): 28.

[88] Oliver Snyder, "A Farmer Looks at Trends in Land Ownership," *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 2 (1947): 6-7.

[89] Mennonite relief sales are annual regional gatherings held to support Mennonite relief agencies. Typically, they involve lots of Mennonite regional cooking, a quilt auction, and much socializing.

[90] A.E., second interview conducted January 5, 2012.

Fires were a frequent threat to farmers, and gave concrete situations in which mutual aid was practiced. Similarly, the sharing of farm machinery and labor was another natural way to extend mutual aid. D.K. remembers that in his community, some machinery was owned in common and was used in a sort of rotation system where farmers would go to one farm to harvest, then the next, each receiving help with their work and extending help to others.[91]

Both of these examples reveal how commitments to mutual aid were expressed through activities centered around farm life. It was of course helpful that so many Mennonites were farmers, and that community members had the ability to share skills, tools, and machinery in times of need. In the eyes of J.R., mutual aid was more difficult to enact as concretely when farming was less prominent within the community.[92]

Even with this strong emphasis on offering aid in times of need, many church communities and regional conferences recognized that there are times when neighborly goodwill reaches limitations, and more systematic modes of providing assistance are necessary. While A.E. remembers the assistance of his neighbors with immense gratitude, he recognizes that these same neighbors and church members could not bear the financial burden of the fire alone. A.E. and his wife were also members of the Franconia Mutual Aid Plan for Fire Insurance, and the records from 1963 show that the family used $12,500 to cover the costs of the fire. [93]These records were annually published and sent to all Aid Plan members, showing the losses and disbursements from the previous year. This transparency was undoubtedly linked with a desire to remain distinct from non-religious insurance companies, and to remain true to open mutual aid practices rather than what would have been seen as impersonal and individualistic insurance plans.

In fact, when the idea of a Mennonite fire insurance plan was first proposed in 1896, the conference disapproved of it. Insurance was viewed as a lack of faithfulness and dependence

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[91] D.K. interview.
[92] J.R., interview conducted on January 3, 2012
[93] "Franconia Mennonite Aid Plan for Mutual Fire Insurance," 1963, Mennonite Heritage Center Historical Library Archives, Harleysville, Pa.

upon God and the community of faith. But members increasingly turned to non-religious insurance companies to protect against the threat of fire. It thus seemed better to have a Mennonite insurance plan that could maintain Mennonite values than to have so many church members taking part in these non-Mennonite plans. The organization was eventually approved in 1935, and the Franconia Mutual Aid Plan lasted for decades.[94] Even while pressures for larger-scale systems of assistance exerted influence, a strong desire remained to depend upon the community of faith in times of need. Through the development of the Franconia Mutual Aid Plan and through the memories of mutual aid practices, we see the ways that Mennonites valued economic interdependence. This interdependence was often enacted within and connected to rural agrarian experience.

Simplicity & Nonconformity

The lure of wealth and materialism was perceived as threat to these values of interdependence and dependence upon the divine. If a person accrued significant wealth, there would be the temptation to forget that God is ultimate provider of all material and spiritual blessings, as well as the temptation to neglect the needs of others in the pursuit for more wealth. Countering this, then, was a call to maintain values of simplicity.

Part of this call relates directly to the core emphasis upon cohesive communities, nurtured by mutual aid. Millard Lind, in a 1947 article, looks to the Old Testament for principles regarding God and the community's relationship to the land. His essential message is towards many and small family farms, rather than land being consolidated into the hands of the wealthy few. He writes:

> Israel had forsaken Jehovah. She no longer obeyed His law in regard to family ownership of the land. Land ownership was concentrated in the hands of the few.

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[94] J. C. Clemens, "Franconia Mennonite Aid Plan for Fire Insurance," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online,* 1956, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/franconia_mennonite_aid_plan_for_fire_insurance (accessed March 21, 2012).

> Voluptuous luxury and extreme poverty therefore existed side by side to degrade and divide the people. The result was social decay and national calamity.[95]

Here we see the ways that, even within the rural agrarian sphere, wealth and wealth disparities threatened not only a core value of simplicity, but also the well being and stability of a community. If a few wealthy members own a majority of the land, a domino effect will be created where young people can no longer afford to purchase land and farm, less and less community members are united around a central livelihood, and the community becomes increasingly scattered and fragmented. While there are a places in the journal where contributors speak of utilizing material wealth wisely, or recognize the ways wealthy church members can benefit the broader community, wealth accumulation—and in particular wealth through land accumulation—is primarily viewed as a threat to the ongoing vitality of a geographically rooted community.

Consequently, the family farm is consistently upheld as the ideal. Small, diversified family farms can come much closer to sustenance farming, enabling families to grow their own food and produce much of their own goods. And many were also aware that small family farms limited wealth accrual, keeping landowners within certain limits even while supporting the family. Smucker's nostalgia for simpler forms of farming reveal an ongoing family farm ideal, even amidst awareness that the family farm is becoming much less common:

> Technology and the urbanization of the country is greatly influencing the cultural and economic pattern of the typical Mennonite community. The simple life of our forefathers has become very complex today, and the problem of managing the farm business is becoming increasingly complicated…Intimacy and mutual assistance are being replaced by machines, and when assistance is rendered, its value is often calculated by dollars and cents. The individual farmer who meets adversity or needs assistance too often must seek aid outside the community.[96]

Stoltzfus is aware that farming does not automatically guarantee simplicity. Some felt that Mennonite communities needed to work hard to enable the continued flourishing of small, family farms even in the face of broader trends towards large-scale, mechanized agriculture. As

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[95] Millard Lind, "God and the Land," *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 11 (1947): 6.
[96] Silas J. Smucker. "Things to Consider as Communities Change," *The Mennonite Community* 4, no. 1 (1950): 24.

already alluded to, some contributors propose that, in the spirit of mutual aid, wealthy landowners resist adding land to their own holdings and instead help young farmers get started. There are also conversations about utilizing co-operative models that can allow farmers to remain small while still earning a living. The complexities of the farming sphere are apparent, but the perspective of Guy Hershberger remains: "the ideal of the family farm must be maintained for those who are engaged in agriculture."[97]

Others believe that, so long as connections to the soil and to rural patterns are maintained, simplicity will be possible. Elaine Sommers, an English professor at Goshen College, writes an article on "plain living," in which she asserts that even for people working in town or at non-farm jobs, living in the country can help to maintain simplicity. She anecdotally portrays two men who work at the same job on the same salary as auditors. One of them "lived in a manner which, according to popular opinion, was fitting a person of his station,"[98] with a fancy car, membership in clubs, and many meals out with friends. The other man lived with his family on a few acres outside of town, where they had a garden, had a used car, and spent their time reading and working together as a family. In the end, both are put in a difficult situation at work that compromises their honesty. The town-man is dishonest, while the country man is honest and sticks to his principles.

Sommers' anecdote implies much: even if a person works in town or in business, country living in of itself fosters simplicity and, ultimately, greater integrity. For Mennonites like Sommers, it was imperative to remain residents of the rural sphere even as farming became a less common vocation.

Sommers' uses the language of "plain living," which is somewhat synonymous with simplicity. One of the primary markers of simplicity, in fact, during the mid-twentieth century was what was called "plain dress." When Z.K. was asked how she would have distinguished the

[97] "Wider Horizons for the Community," *The Mennonite Community* 2 no. 1 (1948): 7.
[98] Elaine Sommers, "If Thine Eye Be Single: A Meditation on Plain Living," *The Mennonite Community* 4 no. 11 (1950): 26.

Mennonite community of her childhood in North Dakota, she immediately spoke of dress: "clothing styles were simplicity, modesty, and economy."[99]

From the 1930s-50s in the Franconia Conference, plain dress was more emphasized than in some other Mennonite regions, and was pushed with more fervor than it had been even with Franconia Conference's past.[100] In fact, Z.K., who moved from North Dakota to the Franconia area, felt that the strictness around dress in Franconia was a large reason that it was eventually so quickly and completely abandoned. After commenting on the characteristics of dress in North Dakota, she said: modesty, ecomony. simplicity, modesty. Yeah, well, that keeps! Whereas a particular pattern doesn't. Yeah, here [Franconia], it just went—whoops!"[101]

It is interesting that Franconia Conference was stricter regarding clothing style than was Z.K.'s childhood community. Z.K. grew up in a very rural area of North Dakota where there were only a few non-Mennonites in the area, and almost all of the Mennonites there were farmers. Franconia Conference Mennonites, on the other hand, lived in much closer proximity to non-Mennonites, and were also in a geographical region where semi-rural pockets were in close proximity to and frequent interaction with surrounding suburbs and urban centers. If the predominant Mennonite perspective was correct, then Franconia Mennonites would have encountered the lure of wealth and materialism more frequently because of this proximity to towns and cities. Certainly, less and less Franconia Mennonites resided on the family farm—that supposed ideal of simple living—and it may well have been that the renewed vigor around

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[99] Z.K. interview, conducted January 5, 2012.

[100] Plain dress was part of a broader effort to maintain nonconformity. Paul Toews writes of the "General Problems Committee" that formed in the Mennonite Church (MC) during the 1930s. The committee focused on drawing lines of separation between church and world. In 1943 it recommended that "the doctrine of nonconformity to the world" be required for church membership. Specifically, a member might violate the doctrine by "holding of life insurance, membership in labor unions, immodest and worldly attire (including hats for sisters), the wearing of jewelry (including wedding rings), (and/or) attendance at movies and theaters." Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970: modernity and the persistence of religious community* (Scottdale, Pa.:Herald Press, 1996), 75-76.

[101] Z.K. interview.

distinctive dress came as a reaction against these pressures and a desire to remain distinct from "the world."

And yet, for some, this plain dress was an inadequate and in some ways false witness to simplicity. Emma Sommers writes that

> A certain non-Mennonite friend of mine was visiting in a prosperous Mennonite community and he could not weave into one unified pattern the modern homes, large farms, and general manifestations of having abundance in this world's goods with the simple clothing the people wore because they believed in simplicity. His question was, "What do these people really believe?"[102]

Undoubtedly this perceived hypocrisy contributed to the eventual abandonment of Franconia Conference plain-dress requirements. Why wear a symbol of simplicity when so many other lived realities communicated complicity with wealth and materialism? J.R. Burkholder, a young MC Mennonite, charges that practices like plain dress "had degenerated into legalism with little regenerative power,"[103] He argued for practices that would communicate a "dynamic discipleship" more reflective of "true Anabaptism."[104]

These conversations about legalism and nonconformity reveal that, during the mid-twentieth century, Mennonites struggled in numerous ways with the changing tides around them. Core values like simplicity were challenged not only by urbanization, but by changing farming practices, changing social norms, and changing ideas brought by the younger generation. Most agreed that forces like materialism needed to be resisted, but while some believed that the vocations and traditions of old must be maintained, others asserted that new forms of discipleship were required within new and changing contexts.

Nonresistance

Returning to Sommers article on materialism, we encounter another core value within Mennonite rural identity in the mid-twentieth century. Sommers moves in a perhaps surprising

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[102] Emma Sommers, "Mennonites and Materialism," *The Mennonite Community* 3, no. 11: 21.
[103] Toews, 225.
[104] Ibid.

direction in the final section of her article, entitled "The Simple Life and the Peaceful Life." She begins her conclusion by stating forcefully and unapologetically that "materialism is the chief cause of war."[105] She doesn't provide much evidence to support this claim, but nonetheless communicates a central Mennonite commitment to nonresistance and "the peaceful life". As we will see, some Mennonites were concerned with how their commitments to nonresistance interacted with a changing rural sphere.

In many ways, nonresistance fits better within the previous section on social values. Nonresistance, after all, governed much of how Mennonites related to the larger society. And yet, as our sources will demonstrate, many of the conversations about nonresistance during this period focused on economic spheres. Sommers provides one example of this in her assertion that materialism—an economic issue—causes war. But more commonly, Mennonites of this time were concerned with how a shift towards industry and away from farming might compromise commitments to nonresistance.

During World War II, the farm (as opposed to the factory or other industrial settings) proved an obvious benefit to a pacifist stance because draft boards were so willing to grant farm deferments. Young men were in fact probably more likely to choose farm work during this time because of the deferments. In the post-war Franconia Conference survey conducted by John Lapp, he tries to get a sense for whether there is a trend away from the farm now that the motivation of deferment is lacking,[106] clearly aware that the war has in some ways been a boon for farm life.

Beyond deferments, there was less explicit articulation of how farm or rural life positively nurtured a commitment to nonresistance. The farm was, however, lauded in contrast to the world of industry and business. The March 1949 issue presents "A Primer on Industrial Relations," depicting through images and words the ways that industry, driven so much by

[105] Emma Sommers, 21.

[106] Survey asks: "Has there been a trend away from the farm since the war's end?" Responses are mixed, with eight congregations answering "yes," eight "no," three "a few," and two not responding.

monetary profit, has the potential to create wealth disparity between those who run industries and those who work within them. This disparity is presented as fueling the formation of unions (cast in a very negative light), which often lead to violence and "industrial conflict."[107] After stating that "all this is contrary to the spirit of the New Testament,"[108] the "Christian way" is set forth, which "calls for the production of goods primarily as a means of supplying the needs of people for these goods, and only secondarily as a means of making money."[109]

A.D., one of the interviewees, resonated strongly with a critical view of unions. She too believed and continues to believe that unions create relationships defined by conflict and force, and that the resistance of unions is un-biblical. She herself worked in a hosiery mill for a few years and remembers that:

> When unions started, [Mennonite] women who worked in the pants factory weren't allowed[110] to join the union. Because they didn't think it was right, to threaten your boss with quitting. You were a worker, the Bible says you were supposed to work for your boss, and not go out for everything you could get, and quit working if somebody didn't want to give you what you thought you should have.[111]

For some, then, the farm remained the less complicated sphere in which to live out nonresistant convictions. Your work was within the home sphere, you worked primarily with neighbors and other church members, and you did not have to deal with the conflict that might emerge in relationship to industrialization and unions.

For others, however, the increasingly complex sphere of farming could not guarantee the faithful practice of nonresistance. John Hostetler argued that Mennonites of the twentieth century hadn't done enough to think about justice and peace within the "business" of farming. In fact, he says that "not one protest from a Mennonite farmer to the unethical practices of farmers' organizations has come to my attention. Mennonites accept the "going" price of farm products

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[107] "A Primer on Industrial Relations,"*The Mennonite Community* 3, no. 3 (1949): 25.
[108] Ibid, 26.
[109] Ibid, 27.
[110] At this time, the Church Discipline still would have exerted a fair amount of control over personal decisions, such as the decision of whether or not to join a union.
[111] A.D. interview.

which is fixed largely by conflict between organized groups of producers and distributors."[112] Hostetler recognizes that, for most, farming is no longer an occupation that enables them to remain separate from larger "worldly" systems, but that even farming makes them complicit in violent and unjust practices of broader organizations. If farming is to be a sphere where nonresistance is lived out, then it must be done with much more intentionality.

Hostetler does hint that, if Mennonite farmers were to completely return to older models of agriculture, shunning new agricultural developments and technologies, they might be able to depend upon farming more fully as a guarantor of nonresistant practices. He presents two difficult options: "the Mennonite farmer may either return to sixteenth-century farming technology, isolate himself from the complex system and exist as a subsistence farmer, or try to seek a just way in the existing economy."[113] In these words, we hear again the sense that small-scale family, subsistence models of farming more easily enabled the sorts of relational and ethical values that were at the heart of Mennonite faith identity. And yet, Hostetler does not ultimately assert a return to sixteenth-century farming technology. Instead, he makes suggestions for how Mennonite farmers can work to navigate the current complex systems. He suggests that "perhaps there should be groups of Mennonite farmers who would help each other to think through the ethics of their enterprise, and assist each other in maintaining a consistent way of doing justice in line with the Christian ethic."[114]

Throughout this section, we have seen the ways that Mennonites were working to maintain economic values in the midst of changing and complex economic spheres. In many instances, the ideal of a small family farm was still uplifted, seen as a model that more fully enabled practices of mutual aid and economic interdependence, and that resisted trends of land consolidation into the hands of wealthy members. Those such as Hostetler, however, were aware

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[112] John A. Hostetler, "Farmers Organizations and the Nonresistant Conscience," *The Mennonite Community* 6, no. 2 (1952): 18.
[113] Ibid, 19.
[114] Ibid, 31.

of the increasing complexities of farming, but believed that rather than trying to maintain a past ideal, Mennonites must try to navigate current agricultural systems in ways that would enable ongoing commitments to values like nonresistance.

Land-centered Values

As we have already noted, many of the highlighted values have relational components. Additionally, these particular categorizations of values often intersect and overlap. In the previous section, for instance, the economic value of interdependence held many social implications. Similarly, economic interdependence and the corresponding desire to resist wealth disparities played out in relationship to land distribution. This implication for land-use moves us into the next section, in which we will examine land-based values that drove Mennonite community life.

Biblically-based Relationships to Land

In the desire that many Mennonites had to live out daily discipleship, the Bible was often referenced as a source for daily ethics. The impact of Scripture extended beyond relationships with other persons, reaching out to also impact human relationships to the land. Some voices, for example, argued from a strong biblical basis for more widely dispersed, de-centralized land distribution. Returning again to Hostetler, he believes that part of the reason Mennonite farmers are not living as fully into faith values are because there are "selfish sheep in the rural pasture." He goes on to state that:

> Certainly part of the work of the church is to remind the farmer that he is his brother's keeper, and that the only man Jesus ever called a fool was the farmer who thought that bigger crops and bigger barns would be comforts for his soul.[115]

Hostetler uses scripture to bring a rather stinging indictment against current trends towards land consolidation and increased scale. Other voices draw on the prophets to make similar arguments. In these arguments, Scripture calls Mennonite farmers to particular practices.

[115] Hostetler, 32.

In other cases, however, the farm is asserted again as a sort of ideal that enables a strong relationship with God and greater biblical insight.

This in part emerges from a belief that living on a farm brings reminders of God's sovereignty, and is also in some ways revelatory. Even in 1981, long after trends away from the farm, John Lapp preaches that "a people who live close to the soil depend upon their God for the fertility of the soil, the rains to water the earth, the favorable weather conditions for growing crops, their health and daily strength for the tasks of life, and for the increase and production of their crops, flocks, herds."[116] Conversely, there was the sense that believers could gain important knowledge of their Creator God through farming. Clayton Keener writes in 1949 that

> the understanding of the Scriptures is enhanced by rural experience. A farm-reared person understand the parable of the sower and its implications; he has seen benefits of fertilization and pruning; he has had firsthand experience with cattle and sheep; he understands how a bit controls a horse…[117]

To Keener, the farm functions like a bible study tool, enabling more faithful living. To Hostetler, the bible calls Mennonite farmers to more faithful practices. In both cases, Scripture provides a reference point for relationship to land and agriculture.

Land Stewardship

Keener and Hostetler both bring farming into conversation with faithfulness. For many contributors to *The Mennonite Community*, faithfulness involves being good stewards of the land. There are many articles that talk about the need for soil conservation, one article asserting that "a faithful steward leaves for his successor a better farm than he received."[118] While Mennonites can hardly be upheld as prophets or models of environmental consciousness, their commitment to rural, agrarian landscapes, as well as their commitment to living out faith in every sphere of life, sometimes translated into concern for the land's well-being.

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[116] John Lapp, "Harvest Home Sermon," Franconia Mennonite Church, September 9, 1981.
[117] Clatyon Keener, "Values from being raised on a farm," *The Mennonite Community* 3 no. 7 (1949), 24.
[118] John E. Kaufmann, "Safeguarding an Illinois Farm," *The Mennonite Community* 1, no 2 (1947): 21.

J.L. recalls his own father's concern to leave the land in better condition than when he received it. He remembers when his father purchased a nearby tract of land that was in considerably poorer condition than his own farm. J.L.'s father spent two full years working at building up the soil before he allowed himself to plow any of the land. There were, in all likelihood, economic concerns driving this decision as well, but J.L. remembers his father's decision as primarily emerging from a commitment to maintaining the health of the soil.[119]

Another striking example from the Franconia Mennonite Conference is "The Mennonite Soil & Health Association," officially formed in 1951. Interestingly, the primary thesis driving the organization's proposal is that "physical well being is based on healthy soil," and their ultimate objective is to nurture health by nurturing soil.[120] The preamble to the constitution and by-laws does show, unsurprisingly, that faith is also a motivator for caring for the land.

> Believing that God made all things good; and that we are only stewards of our land and time; and that physical well being is based on fertile soil; further that the principles of husbandry commonly known as "organic husbandry" consist of finding the best means of cooperating with God; this association is formed as a Christian means of promoting good health.[121]

The statement of "finding the best means of cooperating with God" aligns like so many other statements with Stoltzfus' assertion that Mennonites embrace a "seven day-a-week" religion. In farming, utilizing time and resources, in pursuing health, one must seek to be aligned with God's purposes. God's purposes were sought in relationship to the land at least in part because the community was rooted in the landscape for so much of their history, and continued to depend upon the land for much of their living and work. Thankfully, in the case of the Soil & Health association, this translated into a deep care for the land and commitment to organic practices.

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[119] J.L. interview.
[120] "Proposed Mennonite Soil and Health Association," September 1950, Mennonite Heritage Center Historical Library Archives, Harleysville, Pa.
[121] "Constitution and By-laws," *Mennonite Soil & Health Association*, Souderton, Pa., page 2. Organized June 4, 1951. Mennonite Historical Library Archives.

The Mennonite Soil & Health Association did not make a huge mark in the history and life of Franconia Conference. Records and newspaper advertisements show that, while initial informational meetings attracted quite a bit of attention, numbers quickly waned and the organization never gained the critical mass it hoped for. A member notice in 1958 advertised an upcoming speaker, stating that "we expect him to put new enthusiasm into our group,"[122] hinting at a lack of energy and support.

Originally, the organization's goals were high. Their immediate goal was to begin a small association that would provide organically raised food for one of the Mennonite institutions (most suggestions were for one of the elderly care homes), and to observe the health of residents of that institution. Their ultimate goals included:

> I. A large association paying good prices for selected food, serving, under doctors observation, both institutions and individuals.
> Also selling, under Association trademark through hucksters[123], health food stores, by mail, and even through city mission lunch rooms.
> II. Production of all the basic foods on fertile soil, using compost or its equivalent and without artificial chemicals or poison sprays.
> III. To provide compost through municipal composting plants for the benefit of members and others. [124]

At the outset, the organization tried to get an idea of what farmers believed they could produce organically. They also tried to expose farmers to successful organic methods, taking field trips to various organic farms. Yet, in the end, they were not able to convince enough farmers to join their efforts in order to attain their original goals. It would have been fascinating to see what could have emerged from their efforts at an institutional level, but unfortunately many contemporary members of Franconia Conference have no memory or awareness of this organization.

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[122] "Member notice," March 17, 1958, *Mennonite Soil & Health Association.* Mennonite Heritage Center Historical Library Archives, Harleysville, Pa.
[123] "Hucksters" was the local term for men who sold produce, eggs, dairy, and other goods in towns and cities.
[124] "Proposed Mennonite Soil and Health Association."

It may have been that the members of the Soil & Health Association were too far ahead of the trend in terms of organic methods. In February 1950, Allen Zurcher wrote an article called "What is Organic Farming?," in which he enthusiastically advocates for organic methods. Two editions later, however, "What is Organic Farming?: A Reply" is published by the president of the Mennonite Medical Association, significantly undercutting the claims of Zurcher. Zurcher had aligned with the Soil & Health Association in asserting that organic food production is better for health, but the good Mennonite doctor provides much evidence for why this argument is misguided.

If many Mennonites were unconvinced of organic farming, they had an easier time agreeing that conserving soil is essential for maintaining the place of farming in the place of the rural community. A reflection by John E. Lehman is telling and indicative of many other perspectives expressed in the magazine:

> I reflected for some time as I looked out over those severely eroded fields with deep gullies and the barren hillsides with the subsoil exposed…after years of unwise farming practices the soil has been carried away. 'Yes,' I thought, 'soil erosion is certainly devastating.' But there is still a much more serious aspect to the problem. When soil erodes, human life erodes too. People once lived here…now the farms stand there, deserted, empty, completely gone; what once contributed to the community is now a liability.[125]

This excerpt is from an article entitled "The Farm, and Community Stability." Even more than a desire to steward God's gift of land, people are concerned for the health of the land because of how directly it is linked to the health of their communities. With rural agrarian histories stretching back to Swiss-German forebears, and with an identity so connected to the farming life, it is difficult to imagine how Mennonite communities will survive if they are no longer able to base their livelihoods upon the land. As Lehman goes on to say:

> Mennonites are largely an agricultural people. Those who have been an agricultural people from generation to generation are interested in stability. Our churches, to grow and prosper, must be supported by stabilized communities.

[125] John E. Lehman, "The Farm, and Community Stability," *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 1 (1947): 27.

While this section has revealed the ways that many Mennonites felt called by scripture and by their faith to be in right relationship with the land, Lehman's quote also demonstrates the strongly motivating factor of community stability. Many Mennonites realized that, if they wanted to maintain close-knit, relational, rural communities, they must value and care for the land so that the land could continue to support these communities.

This primary concern for cohesive community life undergirds each of the values we have examined. These values are: a commitment to intimate and cooperative social relationships; economic environments that foster simplicity, interdependence, and nonresistance; relationships with the land that sustain both the soil and the human community. During the mid-twentieth century, many Mennonites directly tied these values to rural and farming life. While some voices do not believe older forms of subsistence farming are most desirable, the small family farm is still asserted by many as the ideal center of Mennonite community life. This model of farming and rural life is attractive because the work contributes to shared labor and interpersonal relationships, fosters concrete expressions of mutual aid, purportedly encourages greater simplicity, and enables separation from potentially conflict-ridden realms of industry and unions.

In these primary values, it becomes clear that relationships within the community are at the heart of what it means to be Mennonite. Many in this period believe that relationships are best fostered and communities are most stable when members live in close proximity, are rooted in rural geographical regions, and have farming as a central vocation. The shifts towards urbanization and industrialization, then, posed significant challenge to how many Mennonites understood faithful community.

Expressing Values in Practices of Resistance and Adaptation

As we have already seen, urbanization and industrialization threatened the interdependence and tight-knit communal relationships that many Mennonites prized because the industrialization of agriculture introduced larger scale and more machines, cutting back on human

labor while also making it more difficult for a larger percentage of any given community to own land. Hence, many young people moved away from the farm and away from the rural community in order to find work that did not demand such a high investment and that could offer more secure pay.

Perspectives such as John Hostetler have revealed that many Mennonites were conscious of these pressures and were trying to discern how best to respond. How could Mennonite rural communities continue to thrive within increasingly complex systems, and how could they maintain core values that had long been expressed within communities oriented around small-scale farming? Hostetler suggested that there was an option between returning to sixteenth-century models of subsistence farming—the choice that in many ways characterizes the Amish—or they could "seek a just way in the existing economy."[126] Hostetler's framework represents the spectrum along which many Mennonites moved within this period: a spectrum between resistance and adaptation. As Mennonites responded to changes that potentially threatened core values, we see strategies that resisted these trends, that adapted to them completely, and strategies that fall somewhere in between utter resistance and unquestioning adaptation.

Resisting and Adapting to Changing Agricultural Models

Large-Scale Agriculture

Many writings of this period reveal a tension between a desire to hold onto elements of former models of farming while also remaining open to new methods that might benefit the farmer and the community. In response to increasingly dominant large-scale models, most Mennonites leaned towards resistance, eager to retain the small-scale models that have been so helpful in the past. But in order to maintain a smaller scale, many discovered that they would need to adapt to other new models and strategies.

[126] See footnote 114.

As has already been discussed, the *family* farm is frequently upheld as the ideal. Children work together with their parents, neighbors share labor, and the family is often able to grow and produce much of their own food. On a large farm where machines are used to plow and harvest, where crops are specialized, and that take up significant chunks of land, this ideal is much more difficult to attain. Guy Hershberger emphasizes the importance of small scale in both farming and industry:

> More and more it is being realized that thriving small communities, with their family farms and small industries, are the bulwark of our civilization…much of the social unrest in America today is due to the evils inherent in a system of big organized business and big organized labor. The small family farm and small community business and industry are among the most desirable elements in our economic culture.[127]

Small is difficult when the market rewards larger scale production, and when pressure is consistently upon expansion. Both A.D. and Z.K. recall the pressure their fathers felt—in very different regions of the country—to rent and acquire more land. A.D.'s father owned sixty acres, and she says "it wasn't enough to make a living. We had to rent a lot of ground."[128]

A.D.'s father responded the way that the market expected—by acquiring more land. Voices like Hostetler, however may have been critical of this choice, indicting the choice of "bigger crops and bigger barns" because of the ways it countered Christian discipleship and the well-being of the rural Christian community. His message is certainly convicting, but the reality remained that, even if farmers chose to limit their landholdings for the sake of other farmers, it was unclear whether farmers could make a living on smaller acreage.

Numerous voices assert farm collective or co-operatives as a viable economic model that will also enable small scale. In these models, farmers co-operatively produce for a local centralized creamery, feed mill, or other processing center. The notion of a co-operative was in fact viewed with quite a bit of suspicion, because if the co-operative involved non-Mennonite

[127] Hershberger, "Appreciating the Mennonite Community," 7.
[128] A.D. interview.

farmers, it was seen as "unequally yoking"[129] the Mennonite farmers, compromising their convictions by binding them to those who likely did not hold to the same convictions. As small farms become increasingly difficult to maintain, however, the co-operative model begins to be asserted as an acceptable strategy. Carl Kreider, Mennonite Community Association member, reminds his audience that there are many kinds of co-operatives, and that communities can be discerning in which are appropriate to be involved in. He does highlight a community that has an entirely Mennonite-run co-operative, but also encourages Mennonites to consider participating with non-Mennonite co-operatives in their regions.[130]

Walter Kollmorgen, a non-Mennonite contributor to *The Mennonite Community* similarly encourages Mennonites to try new methods of collectives for the sake of maintaining the family farm, and in fact encourages them to become leaders in this model. Acknowledging Mennonite resistance to collectives, he says that

> the methods used can be constructive if the participants will it so. Collectives can be used to promote efficiency in production, processing, and marketing. I believe that the Mennonites will want to note this trend in society and provide us some good examples of constructive, exemplary collectives.[131]

Kollmorgen was also aware that these models could free Mennonites from such wholesale dependence upon larger systems and federal aid. As noted by John Hurt at the outset f the paper, this was a period not only of increasing scale and mechanization, but also increasing dependence upon federal programs. These trends fed off of one another cyclically: federal programs rewarded large-scale production of particular monocrops; farmers needed to purchase machines that would make such production feasible; the cost of land and machinery forced farmers to depend more and more on federal aid. Kollmorgen is aware of the dangers of this cycle, and encourages his Mennonite readers that:

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[129] See footnote 123.

[130] Carl Kreider, "An Economic Program for the Mennonite Community of Tomorrow," *Mennonite Community Life: a series of papers read at the Conference on Mennonite Community Life, Goshen College, March 16 & 17, 1945* (Scottdale, Pa.: Committee on Industrial Relations, 1945), 81.

[131] Walter K. Kollmorgen, "The Role of Mennonites in Agriculture," *The Mennonite Community* 1, no. 1 (1947): 20.

> Our better farmers are a product of generations of experience rather than the product of a benevolent government program or the direct product of short college courses. Folkways and folk beliefs have much to do with this as, for example, the willingness to do hard work plus the capacity to do it effectively.[132]

Kreider and Kollmorgen's suggestions demonstrate an approach that includes both adaptation and resistance. Mennonites cannot give up models of small scale farming, because that is what has enabled entire communities to be rooted in the rural sphere, to share labor, and to maintain close-knit familial and communal relationships. There is also much wisdom in the farming practices that have been handed down through the generations. But they also need to adapt new strategies that will make these practices viable in current contexts. It is not apparent how many Mennonite communities chose to utilize co-operative models, although it is apparent that not nearly as many Mennonites stayed on the farm as these writers would have hoped.

Another approach is to adopt more intensive modes of farming. Tilman R. Smith, a contributor to a 1950 edition of the magazine, warns that moving with the trend to larger scale farms will mean that more young people will move out of the community and away from the church. He suggests that more people could make a living off of the soil if they

> practiced a more intensive type of farming. If more cows were milked, more cattle and hogs fed, and more poultry raised the average farm could provide a good economic base for more people. The large increase in our national population means that we are going to consume more and more goods so in certain areas this will allow for more intensive methods of production.[133]

While Smith resists broader movement towards large-scale farms, his suggestion simultaneously aligns with these trends because it asserts a more intensive and specialized form of farming. Ultimately, Smith's concern (as is the concern of many Mennonites) is to keep the community, including young people, rooted in a particular geographical place. The tides that obviously pushed young people away or fractured the farming community were resisted, while the tides that seemingly enabled the continued centrality of farming to Mennonite community life

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[132] Ibid.

[133] Tilman R. Smith, "The Mennonites in Woodford County, Illinois," *The Mennonite Community* 4, no. 12 (1950): 7.

were adapted. In Smith's mind, adapting intensive or specialized models of farming could enable its continued viability.

For some, the best way to keep a community rooted in one rural place was to move the entire community to a new geographical place. What was known as Mennonite "colonization" was another strategy utilized in order to maintain a network of small-scale family farms at the heart of a Mennonite community. This is the strategy we heard near the beginning of this paper: John Lapp stated in a 1947 interview that "perhaps, in order to keep their way of life, some members of the [Franconia] conference would need to move to where there was still open, and cheaper, land."[134] Our contemporary ears have a difficult time digesting the colonizing strategies of Lapp and others, but it is important to investigate precisely because it was deemed an accepted and faithful strategy for maintaining community cohesiveness in the face of changing landscapes and cultural tides.

The co-operative model aimed to help farmers make a living even while remaining smaller-scale, hopefully preventing them from needing to buy up land from their Mennonite neighbors. Issues of land acquisition and the scale of farming also drove colonizing strategies. A 1951 issue of *The Mennonite Community* profiles a "Community on the Prairies of the Community West," narrating the difficulties faced in the former community: "land in the older districts was scarce. Wages were low. Most families were quite large and the home farm could not give employment to all."[135] And so the community decides that a large portion will move together and "colonize" a region in the Canadian West where they can have more space to establish a bounded, agricultural-based rural community. Rather than trying to limit the scale of farms within the old region, this community decided to move to a place where a larger network of farmers could access larger, more affordable plots of land.

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[134] See footnote 35.

[135] Lyle A. Schantz, "A Community on the Prairies of the Canadian West," *The Mennonite Community* 5, no. 1 (1951): 6.

An author in the next edition argues that colonization is a good option for maintaining "farming as a way of life and simple Christian living."[136] Even though farmers might be adapting larger-scale models when they colonize these new areas, authors like this one believe that, so long as a higher number within Mennonites are able to continue farming, ideals of simplicity and interdependence will be more easily enacted.

These suggestions for colonization echo the early Swiss-Anabaptist history of moving isolated rural enclaves where they could freely practice an Anabaptist "way of life." It was that very history which contributed to a strong two-kingdom theology and tendency to want to be separate from the larger society.

And yet in this re-playing of a move to isolationism, there are also explicit desires to be connected with the outside "world." In fact, colonization is posed as both a way to maintain Mennonite communities, and also to evangelize to those outside the community. In March 1953, Murray Krabill writes an article called "Mission Workers in Overalls." Krabill joins several other voices in the periodical who assert that the rural sphere is the best one in which Mennonites can evangelize. Here, rural evangelization is combined with rural colonization, and re-settling in a new rural landscape purportedly benefits both the Mennonite community and others who might be drawn to the good news. Krabill assures his writers that colonization is more "than just succeeding economically. By colonization evangelism is meant not only being interested in working out a livelihood through the soil but also having an interest in the spiritual welfare of the community."[137]

Obviously, this entirely positive view of colonization, both for the Mennonite community and for the communities in which they were moving into, is subject to criticism. What is helpful to note at this point is that, in this era of changing landscapes, Mennonites not only sought to navigate modes of resistance and adaptation in their current settings, drawing on co-operative

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[136] Smucker, "Conservation of Human Life and Community Living," *The Mennonite Community* 5 no. 2 (1951): 7.
[137] Murray Krabill, "Mission Workers in Overalls," *The Mennonite Community* 7 no. 3 (1953):19.

models and intensive farming, but also considered the option of withdrawal to new areas in order to maintain the rural farming ideal. Certainly such an option was not out of sync with strands of Anabaptist-Mennonite history.

Mechanization

No matter where Mennonites moved, they encountered trends towards increased mechanization. This trend, of course, related directly to the issue of larger-scale farms. The advent of tractors, combines, and harvesters meant that farmers could farm much larger acreage with less human labor. If one were studying an Amish community, one would expect this to be a primary site of resistance. To this day, most Amish communities reject tractors, continuing to do much of their farming with horses. This of course limits the scale of their farming. As J.R. states, Amish resistance to farming technology is directly related to community maintenance: tractors and other machines translate into less shared labor, more concern for profit, and less attentiveness to the shared community life.[138]

We have seen a similar Mennonite concern for maintaining intra-personal relationships and close-knit communities. In the Franconia Conference, at least, there were explicit restrictions against "worldly" practices or forms of technology[139] that were aimed at maintaining these types of communities. In the form of their discipline, they were similar to Amish restrictions against farm equipment. And yet church restrictions focused primarily on issues of dress and social activity, with no explicit restrictions on what kinds of machinery the Franconia Mennonites could use. J.L.'s father, for example, who was both a pastor and farmer, was one of the first in the

[138] J.R. interview.

[139] In a 1935 sermon on Separation and Nonconformity, delivered at Plains Mennonite, Lapp states that separation and nonconformity applies to the following: Dress, business life and principles (avoid unequal yoke), Social life, relation to the government, education, in entertainment and amusement, avoid cardplaying, dancing, movies, fairs, etc, secret societies (even social clubs), life insurance, worldly investment (avoid playing stock markets), filthy habits and language.
When I asked interviewees what "worldly" would have meant, they gave examples of dress and entertainment. A.D. spoke of not being able to wear light colored "worldly" stockings; J.L. and others spoke of the restrictions on radio and television; B.L. spoke of not being able to go to amusement parks. None remembered "worldiness" being applied to farm technology.

community to purchase a combine, and viewed his ability to share the combine as a form of neighborliness.[140]

Of course, there was some awareness that even while machines improved farming, it also decreased the need for farmers. Norman High writes that mechanization contributes directly to rural depopulation. But High certainly does not think it is easy or even possible to resist this trend towards mechanization. He asks:

> how can we make sure that the right persons remain on the farms and that they do so in a manner that is economically sound and socially agreeable; and secondly, if we think that rural life possesses innate qualities that are essential to the development of important qualities of character in our people, how far are we going to permit this trend to continue?[141]

High seems willing to somewhat adapt to mechanization, so long as the "right persons" stay on the farms even when there is less need for human labor. But High is also aware that the trend towards mechanization needs to be monitored, and at some point may need to be resisted.

Others believe that Mennonites should not resist, going along with developing technology and machines so that farming remains attractive. Lester Culp asserts that "if farm methods, equipment, and outlook are too far behind the times, growing boys will not be challenged by farming. It is doubtful if this boy will want to stay on an ox-powered farm in a tractor and combine age."[142] Culp also wants to keep young men on the farm. But to Culp, remaining on the farm demands adaptation to the broader economy.

In general, there seemed to be less conversation or concern about mechanization than there was about the changing scale of agriculture. While most of my interviewees could remember when their family switched from farming with horses to farming with machines, none of them remembered resistance to this change, and few of them had much nostalgia for the old days of farming with horses. Overall, mechanization seemed to be a sphere where Mennonite farmers practiced adaption much more frequently than resistance.

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[140] J.L. interview.
[141] Norman High, "Farm Family Business Arrangements," *The Mennonite Community* 7, no. 5 (1953): 25.
[142] Lester Culp, "Helping Young Men to Be Farmers," *The Mennonite Community* 4, no. 6 (1950): 27.

Resistance and Adaptation in Response to Industrialization

Increased mechanization reveals the impact that industrialization had on all spheres of life, including farming. In some respects, Mennonites viewed the impact of industrialization as inevitable. But there were also continued efforts to create models of farming *and* industry that ran counter to predominant modes of industrialization.

Negative views of industrialization did not mean entirely negative views of industry itself, although as the Franconia Survey demonstrated, there was awareness that factory work created issues and complexities for convictions such as the unequal yoke and nonresistance. However, *The Mennonite Community* magazine and other sources hold awareness that Mennonite communities cannot survive on farming alone, and rural industry is imperative for the vitality of rural communities.

Even while Guy Hershberger's opening 1947 article strongly emphasizes the importance of farming, it nonetheless asserts the need for industry within Mennonite communities. After assuring his readers that he does not propose a "back-to-the-farm" movement, he calls young people to an "adventure in Community-building."[143] The community he envisions uses "improved" forms of agriculture, and also contains a "diversity of small industries so that those who cannot find room on the farm need not drift to the cities, but rather find employment in the home community."[144]

Plenty of perspectives throughout the magazine especially value and honor the farm as ideal for raising a family and facilitating positive community dynamics. But many also acknowledge that not everyone can farm. The push, as Hershberger articulates, is to provide more diverse forms of employment so that those who can't work on the farm can remain in the community. It is essential that the community, including and especially its young people, remain

[143] Hersbherger, "Appreciating the Mennonite Community," 7.
[144] Ibid.

rooted in a specific physical place. Many believed that place should be rural, even while realizing that rural life must include industry and non-farming occupations.

The Franconia Conference region demonstrates one example of a more diversified economy. It is, in fact, highlighted for its diversified occupations within a *Mennonite Community* article. Many towns in the area had factories, businesses, and other forms of trade—several of which were Mennonite-owned—and these arguably held an equally important a place in the local economy as did farming. As Shover noted, economic diversity was characteristic of the larger mid-Atlantic region since the 19th century, and this area also had more blurred lines between rural and urban spheres. One common non-farming occupation in the Franconia Conference, which was in fact directly related to farming, reflects this overlap between rural and urban life. "Hucksters," as they were known in this region, were men who took local farm products to markets in nearby cities and towns. While "huckster" sometimes has negative connotations,[145] huckstering was clearly an accepted occupation for many Franconia Conference Mennonites. B.L, an interview subject, spoke growing up as the daughter of a huckster. She has many fond memories of accompanying her father to market in Philadelphia where they sold fruit from their own large garden and products from other farmers. Her father was a well-respected figure in the community, whom church leaders often turned to for support and guidance.[146] Beyond the respect he garnered, he and other hucksters were an integral part of the local Mennonite economy. Their role speaks to the ways that Mennonites in this region drew on the close proximity to cities and non-rural markets, shaping a more diversified economy around the particularities of local place.

While Franconia Conference more easily embodied a diversified economy because of its regional landscape, the broader Mennonite church was concerned for how local communities

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[145] "huckster, n." The second definition provided is: A person ready to make his profit of anything in a mean or petty way; one who basely barters his services, etc., for gain; a mercenary; an overreacher of others." *Oxford English Dictionary, Second edition*, 1989; online version March 2012. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89101>; accessed 01 April 2012. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1899.

[146] B.L. interview.

could more intentionally nurture diversified economies that would maintain healthy rural existence. In the 1945 Mennonite Community papers, Carl Kreider lays out a fairly specific economic program that enables communities to support a wide range of their members. He challenges his readers to recognize that agriculture has declined in the face of urbanization. Kreider does not believe Mennonites should give up on agriculture, but does believe they need to utilize creative models such as the co-operative in order to make it viable. He proposes that "1) effort should be taken to revitalize agriculture in the Mennonite community, and 2) economic and social forces are operating which make it undesirable to base Mennonite community life exclusively upon an agrarian community."[147]

Kreider argues, however, that Mennonites cannot simply turn to outside forms of industry for employment. Rather, the Mennonite community itself must take the reins and discern what forms of industry are needed and appropriate within their particular context. He suggests that businessmen and farmers take inventory of the area's needs and possibilities, then discerning: what are the products currently coming from the outside that could be produced locally?; are the proposed industries "consistent with Mennonite ideals?"[148]; does the plan enable differing gifts to be used, or does it force all members into one type of occupation?; is the plan economically feasible?

Kreider's model seeks to grant Mennonite communities (and the leadership therein) significant agency or control in local economies. This is undoubtedly connected with two aforementioned values. First, the desire to incorporate lived discipleship into all aspects of home life and work; second the fear that ties with or dependence with non-Mennonite organizations will compromise discipleship convictions.

While Kreider does not insist that all the Mennonite industry be Mennonite-run, Mennonite ownership would obviously further the amount of communal control over the nature

[147] Kreider, "An Economic Program for the Mennonite Community of Tomorrow," 80.
[148] Ibid.

of industry. John Lapp's sermon on "The Christian and Industrial Problems" emphasizes that Christians must apply biblical principles to the industrial sphere, and outlines biblical principles for employers and employees. Employers are to consider the needs and challenges of their employees, are to avoid threats of any kind, serve justice, and promptly pay wages. Employees should work diligently, serve faithfully, and exemplify obedience and honesty.[149] If Christians, and preferably Mennonites, run and work within local industries, it would be hoped that they would seek to honor these principles, thus creating a work environment where discipleship convictions can be enacted.

J.R., an interviewee who continues to believe in the importance of Mennonite institutions and industry, compared the recent history of several banks in the Franconia area. Two were Mennonite established, and emerged out of what he characterized as a "conservative, mutuality-oriented, frugality-oriented culture that was concerned with ethics."[150] According to J.R., both banks strongly beat the national averages for years. But one of the banks had a change in the board of trustees, expanded too fast, and eventually went under, taking millions of dollars of equity with them.[151] J.R. says that the bank that did not have a change on its board and—in his mind—remained to its original values, is still doing well.

J.R. says that, for a significant period, many Franconia Mennonite institutions and industries had a familial-based board of trustees. This treads dangerously close to a "good-ole-boys" kind of system, but in J.R.'s view these were the "good years"[152] when the companies were driven by core Mennonite values and were not governed by the views of outside "experts."

J.R.'s perspective shows that Mennonite institutions and industries were not only valuable for providing local, rural forms of employment, but also integrating core community convictions into the local economic life. Of course, the degree to which these institutions have

[149] John Lapp, "The Christian and Industrial Problems," preached at Brethren in Christ Y.P.M, Silverdale, Pa. July 4, 1943. Each principle corresponds with a bible passage.
[150] J.R. interview.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

embodied such convictions is up for debate, but the driving philosophy is that if members of the Mennonite community run and are invested in such institutions, the institutions will better serve the needs and express the beliefs of the whole community.

This view of institutions characterized the predominant strategies regarding industrialization. While industrialization as a broader trend was seen as a potential threat to Mennonite community values and cohesiveness, many Mennonites realized they would need to develop their own forms of industry in order to economically sustain rural communities. They needed to provide diverse forms of employment so that more members could afford to remain in the local community. If Mennonite communities had agency over and within these forms of employment, it was hoped that they could resist negative aspects of industrialization.

Increasing Openness to (Sub)Urban Places

All of the material thus far—from sermons to magazine articles to arguments made by Mennonite Community Associations—have supposed that the rural environment is most conducive for Mennonite community living, and that the primary concern is thus to discern how the rural sphere can be maintained in the face of trends towards urbanization. Even if more Mennonites must work within industry, and even if Mennonite farmers need to adapt their farming methods, Mennonites must remain rural.

Peachey's words, however, offered at the outset of the paper, remind us that while most Mennonite assumed a rural ideal, some saw the value of urban environments. While *The Mennonite Community* magazine never goes so far as to agree with Peachey's argument that urban life provides a "more congenial setting for a vital Anabaptism"[153], there is evidence of an increasing openness to the urban sphere. Throughout the magazine, for example, nearly every edition features a specific Mennonite community. For the bulk of the magazine's existence, these communities are rural farming ones. In January 1953, however, Bethel Mennonite Church of

[153] See footnote 38.

Chicago is featured. This sets a trend for 1953 publications, in which there is more of a mix of city and country representation. John Zehr even puts out a call in February 1953 for "more community builders who will accept the challenge of the difficult task of urban church community building."[154] His summons contrasts Hershberger's initial call for rural community builders. Undoubtedly, there are still many who prioritize the rural environment, but it is important to note that even this publication, with such explicit priorities upon rural life, is opening itself to visions for the urban sphere.

This openness may correlate with increasing attention to world events, international travel, and the call of the mission field. 1953 also contains many more articles on international communities, highlighting far-away places from Paraguay to Russia to the Middle East. Additionally, Carl Kreider, the same Association member who proposed a diversified economic program, introduced a regular column entitled "viewpoints on world news."[155] While many strands continue to bespeak a commitment to local place and a desire to remain somewhat separate from outside influences, there is also a burgeoning consciousness of and concern for the larger world. It is likely that with this consciousness comes more openness to what Mennonite communities look like and where they might reside.

This increased openness aligns with the reality that though mid-twentieth century Mennonites remained committed to rural places in the midst of changing rural landscapes, most did utterly resist these changes. Mennonites wanted to maintain rural life, but were either unwilling or unable to turn away from changing local and global tides.

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[154] John David Zehr, "Building a Church Community in the City," *The Mennonite* Community 7 no. 2 (1953): 21.

[155] Column first included in 1950.

Ongoing Mennonite Relationships to Place

Mennonite Demographics since the Mid-twentieth Century

If the 1953 editions of *The Mennonite Community* began to show more openness to the urban sphere, this trend has continued since that time. Since 1975, there have been three Mennonite church surveys, and briefly examining the data from these surveys gives us a glimpse of how, in general, Mennonite connection to rural farming life has changed. While these surveys show changes in rural Mennonite demographics, we will continue to see the concept of place being used powerfully in constructions of Mennonite identity.

In 1972, Kauffman and Harder divided church members into four residential categories: rural farm (residence on a farm of three acres or more); rural non-farm (residence on a plot of less than three acres outside a village or city, or in a village with less than 2500 people; small city (population 2500-24,999); large city (population 25,000+).[156] They state that, in 1970 in the U.S., 26.5% or the population was rural, with 5.2% of that living on a rural farm and 21.3% on a rural non-farm. The statistics for the surveyed Mennonite groups are significantly higher: 65% rural, with 34% on farms and 31% on rural non-farms.[157]

According to Kauffman and Harder, then, Mennonites in the 1970s are significantly behind broader urbanization trends. The authors are certainly aware of urbanization, and of the significance of rural/urban demographics. At one point, they explicitly ask: "what relation does urbanization have to adherence to Anabaptist beliefs and other measures of faith and life?"[158] The authors seem to begin with a bias towards the rural life, stating early in the study that they "expect stronger adherence to Anabaptism to be associated with older age, lower educational achievement, *rural residence*, lower socioeconomic status, and Mennonite parentage."[159] However, they also try to represent the other side, showing that while urban members were

[156] Kauffman and Harder, *Anabaptists Four centuries Later,* 284.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid, 24.
[159] Ibid, 28.

generally less concerned with communal forms of discipline and tradition, they were more committed to combating injustice. They authors also acknowledge a "back to the city movement, which emphasizes that certain elements of Anabaptist vision were being suppressed by rural withdrawal, such as evangelism and prophetic witness."[160] Ultimately, however, the scales are tipped in favor of the rural life, asserting that "community agrarianism is an integral part of Mennonite faith and life because it reinforces the central doctrines of nonconformity to the world and nonresistance to inevitable persecution in the world."[161]

By 1989, the demographics had shifted considerably. By this time, 48%, nearly one half of Mennonites in North America, were urban. One-fourth of males were farmers in 1972; that figure declined to 15 percent in 1989. Four times as many Mennonites (both males and females) were in the professions (27%) in 1989 as are working the land (7%).[162]

In this study, the authors no longer hypothesized as to what impacts urbanization would have or whether it was better for Mennonites to be rural and urban. Urbanization, even within the Mennonite church, was a reality. The question shifts to: "what happens to their religious identity when church members become urbanized, achieve higher educational and income levels, and enter occupations that involve them much more extensively within the networks of industry, commerce, and the professions?"[163] The expectation remains, however, that even if urbanization is real for Mennonites, it is not necessarily positive. The authors continue to expect that Mennonites who have remained in rural areas will maintain strong family and communal identities, while in urban areas individualism will be much stronger.[164]

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[160] Kauffman and Harder, 292.
[161] Ibid, 291.
[162] Kauffman and Driedger, 27.
[163] Ibid, 22.
[164] Ibid, 43.

The most recent (North American) Mennonite church survey was published in 2007 by Conrad Kanagy. As cited near the beginning of this paper, the survey revealed that, while more than 40% of current Mennonites grew up on a farm, fewer than 23% (1/4) remain on the farm.[165]

More fascinating than the shift in numbers, is the way they are presented in each of these studies. The first two studies were clearly concern about urbanization was threatening the identity of Mennonite communities. Kanagy does echo some of those concerns, stating that as Mennonites have become more (sub)urban and professional, they have tended to become less involved in the church and more shaped by broader culture.[166] While acculturation may to a certain degree enable Mennonites to be more missional, Kanagy believes current trends show more acculturation and less commitment to the mission of the church.

> Kanagy notes a difference, however, in "urban Racial/Ethnic"[167] members. He says that
>
> more than other Mennonite congregations, [urban Racial/Ethnic congregations] effectively combine evangelistic outreach with social action. They do not appear to be torn between these two callings, but live in contexts where they are daily faced with the realities that Jesus Christ is the answer both for broken individuals and for unjust social and political structures. *The immediacy of need in urban areas demands an approach that addresses the transformation of individuals and of social structures and relationships* (my emphasis).[168]

At least implied is that something about the urban context enables a more transformative and perhaps authentic expression of Anabaptist faith.

Throughout the surveys, then, a rural-urban dichotomy is used as a gauge for faithful Anabaptism. Like any dichotomy, this rural-urban one leans towards an either/or mentality, posing the two geographical spheres in contrast and competition. One way to avoid this dichotomy is to, as Dawn Ruth Nelson proposes, mediate core values that are unhinged from a sense of place. Nelson suggests that we shift from a spirituality of "place" to a spirituality of

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[165] Kanagy, 58.
[166] Kanagy, 65.
[167] This terminology is not helpful, since it "others" all non-white Mennonites "Racial/Ethnic" minorities, ignoring the fact that Caucasian members also have race and ethnicity. However, it is the terminology that is used in the study, and so is quoted here.
[168] Ibid.

"pilgrimage."[169] Her pilgrimage language is certainly appropriate within the Judeo-Christian tradition and scriptures. It also aligns easily with our current globalized context in which local boundaries are frequently traversed and pilgrimage to distant places and landscapes is increasingly accessible.

While Nelson presents a legitimate option, this study asserts our faith values should intersect with renewed sense of place rather than being extracted from place through a pilgrimage alternative. While mid-twentieth century commitments to rural place were at times too narrow and oppositional, we can and should draw upon this history in order to cultivate ongoing commitments to place. Historical notions of place reveal both values and shortcomings, moving us towards more expansive notions of place that enable ongoing interrelationships between faith values, community life, and local (i.e. rural, suburban, *or* urban) place.

Looking to the Future: Claiming and Expanding our Places

Nelson embraces the option of pilgrimage in part because she believes that a "spirituality based on place…is not something we can go back to."[170] There is also the sense for Nelson and many other Mennonites that the historic Mennonite attachment to rural places contributed to what David Harvey calls "an exclusionary parochialism."[171] Rural Mennonite enclaves fostered a separation that, while once deemed theologically appropriate, is now a position that most Mennonites are wary of. As Nelson articulates, a spirituality of pilgrimage allows Mennonites to "shift from a spirituality of separation from the world to a spirituality of separation from evil amid the world; from a spirituality focused on martyrdom to a spirituality of more hopeful participation in the world."[172] She understandably wants to move away from strongly boundaried places that contributed to an exclusive, non-participatory separation.

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[169] Nelson draws on language of religious sociologist Robert Wuthnow. Nelson, 88.
[170] Ibid, 50.
[171] Quoted by T.J. Gorringe, 76.
[172] Nelson, 88.

In this final section, we will argue that the present reality in fact demands that we base spirituality and ethics within the context of local place. To do so, we must find ways of maintaining healthy geographical boundaries even as Mennonite church members seek to open their communities and resist exclusive isolationism. Boundary maintenance is important because boundaries: 1) help us to recognize human limits, thereby enabling practices of restraint upon the earth; 2) foster knowledge of and interdependence with the local landscape, as well as the surrounding region; 3) nurture deeper relationships within the local community. In these ways, the values and practices of mid-twentieth century Mennonite communities are instructive, in that they concretize a model (of course subject to criticism) of community life governed by the boundaries of local place. In this concluding section, we will imagine how these place-based values and models might be creatively translated and expanded into our current contexts.

Embracing the Limitations of Place

Many contemporary Mennonites are cautious of boundaries because of a history of theologically-driven separation from all those who did not profess an Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. Today, however, what is arguably more pervasive than two-kingdom theology is a broader societal distaste for limitations and boundaries. Our globalized era has in many ways been characterized by the prized ability to break beyond limits. We value the fact that technology enables us to transcend time and place, communicating instantaneously with people halfway around the globe. Our global markets, in spite of limited and shrinking fossil fuel resources, largely function on the premise of limitlessness: we eat any food in any season grown in distant fields and groves; we use goods manufactured and shipped from unknown factories in unknown places; we fly to conduct business halfway around the world without a second thought. Many of our lifestyles assume that, no matter where we reside, we can access the resources of places across the globe.

More and more people recognize that limitlessness is a deeply problematic illusion. First and most basically, we are faced by extremely limited fossil fuels. Our markets and mobility are hugely dependent on oil, and the reality is that oil is disappearing. Some think that coal and natural gas provide alternatives to oil that can keep our systems functioning at the scale that has become so normal. Others think we will develop the technology necessary to maintain the lifestyles and global access we have grown accustomed to. But there are also those who believe that we must simply learn to live again at a smaller scale, and to limit more of our lives to the local level. As Wendell Berry puts it:

> There can be no such thing as a global village. No matter how much one may love the world as a whole, one can live fully in it only by living responsibly in some small part of it. Where we live and who we live there with define the terms of our relationship to the world and to humanity. We thus come again to the paradox that one can become whole only by the responsible acceptance of one's partiality.[173]

There are undoubtedly benefits to globalization, as well as aspects of globalization that are not going away. And yet, in light of disappearing fossil fuel resources as well as a host of other complicating factors, we must learn to live more fully into our limitations and our "partiality."

We can learn from ways that many Mennonites in the mid-twentieth century not only assumed the limitations of place and smaller scales, but also struggled to maintain this reality in the face of trends towards increased scale. Even when Mennonites unquestioningly adapted broader trends of mechanization or specialization, many clung tightly to small scale models of farming and industry. In their mind, a small family farm was especially ideal because it maintained shared labor, diversified tasks so that an entire family unit could be involved, nurtured a greater degree of dependence on the community, and enabled a lesser degree of dependence on large scale systems and unstable markets.

Undoubtedly, Mennonites were motivated to maintain small-scale models because it enabled a greater degree of autonomy and control within the community. According to Zygmunt Bauman, this is precisely what our "globalized world" undermines. He says that "localities lose

[173] Wendell Berry, "The Body and the Earth." *The Art of the Commonplace,* 118.

their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control."[174] Surely this is the case for farmers who no longer see where their products go, how they are used, and who in many cases lack control over even *what* they grow. As noted in earlier sections, cycles in which federal aid supports the large-scale, mechanized production of monocrops make difficult for farmers to choose small-scale, diversified farming practices in which they have more control. This cycle was significant for Mennonites who had oriented much of their community life around agriculture. Agriculture was increasingly dictated by forces beyond the community, thus threatening a prime medium through which community identity had expressed. In response, some sought to keep farming small and less dependent upon larger scale systems and aid programs. In order to make small-scale farming viable, they asserted alternative models such as farm co-operatives and diversified local economies that would help communities support themselves and provide work and resources for all members.

Today, we have additional reason to emphasize small scale, local farming—it is no longer sustainable to ship so much of our food and resources across such great distances, and we are increasingly aware of the strain that large-scale industrialized modes of farming place on our environment and incredibly finite resources. The desire of many Mennonite farmers in the 40s and 50s to stay small, in fact, resonates strongly with the contemporary movement towards small-scale, diversified farming. Bumper stickers ask "Who's your farmer?", implying the need to again know the people who grow our food rather than depending on an vast system of production and distribution; Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) models are increasingly common, attractive to farmers who want to farm on a smaller scale and be guaranteed a more stable market, and attractive to consumers who want to eat on a more local scale and know where their food comes from. In this way, a Mennonite history of small, agrarian communities bounded by the local sphere is not something to regret or move past, but a source of wisdom for contemporary

[174] Quoted in Gorringe, *The Common Good and the Global Emergency,* 72.

models of farming and eating. The window of time is short, but young Mennonites who are interested in small-scale diversified farming have a wealth of resources in the stories and experiences of their grandparents, many of whom took "local" and "organic" for granted as elements of their experience.

In fact, while Mennonites (and North America in general) are not likely to have as many farmers as they did in earlier history, we can learn something from the high value placed on farming by mid-twentieth century Mennonites. The idealization of farming can be problematic if it denigrates other vocations, pretends that everyone can and should farm, or looks to some romantic notion of the past without adequately bearing in mind current realities. However, our society and our communities need to learn again what it means to value farming. Globalized scales of food production and distribution make it all too easy to forget where our food comes from, and to even pretend that we are somehow a "post-agricultural" people. For the majority of us who "pick" our food off of vast supermarket shelves, farming seems rather distant and irrelevant. Unfortunately, this often means we are ignorant of how our food was produced or what impact our eating has.

In spite of this common disconnect from food sources, eating remains one of the most basic aspects of human experience, and the ways we eat and grow food has immense repercussions. Access to cheap bananas, for instance, contributes to the destruction of rainforests and of local economies through pressure to grow monocrops that can be exported to a fruit-hungry international market.[175] While individual consumers do not utterly dictate these realities, their simple acts of eating certainly contribute to far-reaching repercussions.

In light of sobering examples like this one, we gain further understanding of why Franconia Mennonites in the 50s and 60s connected soil and health. While their perspective was not nearly as global, they correctly asserted that the ways we produce food from the soil directly

[175] "Environmental Impacts of Banana Growing," *Pacific Lutheran University,* online access <http://www.plu.edu/~bananas/environmental/home.html>, accessed April 1, 2012.

impacts the health of the land and our human communities. Every church, in fact, should have a "Soil & Health Association," in which members support local farmers with responsible farming practices and also foster awareness of how our eating practices impact the health of more distant communities and landscapes.

It would be difficult to wean Americans off their love of bananas.[176] And yet a large part of the problem with banana markets and other globalized food markets is that specific bioregions are stretched thin because people in far-away places want access to the unique products of those areas. As Wes Jackson puts it, we think we have "unwitting accessibility to the world." Jackson writes that:

> it is always easier to think of a better way to produce food or a consumer item than to think of how to avoid using that food or that gadget wastefully. We waste, I believe, largely because of our fallen condition. We employ human cleverness to make the earth yield an unbounded technological array, which in turn produces countless more technologies, more things. In agriculture, we hot-wire the landscape, bypassing nature's control devices. We do this in the face of abundant evidence that we are destroying our habitat because of our "unwitting accessibility" to the world.[177]

Jackson and others argue that it is crucial for us to move away from consumption habits driven by this "unwitting accessibility." According to A.D., it was impossible to take food access for granted when you were growing it yourself. She reflected that one of the best lessons she learned from growing up a farm was the hard work that goes into putting dinner on the table. Guy Hershberger, writing in the 1950s, would have argued that rural farming families like A.D.'s family were wiser consumers precisely because they were producing so many of their own resources. He believed that "the man of the city seems more inclined to think in terms of consumption than in terms of production and thrift. Even in dealing with human life itself the country is a producer while the city is a consumer."[178] Other members agreed with Hershberger that, by remaining in small rural communities where life was lived close to the land, Mennonites would maintain an ethic of simplicity and prioritize production over consumption.

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[176] Americans eat an average of twenty-eight pounds of bananas per person per year. Ibid.
[177] Wes Jackson, *Becoming Native to this Place* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 89.
[178] Hershberger, "Appreciating the Mennonite Community," 6.

Hershberger's characterization of the city and country is unfair and, at least at this point in history, inaccurate. Many who live in rural regions consume immensely, and an increasing number in urban areas are exploring how they might produce food and other goods within their own local spheres, cutting back on personal consumption. But Hershberger's critique of consumption, and the way that he connects it to place, remains valid. Much of our consumption *is* tied to disconnections from local place and seemingly unlimited access to far-away places.

While Mennonites of the mid-twentieth century did not resist consumption to make an environmental statement, they did make a statement that, in the face of materialism and consumption, they would remain committed to simplicity as a key part of their lived discipleship. Interestingly, simplicity became connected with remaining rooted in local communities and dependent upon the local landscape. We too can live more simple (though not necessarily cheaper) lives by learning live more fully within the bounds of local place, fed by the resources of that place. We can resist buying cheap bananas at the chain supermarket, instead paying a higher price for locally-grown strawberries; we can even do without fruit when it is out of season in our local contexts. We can, like A.D., grow a few tomatoes or peppers on our patios or in our backyards in order to nurture greater awareness of the work that goes into producing food.

These simple practices return again to the idea of limitations. We could argue that we have rightfully moved beyond the time of A.D., when people had to work so hard for their food and live within such limitations. In fact, we and the land on which we reside would benefit from reclaiming some of these limitations of our histories.

Knowing and Depending on our Landscapes

In order to live within the limitations of our local places, we must know and understand them. As Berry notes: "where we live and who we live there with define the terms of our relationship to the world and to humanity." Another way we can learn from rural agrarian communities of earlier decades is the ways in commitments to farming fostered attentiveness to

the particulars of the landscape. Although Mennonite colonization is subject to much criticism, many of the articles that highlighted new Mennonite colonies emphasized ways that the settlers needed to learn about the soil in order to thrive in their new settings. Farmers moving from the rich soils of Pennsylvania needed to get to know sandy soils that were much better suited to pasture than to any kind of intensive cultivation; farmers who may have not dealt with significant erosion issues needed to find ways of building up eroded soils in their new settings, and to practice techniques that would prevent further erosion. Many were committed to farming as livelihood, but found they could not assume or impose a static agricultural model in these new spheres. They needed to be attentive to and learn from the landscape in order for the landscape to support their livelihood. And so the work and character of each community was to some extent defined by the characteristics of local geography.

Some Mennonites were also driven by a longer-range view. They were concerned not only with present economic success, but in nurturing the land so that future generations could also reside there. J,L. reflects that, long before "the era [of] climate change and concern about the earth…my dad was very careful with soil. His commitment, and this was openly stated, was that he wanted to leave the soil better than he found it."[179] J.L.'s father's commitment to soil was likely multi-layered, involving a sense of stewardship for God's creation, as well as a desire to provide good soil for the next generation of farmers. The Franconia Mennonite Soil & Health Association embodied a similar commitment: they were aware that the ongoing existence of their farming community depended upon the health of the soil, and so they were committed to responsible use and stewardship of the soil.

Most of us, of course, hold at least a vague concern for the well being of future generations in light of our current ecological crisis. And yet it can be difficult to translate that concern into action. A first step is to re-invest our places with meaning. E.V. Walter wrote in 1988 that we are threatened by two kinds of environmental degradation: "one is pollution--…the

[179] J.L. interview.

other is loss of meaning. For the first time in human history, people are systematically building meaningless places."[180] Not-so-distant Mennonite history can provide a counter to meaningless places, revealing communities who invested their livelihoods in the local landscape, and viewed the perpetuation of their faith community as dependent upon the perpetuation of that landscape. This understanding translated into concrete ways of using the soil gently so that future generations could also be sustained by the soil. If Mennonites feel they must forsake former commitments to place in order to be more at ease in the movements and transience of the wider world, then they will (and in many ways have already) become complicit in the construction of meaningless places, failing to truly care for those places. Yet Mennonites have an exciting opportunity to bring their history to bear upon an ever-growing environmental movement, and in particular upon a blossoming concern for local food systems and sustainable farming.

One of the ways Franconia Conference Mennonites could utilize their history within present concerns is through the history of huckstering. In the mid-twentieth century, this was a strong dynamic in the Franconia Conference region. As already noted, the role of hucksters, who took local farm goods to nearby urban markets, emerged in many of the interviews. Unfortunately, according to an interview with J.R., the reality of white flight and a few incidences of crime contributed to many hucksters refusing to travel to the city. White rural Mennonites allowed themselves to become overcome by fear of the city, and an interdependent market relationship was severed.[181]J.R sees this decline in huckstering as a significant contributing factor to the overall decline in farming and market gardening in the Franconia area.

The decline of hucksters in the Franconia Conference region is indicative of a broader severing between rural and urban spheres. While members of The Mennonite Community Association argued rather polemically against urban migration, the reality was that some rural communities were quite interdependent with urban areas. They were closer to what Ellen Davis

[180] E.V. Walter, quoted by T.J. Gorringe in *The Common Good and the Global Emergency,* 72.
[181] J.R. interview.

describes as the reality of ancient Israel, which "knew no deep rural-urban cleavage of the sort that industrialization has established so firmly that it now has the semblance of inevitability."[182] Whereas contemporary Franconia Conference Mennonites might travel to Philadelphia more often, the reality is that most are much less dependent upon the city for their livelihoods and food systems. Conversely, Philadelphia residents likely do not depend on the surrounding rural regions for their food, instead eating food that is shipped in from far-away places.

The fact that rural and urban residents alike have come to depend upon distant markets for food instead of feeding off of local food sheds has contributed to the prevalence of what has been called "food deserts."[183] While our country produces an immense amount of food, there are rural and urban pockets where (often low-income) residents do not have access to healthy food. Inner-city residents, for example, might be able to buy snacks from a corner gas station or french fries from a fast food joint, but fresh produce is nowhere in sight.

The prevalence of food deserts provides a unique opportunity for Mennonites to utilize their history, the knowledge of their elders, and their continued access to land for the sake of justice and wholeness. Franconia Conference recently dedicated conference-owned land for the purpose of a Community Supported Agriculture model of farm. This step alone is a promising act of commitment to local landscapes. The Conference could go further, however, in drawing on the history of hucksters in order to re-establish mutually beneficial relationships with nearby urban centers. The farm could hire local residents who would travel regularly to city markets. It could also commit to providing a certain amount of its produce to food desert regions. In these possibilities, we see the ways that history provides inspiration and concrete models for our contemporary interactions with local place and landscapes. First, however, we must commit to

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[182] Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 159.

[183] The USDA provides a definition of food deserts, as well as a "Food Desert Locator" that locates all identified food deserts within the United States. Available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/FoodDesert/index.htm.

knowing our history and the ways it has shaped our current landscape, moving from that knowledge to creative action.

Place-based Community Life

In the past, Mennonites were not so much committed to the boundaries of place because of the opportunity for creative social justice, but more because local place was the primary context in which Mennonites related and built community. As we strive to strengthen our present-day communities of faith, we can learn from the ways that Mennonites oriented their relationships and expressed their theological commitments around place-based communities.

Mennonite communities were committed not only to "where we live," but to an intimate knowledge of "who we live there with." While this knowledge holds many benefits, it must be examined honestly for its exclusivist tendencies. Mennonites were prone to only knowing and relating to their *Mennonite* neighbors. Paul Erb, in his description of Mennonite communities, noted that young people were encouraged to socialize with other young people from the church.[184] Undoubtedly this was a control mechanism intended to limit the influence of non-Mennonites on Mennonite youth, for fear that Mennonite youth would adopt negative values or be drawn away from the church.

And yet many of the interviews with Franconia Conference Mennonites revealed strong openness to non-Mennonite neighbors. A.E. and B.L. both spoke of the frequent interactions they had with Catholic neighbors in their local town. A.E. remembers when the Catholic parish asked his grandfather to craft a new bell for their church bell-tower. B.L remembers the many times when her father hired Catholic neighbors to work for them, or helped out a Catholic neighbor financially. In an area about twenty miles south of where A.E. and B.L. lived, A.D. remembers frequent interactions with her Baptist neighbors. Her father even played music occasionally at the Baptist Sunday evening services, since instruments were not allowed in their Mennonite church. These memories demonstrate that, while strong boundaries were certainly in place, on-the-ground

[184] See footnote 68.

experience often involved more open interaction and neighborliness with those outside the religious community. They also demonstrate that, even when a religious community is theologically invested in separation, the demographics of local place can challenge ideologically-driven boundaries. While Southeastern Pennsylvania was certainly heavily populated by Mennonites, there was also significant representation of other faith traditions, and to a certain point, Mennonites included these traditions in their commitments to relationships and neighborliness.

Relationships with and care for those within the community of faith, however, were still prioritized. J.L. spoke of his father's desire to be a good neighbor to all. And yet, the expectation still would have been that a Mennonite was responsible "first to the household of faith."[185] While it was honorable to help a neighbor in need—no matter what church she worshipped at—mutual aid was first and foremost extended to members of the Mennonite community. This kind of limitation needed to be challenged by a more expansive notion of "brotherhood", and yet there are ways we can learn from the interdependence fostered by this limited notion of community. In depending upon and being responsible for others in the community, members experienced what Berry calls an "acceptance of one's partiality." When your barn burned down, you knew you could not recover without the support (monetary and physical) of the community. When a community member was sick, it was understood that you helped support them through meals, childcare, and any necessary financial assistance.

Wes Jackson believes that within a globalized economy, "entire neighborhoods are more accessible to the world than their members are to one another."[186] A community that produces sugarcane or corn, for instance, may provide goods to the global market, but be unable feed and provide for one another. In these instances, global markets take priority over the needs of local communities. For many Mennonites of the mid-twentieth century, the local faith community

[185] J.L. interview.
[186] Jackson, 89.

always came first. The kind of mutuality that defined these communities is experienced most directly and most fully at the local level where physical relationships and fellowship are possible. In order to sustain ongoing mutuality and care, we must know one another with a kind of intimacy that is not possible across great distances or at a vast scale.

If Mennonites want (as they should) to move away from the rigid boundaries and exclusionary mechanisms of the past, they should not assume that this means neglecting local communities and a strong sense of place. Rather, they should strive be attuned to *all* residents of those local spheres, and not only to Mennonites. The value of neighborliness should truly be extended to all neighbors, striving to create a more inclusive network of care and community support that remains rooted in place. The aforementioned effort to alleviate food deserts is just one possibility for a broader network of mutuality.

In facilitating a more inclusive notion of place-based community, Mennonite beliefs and values will undoubtedly challenged. This was part of the reason why some Mennonites resisted socializing with non-Mennonites. They feared losing convictions of simplicity and peaceful living. But rather than remaining isolated from outsiders, a more powerful and more effective means of maintaining core values is to intentionally enact them through daily, place-based living that brings us into contact with those who live differently.

In order to move into a more inclusive notion of place-based faith and living, Mennonites will need to more positively express their faith values in relationship to local places and communities. We have seen ways that Mennonites in the 40s and 50s viewed rural agrarian life as conducive for living out values like simplicity and nonresistance. But often farming was seen positively because of what they could avoid, rather than because of how farming could positively further faith commitments. Farming meant, for example, that they could avoid participation in unions, which were viewed as sites of conflict and resistance. But it was not necessarily a sphere of active peacemaking. John Hostetler is aware of this lack, and calls Mennonites to account for failing to truly apply nonresistant convictions to farming. He writes that “Mennonites of the

twentieth century have made little concerted effort to apply the principle of doing justice consistently in the business of agriculture in its broader phases. They are better known for their nonresistance and relief activities than for any trait in the area of economic relations."[187] Walter Klaassen, writing much more recently, reflects that Mennonites have not thought enough about how farming methods can do violence to the land. "We did not have a clear understanding of a God-given mandate to farm without weapons as we had a mandate to live without weapons with our fellow citizens."[188]

Contemporary Mennonites should recognize these inconsistencies and failures to truly live out faith values in relationship to the land and local communities. This recognition, however, should not lead Mennonites to abandon a strong sense of place. Neglecting connections to place will only hinder further commitments to lived discipleship, for our convictions are enacted most immediately and tangibly with the people around us and the places we live in. Instead, Mennonites should claim and strengthen their forebears' commitment to local place, committed to discerning how their values might simultaneously transform and be transformed by interaction with place. A commitment to peace can offer new gifts for change when it is applied to agricultural methods or personal lifestyles that aim to nurture the peace of local landscapes. Interdependence and mutual aid become transformative experiences as we concretely enact these values alongside our immediate neighbors. Simplicity actually matters as it contributes to the sustenance of local resources. In these and numerous other ways, faith values become all the more meaningful when expressed in relationship to faces and landscapes that we relate to every day.

[187] Hostetler, "Farming and the Nonresistant Conscience," 18.
[188] Walter Klaassen, 143.

Conclusion: Expanding a Vision of Place

The desire for place-based Mennonite[189] identity has been at the heart of this paper. Of course, this desire cannot be limited to rural places. We must embrace and try to reconcile the voices of both Hershberger and Peachey, who respectively summon us to honor rural and urban landscapes.

Mennonite history indeed guides us in its strong commitment to local place, but it is misguiding in any assertions that rural is the most or only appropriate place for faithful living. In fact, there are certain ways that urban places better facilitates living on a smaller scale and limiting our habits of consumption. Residents of urban centers often necessarily live in more compact spaces, drive less, use less energy to heat and cool their living spaces, and more easily support their local economies. Conversely, because of the decline of small town and rural economies, many rural and suburban residents now have to drive great distances to work or shop or even to attend church. Ellen Davis argues that cities are an important part of nature because they concentrate human inhabitants so the land can be used more wisely. Davis would argue that more of us need to learn to live in the compact spaces of cities so that the surrounding land can be farmed in order to feed and support the city.[190]

The point, however, is not to assert one "place" as better than another or to swing from a mid-twentieth century rural ideal to a twenty-first century urban ideal. Instead, what matters most is being attentive to local place and finding ways of living out values in relationship to particular places. We need not resist places that are foreign to us, but we should resist forces that threaten the well-being of our own places. One could argue that, even in the mid-twentieth century, what was more threatening than urban environments or industrial forms of work were the forces of urbanization and industrialization. Mumaw was one writer who recognized urbanization as not

[189] It hopefully goes without saying that, while the author works from out of her own Mennonite tradition, and believes it is important to live into our particular traditions, she hopes that the paper holds implications for all traditions. Not only place-based Mennonite identity, then, but place-based Methodist, Catholic, or Muslim identity as well.

[190] Davis, 167.

only a trend of young people moving to the city, but as a more nebulous and powerful force that impacted the rural sphere.[191] He believed urbanization tore at close-knit, cohesive community relationships and asserted negative values like materialism and conformity. Of course, Mumaw's "urbanization" language reflects poorly on urban areas. Yet it is helpful to note that what was most threatening was not the city itself, but forces that worked against cohesive community relationships and convictions within the rural sphere. Mumaw feared that rural Mennonites would be pulled away from the people and places that sustained them, turning instead to material gain within fractured community contexts.

Mumaw's fear of fractured communities was legitimate. Our communities have been fractured by the vastness and impersonal nature of globalized markets and boundary-defying technologies. Our landscapes have been denigrated by a disregard for the particularities of place and an ignorance of our dependence upon the land. We are at a critical juncture, in which we desperately need entire communities who will commit themselves anew to place, fostering interdependence (with the land and people), simplicity, and peaceful living in relationship to our local landscapes, wherever those might be.

As Mennonites continue to discern their identity and witness within our world at this particular juncture, they will be wise to recognize the gifts of their history. Mennonite history demonstrates the ways that faith and community values take on powerful meaning when they are attached to place. As John Inge says:

> Community and places each build up the identity of the other. This is an important insight in a world in which the effects of globalization continue to erode people's rootedness and experience of place. Attention given by the Christian community to place in general, and not just holy places, will not only therefore afford nourishment to the community itself, but will be a powerful prophetic action.[192]

Many Mennonite communities have been nourished by attachment to rural places. As they move from a rural history into changing landscapes, they will do well to remember the places that have

[191] Mumaw, "Current Forces Adversely Affecting the Life of the Mennonite Community," 38.
[192] John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2005), xi.

brought nourishment, using these memories to foster prophetic enactment of faith values. An Anabaptist-Mennonite vision of interdependence, peace, and simplicity will take on flesh when it is rooted in and limited by the particularities of place.

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Appendix: Interviews

Interviews were conducted by the author in January, 2012. Not all twelve interviews were cited in the paper, but the initials of all twelve, as well as their age, are listed below.

A.D., b. 1920. Interview with author. Souderton, Pa. January 5, 2012.

A.E., b. 1918. Interview with author. Souderton, Pa. January 2 & 5, 2012.

B.L., b. 1924. Interview with author. Lansdale, Pa. January 6, 2012.

D.K., b. 1936. Interview with author. Perkasie, Pa. January 2, 2012.

E.C. Interview with author. Souderton, Pa. January 4, 2012.

G.M., b. 1920. Interview with author. Souderton, Pa. January 4, 2012.

H.T., b. 1924. Interview with author. Souderton, Pa. January 3, 2012.

N.K., b. 1937. Interview with author. Perkasie, Pa. January 2, 2012.

P.S., b. 1918. Interview with author. Souderton, Pa. January 4, 2012.

J.L., b. 1941. Interview with author. Bally, Pa. January 8, 2012.

J.R., b. 1930. Interview with author. Skippack, Pa. January 3, 2012.

Z.K., b. 1937. Interview with author. Souderton, Pa. January 5, 2012.