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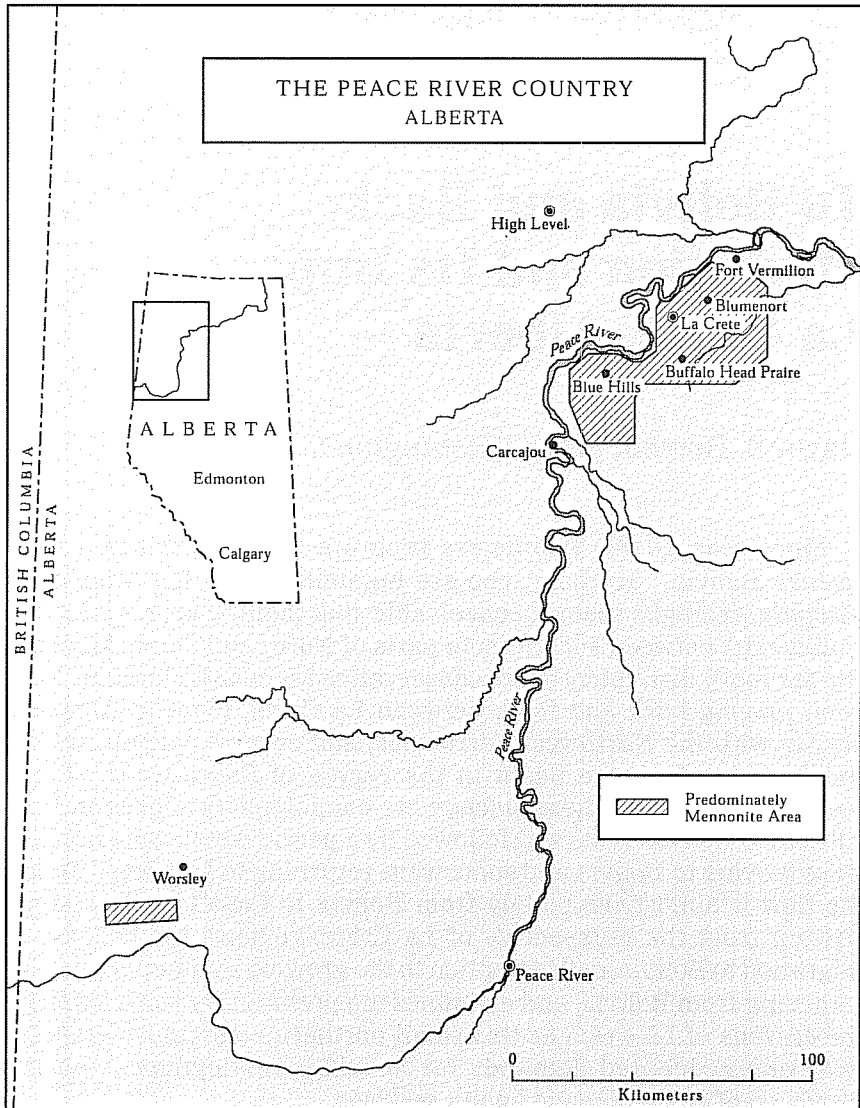
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To Bolivia and Back: Migration and Its Impact on La Crete, Alberta

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More than 10,000 kilometers separate northern Alberta from eastern Bolivia. To those who are unfamiliar with the Mennonite diaspora, it might seem inconceivable that significant connections would exist between such remote parts of North and South America. But for more than thirty years conservative Mennonite families have been moving back and forth between La Crete, close to Alberta's border with the Northwest Territories, and several colonies within the Amazon drainage basin in the region of Santa Cruz. Early movements between these places were dominated by migration from Alberta to Bolivia. This was followed by a period when some families were moving to Bolivia and some were returning to La Crete. Today, the flow is almost completely from Bolivia to Canada. This paper, written from the perspective of La Crete, reviews the process of migration to Bolivia, calls attention to the growing number of families returning from Bolivia, and examines the preliminary steps taken by the citizens of La Crete as this small northern community grapples with unprecedented demands for housing, employment, and the provision of education and health services.

Mennonite migration to northern Alberta began in the 1930s, when Old Colony families from Saskatchewan, disturbed by what they saw as increasing worldliness around them, moved to the isolated lower Peace River country, which could be reached only by riverboats in the summer and dog sleds in winter, and where no thought had yet been given to establishing public schools. Their first destination was Carcajou, about 180 kilometers north of the town of Peace River.



Three Old Colony families settled here in 1932, and by 1934 twelve additional families had joined them. Despite the existence of fertile bottomland soils that yielded good crops of grain and garden produce, two serious floods and settlers' recognition that expansion away from the river would be difficult soon compelled the Carcajou settlers to relocate to more suitable sites farther north, about midway between their original settlement and the old trading post of Fort Vermilion.¹

In 1936 two families from Carcajou moved to the vicinity of La Crete and Buffalo Head Prairie, which at the time consisted of scattered residences belonging to a handful of Anglo and Métis trappers and homesteaders. The other Carcajou residents followed, and in the next few years these first settlers were joined by friends and relatives from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and by several groups of Old Colony who had elected to leave Mexico and return to Canada. Most Mennonites rented or purchased land from the original settlers, who eventually moved away, while others squatted on unclaimed public land. By 1939 forty Mennonite families, totaling approximately 240 people, were living in and around La Crete. A dozen years later the area's population had swelled to more than 450, of whom approximately ninety-nine percent were Old Colony Mennonites. Together, these people established churches and their own German-language schools, cleared land, and made steady progress from subsistence agriculture to commercial grain farming.²

For two decades the Old Colony had La Crete almost completely to itself.³ But in the 1950s several forces intersected to bring an end to the community's isolation and its distinctive way of life. These included construction of roads into northern Alberta and the cancellation of riverboat service, which forced farmers to use trucks instead of horse-drawn wagons, and the establishment of public schools over vigorous Old Colony protest. Knowledge that grain farming was proving successful, that roads now connected La Crete to outside markets, and that public schools existed, attracted more progressive Mennonites to the area. By late 1958, approximately 1500 people were living in and around La Crete, which could no longer be called an exclusively Old Colony community. As more non-Old Colony people moved in, new churches were established, additional public schools were opened, and progressive Mennonites pushed ahead with plans to modernize the community. For a significant number of Old Colony, the changing character of La Crete meant that it was once again time to move on.⁴

Departures

Between 1959 and 1970, about half of the people who had been living in the La Crete area in 1958 moved away. The first exodus occurred in 1959, when thirty Old Colony families moved to land near Worsley, some 300 kilometers to the southwest near the British Columbia border. Soils here were mediocre at best, and good drinking water was scarce, but these disadvantages were offset by the area's isolation and because it lay beyond the boundaries of existing school districts. Others were reluctant to follow, however, for they feared that it was only a matter of time before the province would establish public schools in the area, and that the principal benefit of moving to Worsley would be lost.⁵

A second migration began in 1960 when several families moved to British Honduras, present-day Belize, a country where, it was said, "education is not stressed."⁶ As this migration gained momentum, more families sold their belongings at auction sales, held farewell gatherings, and set out for Central America, with many making the tedious journey by truck.⁷ Before the end of 1962, nearly three dozen Old Colony families had gone to British Honduras, prompting a supporter of public schools in La Crete to observe with relief that "most of the troublesome factions have left...."⁸ As these families departed, their places were taken by still more progressive Mennonites, who accelerated the process of modernization.⁹

Each of these movements was substantial, but neither could compare in magnitude or significance with the migration to Bolivia that took place just a few years later. Predictably, the impetus for relocation to this distant country was supplied by growing concerns about new schools and new churches, and distrust of government motives. In the years following the migration to British Honduras, La Crete's most conservative Mennonites lost virtually all remaining control over their children's education. The first blow occurred in 1964, when the Fort Vermilion School Division, which included La Crete, replaced two Old Colony board members with non-Mennonites, putting an end to the direct voice that this group had in curriculum matters. Then, during the next two years, all of the area's one-room public schools, which had replaced the private German-language schools, were closed. By 1967 children were being transported by bus to two large consolidated schools, putting most Old Colony parents completely out of touch with the educational process.¹⁰

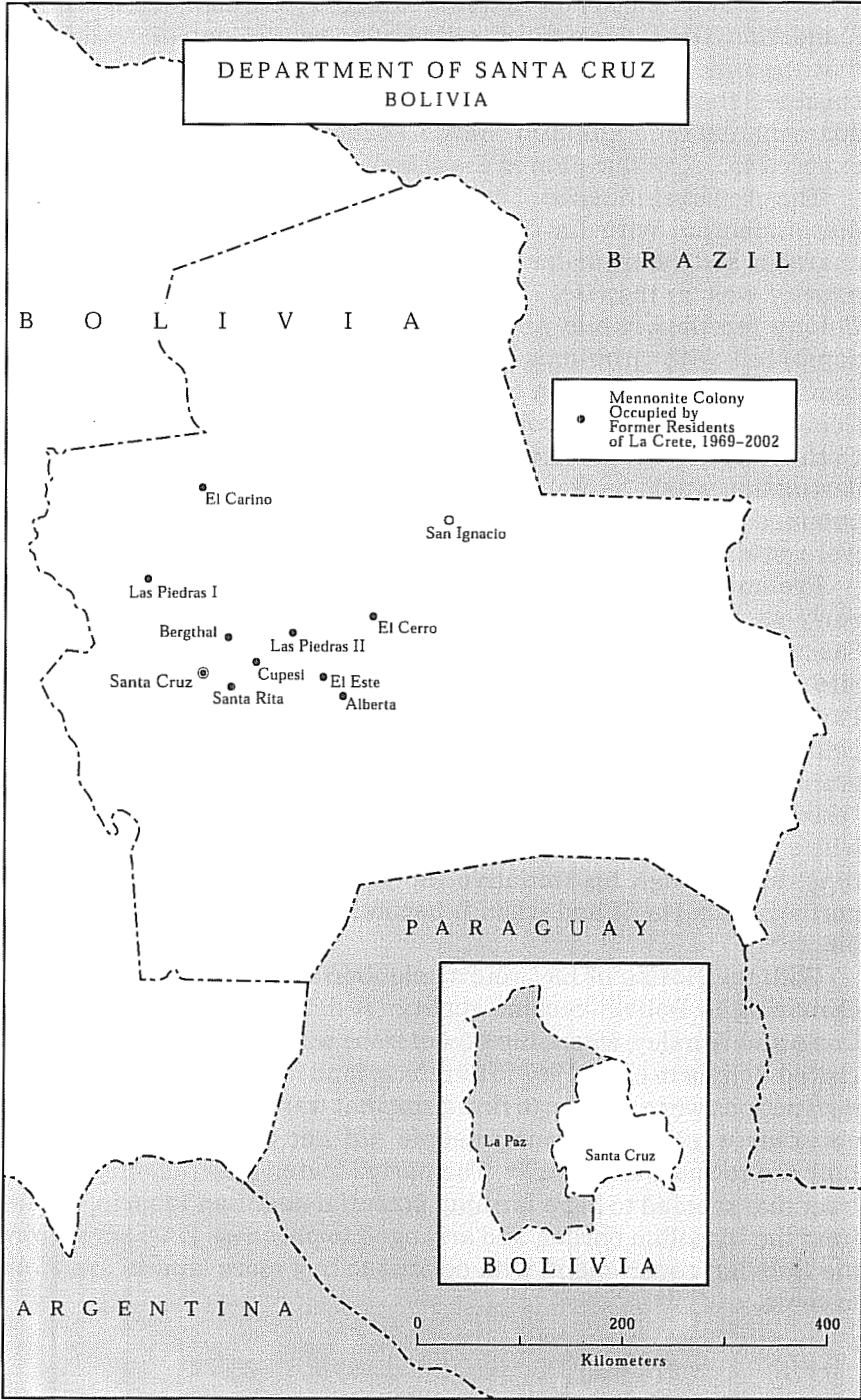
Distrust of the public school system contributed to the spread of rumors about the undesirable content of classroom instruction. One widely-held belief was that sex education, complete with explicit films, would be introduced to the elementary school curriculum.

While it is understood now that these rumors were completely without foundation, Old Colony parents did not know this, and many decided that the time had come to leave La Crete. Some younger parents conceded that they did not want to move for their own sake, but were adamant that their children "have a chance to grow up without being exposed to...sex education in the schools."¹¹

The growing influence of other churches added to the Old Colony's dissatisfaction with La Crete. By this time, two Sommerfelder churches and a Bergthaler church had been established, and mission activity was on the rise. The new churches converted several Old Colony families, while others joined through marriage.¹² When combined with problems in the schools and the belief that the community was becoming too worldly, these defections alarmed Old Colony ministers who spoke forcefully about the need to leave La Crete before it was too late. This time, they said, the most preferable destination would be Bolivia, where Mennonites from Paraguay had obtained a foothold in the 1950s, and to which Mexican Old Colonists were now moving by the hundreds.¹³

Preliminary steps for such a move had already been taken. As early as 1963, Wilhelm D. Fehr, who had come to La Crete from Saskatchewan in 1940, traveled to Bolivia in search of an appropriate site for resettlement. At the time of his trip, two colonies of Paraguayan Mennonites were on the land, the group from Mexico was getting established, and the Bolivian government had issued a decree granting Mennonite colonists special privileges, including the right to "establish, manage, and support their own churches and schools." His wife's failing health prevented Fehr from taking further action at this time, but through his initiative the foundation for migration from northern Alberta, if and when it became necessary, had been put in place.¹⁴

With the closing of La Crete's neighborhood schools, the prospect of moving to Bolivia became reality. A delegation of men from La Crete and Worsley, where the school issue was also a serious concern, visited Bolivia in early 1967 to purchase land for a new colony.¹⁵ Their instructions were simple: to find a site that was so isolated that, as one observer wrote, "the young people did not have ready access to Bolivian towns and cities."¹⁶ The party located a sufficiently remote tract that seemed to have farming potential near San Ignacio, not far from the Brazilian border, and arranged to purchase 2000 acres from the Bolivian government, with options to buy more land in the years to come.



In July, 1967, two groups of Old Colony, totaling 102 persons, left the Peace River country and flew to Bolivia. Additional families departed in the months that followed. More than half of these pioneers were from Worsley, but at least eight families from La Crete, including two with nine children each, also participated in the move.¹⁷

From the very start, colonization near San Ignacio was a disaster. Upon their arrival at the city of Santa Cruz, the first settlers climbed into trucks which delivered them to the colony site at three o'clock in the morning and then departed, leaving them completely on their own and completely unprepared for what lay ahead. Much to their dismay, the colonists discovered that much of the land they had purchased was covered with scrub trees and thorn bush, with sandy soils that were, in one man's words, "weak and poor," not at all suitable for farming. No one had bothered to determine if drinking water could be obtained.¹⁸ Peter Peters, who was eight years old at the time, recalled that "when we finally arrived at the land...my parents were quite surprised. This land did not look arable [and I] remember well how stressed my parents' faces looked in the desert land."¹⁹ With no provisions made for proper sanitation, it is not surprising that within a few days of their arrival, the entire group was afflicted with dysentery.²⁰ None of the settlers could argue that the site was not isolated, but everyone could see that it was unlikely to support a viable agricultural community.

The colonists remained at this place for several months, but conditions did not improve, and in May, 1968, after their first crop had failed, they abandoned their holdings and traveled to Santa Cruz, where they negotiated with the government for the purchase of another tract, at a much greater cost, about 120 kilometers to the northwest. In contrast to the dry country near San Ignacio, this was in the rain forest, but the colonists did not seem to mind, and in October 1968, they moved onto the tract, which became known as Las Piedras, laid out a traditional Mennonite village, and began the task of converting virgin land into farms.²¹ In the meantime, sixty-four new settlers arrived from northern Alberta to join the first pioneers. Once again, the majority of the newcomers were from Worsley, but several people also came from La Crete, including Isaac Goertzen, who had been an Old Colony minister in Alberta since 1955 and would soon be ordained as Bishop of the Las Piedras colony.²²

In La Crete, the remaining Old Colony families debated the merits of going to Bolivia. Some people were convinced that it was a good idea, for as one of them said,

"in Bolivia we will use horses and wagons again as it was in the early days here. We can have our own ... schools again

and our children will have a chance to grow up in our way, speaking Low German instead of English.”²³

Others were not so sure. At least three families had already returned from Bolivia, bringing news of the colony with them, so the fiasco at San Ignacio and the difficulty of getting started under rain forest conditions was no secret.²⁴ One Old Colony man who would decide against leaving La Crete acknowledged that life in Canada was not ideal, but thought that it was foolish to dispose of his land and belongings without knowing if he could support his family in Bolivia. The people proposing to move, he declared, “are ignorant...and...do not know what they want.”²⁵ Another, who had journeyed to British Honduras in 1961 but soon returned, refused to get drawn into another movement to Latin America, and said later that “the people who left for Bolivia were stupid...they wouldn’t try to cooperate with the government. They chose the stupid way, and the hard way.”²⁶

Indecision about migration continued during the first part of 1969. But as the months passed a rumor spread through the Old Colony community that the Canadian government was about to issue new currency, and that minority groups not conforming to mainstream Canadian values would be prevented from participating in the country’s economic system until they altered their views. Like the threat of explicit sex films in La Crete schools, this was not true, but belief that they would be economically marginalized if they remained in Canada convinced many families to move to Bolivia. Then, in late August, Old Colony families learned of an article in a newspaper published by the Holdeman Mennonites that seemed to confirm their worst fears about exclusion from the Canadian economy. In short order, what had been a possibility became a certainty. Within a matter of days many families finalized decisions to migrate, and as fall approached they held auction sales in preparation for the move to Bolivia.²⁷

Before the end of 1969, approximately 300 people from the La Crete area moved to Bolivia. Of these, about half had been living in the neighborhood of Blumenort, between La Crete and Fort Vermilion, while most of the remainder came from farming areas close to town and from Buffalo Head Prairie. The overwhelming majority flew directly to Santa Cruz, but three families took a more roundabout route, driving to British Honduras in a school bus and continuing on to Bolivia by plane after a two-week visit with relatives. Upon their arrival, the settlers made their way to Las Piedras, where the people from Blumenort laid out a new village, also called Blumenort, near the southern end of the colony, while the others made their homes with people from La Crete and Worsley in the four villages that had

been established since the first colonists arrived. In 1970, thirty additional people from Blumenort joined their friends and relatives on the Bolivian frontier.²⁸

By early 1970 no more than half of the people who had been living in and around La Crete in 1958 were still in the area. Some had passed on, and others remained in British Honduras, but the majority of those who were no longer in La Crete now made their homes in Bolivia. These colonists, numbering about 550, were evenly divided between those who had moved directly from La Crete and the families from Worsley, almost all of whom had been residents of La Crete until 1959.²⁹ This does not mean, of course, that La Crete was becoming vacant. Even during the years of heaviest migration to Bolivia, population continued to grow, for the property of most departing families was purchased by newcomers to the community, some migrants returned home after only a few months in South America, and a few other individuals moved onto land recently opened for settlement under provincial homestead lease provisions.³⁰

Since 1970, migration to Bolivia has slowed but not stopped. At least one family moved from La Crete to Bolivia in every year from 1972 through 1985, often traveling in the company of other La Crete residents going to visit relatives or to see for themselves if conditions warranted moving at a later date. Reports from returning visitors, letters from colonists that they brought back with them, and occasional visits by people with homes in Bolivia convinced still others to relocate to this distant country.³¹ More families departed in the early 1990s, citing a shortage of farmland, concern about the undesirable impact of technological innovations such as television and video cassette recorders, and what they saw as La Crete's deteriorating moral climate, including the use of alcohol and drugs by some of its young people, as their reasons for leaving.³² As recently as 1999 two families moved from La Crete to Bolivia, although in both cases these were return migrations after periods of residence in La Crete of three and eleven years, respectively.³³

Most people who moved to Bolivia in the 1970s made their homes at Las Piedras, but as this colony declined and a branch colony, called Las Piedras II, was established in 1984 east of Santa Cruz, destinations became more diverse, with some moving directly to Las Piedras II and others gravitating to other new colonies, often after short periods of residence in one of the earlier settlements.³⁴ By the end of the twentieth century, former residents of La Crete were living in at least eight colonies,³⁵ with increasing numbers residing in Cupesi, a short distance from Santa Cruz, where, as one man put it, "it was all bush land, and ... a challenge to start over again."³⁶ Other families from La Crete, also seeking fresh starts, made their way to El Carino colony, in

the rainforest at the end of a primitive dirt road 200 kilometers north of Santa Cruz.³⁷

Return to La Crete

Some families found colony life in Bolivia to their liking, and had no second thoughts about decisions to leave Canada. But others became dissatisfied, and for many in this latter group the solution was to return to La Crete. As noted above, a handful of families trickled back as early as 1967 and 1968, reportedly saying that "the weather there did not agree with them." Among these early returnees were Peter and Margaret Wolfe and family, who sold everything and moved to Bolivia in July, 1967, only to return in September of the same year, and William and Anne Neudorf and children, who also went in 1967 and came back to La Crete just a month after the Wolfes returned.³⁸ In all probability crop failure and the intolerable living conditions at the San Ignacio settlement, as well as the weather, were instrumental in convincing these people to return to Canada even before their companions had relocated to the more promising site at Las Piedras.

The arrival of these families was just the beginning of a return flow to La Crete that gained momentum when the new village of Blumenort imploded shortly after it was founded in 1969. The causes of discord were complex, but at their root was the discovery by many new arrivals that, despite what they may have thought before leaving Canada, they were not fully prepared to make fresh starts in a raw land and to live under strict Old Colony control. Some men had expected to continue farming as they had done in La Crete, but quickly learned that clearing the rain forest, cultivating unfamiliar soils, and working in extreme heat, as well as trying to function in a completely different economic system, made this impossible. Their frustrations deepened when they found that the ministers had absolutely no intention of bending the rules about using technological conveniences, including trucks. Many had believed that living in a traditional village would bring families together, but they learned that just the opposite was true, for with little privacy one person's business often became everyone's business, and squabbles that could have been avoided in Canada now became commonplace. When several families publicly announced their intention to return to La Crete, smoldering resentment flared into open conflict as the community split into two factions, with one side supporting a return to Canada while the others, who in many cases had exhausted their financial resources going to Bolivia and would be unable to return in any event, declaring that

they had been betrayed.³⁹ The insistence of the ministers that everyone should remain in Bolivia, combined with religious and economic sanctions against those planning to leave, as well as occasional physical threats, did nothing to ease a troublesome situation, and only increased the first group's determination to return to Canada.⁴⁰

The exodus from Blumenort began before the end of 1969, and accelerated in 1970. By the end of May 1970, 85 of the 150 people inhabiting this village had left, and were soon again living near La Crete, with all but three families reestablishing residence within short distances of their former homes.⁴¹ The hardship involved in making two intercontinental moves in less than a year was expressed clearly by one of the migrants' children, who wrote that

In 1969 [my parents] sold their home quarter and ventured out to Bolivia with ten children tugging on Mom's skirt. The decision to move was based on Mom's entire family moving to Bolivia. Escaping English schooling was also a motive. After ten months they decided that Bolivia was not for them.... Traveling cost them much stress and approximately \$6,500. Returning to La Crete meant starting a new homestead.⁴²

But even as these people returned to Canada, other families, usually related by birth or marriage to those who had gone to Bolivia and decided to stay, were disposing of their property in northern Alberta and making the long move southward, in most cases taking over houses that had been occupied by families who by now were back in La Crete.⁴³

Migration from Bolivia to La Crete slowed after these tumultuous events, but it did not come to a halt. Pioneer life was difficult at best, and for some it was nearly impossible, as the experience of Heinrich and Helena Harms indicates:

The first couple of years were very tough for the parents. The children got very sick, had very sore eyes and lots of boils on their bodies, due to the change of climate. The Harms family lived together in one house, along with the Peter Neudorf family. In total they had fourteen children. One wall divided the living quarters from the cows and chickens. It was a big change from Canada....Money was very scarce and in the first years they had no crops.⁴⁴

Despite these hardships, the Harms family remained in Bolivia, but others did not. Accounts in local histories and newspapers tell of a

dozen families moving from Bolivia to La Crete between 1972 and 1979, but interviews with residents of La Crete have indicated that in fact the number of returnees during this period was considerably higher.⁴⁵

In some cases a complex interplay of religious beliefs, kinship ties, the aging process, and economic necessity drew families back and forth from one country to the other. Peter and Betty Driedger, for example, participated in the migration from Blumenort in 1969 with Betty's parents, Benjamin and Anna Goertzen, and several other relatives, but returned five months later, along with her parents, when factionalism threatened to tear the new colony apart. Betty's parents resided in Canada for the rest of their lives, but in 1976 the Driedgers sold everything for a second time and went back to Bolivia. This time, they remained for about a year and would have stayed longer, but Mr. Goertzen, who by now was in his mid-seventies, became unable to continue farming, so the Driedgers left Bolivia once again and took over his farm.⁴⁶ In another instance, Henry and Helena Neudorf, with several of their married children, also moved to Bolivia in 1969, but Mr. Neudorf found that he could not make a living from his new land, so for ten successive years he returned to Canada for a few months to sell fish caught in the Northwest Territories, just as he had done before moving to South America. His last trip for this purpose took place when he was in his late sixties. Mr. Neudorf remained in Bolivia until his wife's death in 1983, and then returned to La Crete to retire. Many of the couple's children continued to reside in Bolivia, but one son, who had made his home in Bolivia on two occasions, separated by seven years of residence in Canada, returned again in 1978 to try farming south of La Crete, and was living on this property when his father came back five years later.⁴⁷ In still another case, Frank Banman moved back and forth between La Crete and Bolivia a total of seven times, often, he admitted "with the intention of staying and never moving again."⁴⁸ These movements, and others like them, support the observation made by one man that numerous families moved to Bolivia, returned to Canada, and then went back to Bolivia for a second time, but that most of these people "came back twice, too."⁴⁹

New economic opportunities encouraged an upsurge in return migration to La Crete during the 1980s, when a large number of jobs became available in logging and sawmill work, trucking, and construction. Many young men, on the verge of starting families of their own and not wanting to be farmers, returned home to take advantage of this situation, in some cases bringing their aging parents with them. Upon their arrival, most individuals had no difficulty finding jobs, and soon enjoyed levels of prosperity that had been

almost unimaginable in Bolivia. Representative of this group was Abe Peters, who came back to Canada in 1980 at the age of nineteen. This young man had learned to weld in Bolivia, and immediately joined his older brother, who was already living in La Crete, in the latter's welding business. Mr. Peters married another Bolivian returnee in 1982, and within five years of their marriage he and his wife had purchased the brother's welding firm. Later, the couple expanded into the log hauling business. Then, in 1991, they sold the welding shop and purchased a logging company, which the family continues to operate today.⁵⁰ The Peters' success was not unusual, for it coincided with a remarkable economic and social transformation taking place in La Crete, which in turn made this northern Alberta community increasingly attractive to families dissatisfied with life in Bolivia.⁵¹ Indeed, one individual who moved to La Crete in 1983 declared two years later that "we wouldn't mind going back [to Bolivia] for a visit, but never to live."⁵²

The growth of La Crete's non-agricultural economic base was paralleled by an expansion of crown land made available for farming, which provided additional opportunities for people from Bolivia. Most of this activity was concentrated in the Blue Hills area, southwest of La Crete, where the province opened approximately 50,000 acres for agricultural settlement between 1980 and 1984. Although this land was earmarked for beginning farmers with deep local roots, several recent returnees from Bolivia also participated in the acquisition process, and some were awarded choice parcels.⁵³ One of these was Peter Peters. Shortly after his marriage in 1979, Peters purchased a farm in Bolivia, but a year later he and his wife moved to La Crete, where he found employment operating heavy equipment on a road construction project. While engaged in this work, he entered a lottery for Blue Hills land, and to his surprise won the rights to a 480-acre parcel near the southern end of the development area. Pleased with this stroke of luck, Peters went back to Bolivia to dispose of his property, leaving arrangements for finalizing the Blue Hills acquisition in the hands of his father-in-law, who had also returned from Bolivia in 1980. Rumors that Peters would convey this land to his father-in-law or was holding it for speculation led to the filing of a complaint that he was still farming in Bolivia and was therefore ineligible for the Blue Hills lottery, but the government ruled that he had acted in good faith and allowed him to keep the land. In fact, by the time this issue was resolved, Peters had sold his Bolivian farm, was back in Canada, and had cleared timber from almost half of his new property in preparation for planting crops. The family established residence in Blue Hills in 1984, and by 1998 they owned eight adjoining quarter sections, where Peters combined farming in

partnership with his brother in the logging business.⁵⁴ The experience of Peter Peters was repeated, with variations from family to family, by other Bolivian returnees.⁵⁵

The early 1990s witnessed a temporary lull in migration from Bolivia to La Crete. By now, most available land in Blue Hills was occupied, and as crop prices continued to drop, moving back to Canada to engage in commercial agriculture lost much of its appeal. In fact, several families departed from Blue Hills at this time because of economic problems, with at least one of them returning to Bolivia.⁵⁶ For those people who were dissatisfied with life in a particular Bolivian colony, a better option seemed to be relocation to another colony. Dozens of families with La Crete roots moved from one colony to another within Bolivia during these years, with significant numbers establishing new homes in Las Piedras II, Cupesi, and El Carino.⁵⁷ In contrast, only a small number of families came back to La Crete, in one instance to farm and in another because of quarrels with neighbors in Bolivia and good prospects for a sawmill job in Canada.⁵⁸

Since this time the pace of migration from Bolivia to La Crete has quickened dramatically. Extended drought, particularly in the Cupesi colony, has convinced many young families that they can no longer survive by farming in Bolivia, and that job opportunities in the land where their parents and grandparents once lived far outweigh the benefits of remaining in South America. For others, the impetus to move is conflict between the older and younger generations about change and modernization, and the latter group's unwillingness to raise their children under conditions similar to what they had experienced as youngsters. Moving to Bolivia, they say, was their parents' solution to what were perceived at the time as serious threats, but these men and women now realize that they were deprived of many opportunities, and do not want their children to face similar limitations. The tangle of government regulations that usually makes international migration difficult does not apply to most Bolivian returnees, for the majority of the original settlers from La Crete never relinquished their Canadian citizenship, so their children are still legally Canadians and can enter Canada with few if any obstacles.⁵⁹

It is difficult to obtain completely accurate figures about recent migration from Bolivia, and estimates fluctuate wildly, but it is certain that the numbers are high. Knowledgeable sources have asserted that during the first half of 2001 between forty and fifty families from Bolivia arrived in La Crete, and that twelve months later the total had reached one hundred, with still more families on the way.⁶⁰ In the summer of 2002, the local chamber of commerce reported that the population of the La Crete area had grown from nearly 6,000 to about 7,000 during the past year, and attributed most of the increase to

people arriving from Bolivia.⁶¹ While some of these numbers may be inflated, it is safe to say that at least 800 people moved to La Crete from Bolivia in 2001 and 2002 alone, and that over a thousand have arrived since the late 1990s. The magnitude of this migration is illustrated by the observation made by one young woman in the summer of 2002 that a year earlier she had no relatives, other than her immediate family, living in La Crete. Now, she said, there are thirteen additional relatives from one side of the family and seven from the other side, all recent arrivals from Bolivia. This case is not unusual. Indeed, when all accounts of migration to and from Bolivia are pieced together, it appears that more than one-third of the members of families who moved from La Crete to Bolivia between 1967 and 1999 are now back in La Crete.

Coping Strategies

The process of beginning new lives in northern Alberta has not been easy for many recent returnees, and it has also placed considerable pressure on the community that is absorbing them. The current influx from Bolivia is the largest that La Crete has experienced, far exceeding the return of the migrants from Blumenort in 1969 and 1970, and is made up of families whose life experiences differ markedly from those of their new neighbors, despite the two groups' common religious roots. In contrast to many of the earlier arrivals, who were only a few months or years removed from living in Canada, adult members of the new families have spent their entire lives in Bolivia or went to Bolivia as young children, so their frame of reference is almost invariably that of the colonies where they formerly made their homes. For these people and their children, the change is enormous, and making adjustments represents an unprecedented challenge for them and for the citizens of La Crete.

The most immediate needs of the new residents are housing and employment. But soon after arriving they must also begin learning the English language, register their children for school, and gain access to the local health care system. As the number of families coming from Bolivia continued to grow in the first months of 2002, La Crete's social service providers became concerned that the newcomers might overwhelm local infrastructure, and that their presence could produce friction with people already living in the community. It was common knowledge at the housing authority office that some Bolivian returnees were living under extraordinarily crowded conditions. In one case, four families, consisting of eight adults and twenty children, were sharing a single house, while in

another, two families with a total of seven children were living in a one-bedroom mobile home. These circumstances, it was thought, might represent the norm for the most recent returnees.⁶² The local school division, worried that it could not accommodate the influx of children, conducted a study that indicated that at least 200 new students from Bolivia would enter La Crete's public schools in the fall of 2002.⁶³ A plentiful supply of jobs enabled most newcomers to find work shortly after their arrival, alleviating fear that the new families would be unable to support themselves, but some La Crete residents then became concerned that this expanding labor pool would drive down wages and that their own young people would lose employment opportunities that they had come to expect.⁶⁴ "If you put 'Boliviano' on your job application," declared one man, "they'll hire you."⁶⁵

In an effort to provide assistance for the Bolivian returnees and to ward off conflict, community leaders joined together in July 2002, to assess the newcomers' needs and make plans for the future. Representatives from a variety of service agencies, including housing, health, education, and municipal government, formed a committee to study how best to handle the influx.⁶⁶ One important outcome of this meeting was recognition that the community had been talking a great deal about the people from Bolivia, but had not spent much time talking to them. The committee decided that its first step should be the preparation of a questionnaire to help identify specific needs of the newcomers. It also took on the responsibility of educating local residents about the contributions that the new families would make, and dispelling rumors about their presumed negative impact. A local man was hired to survey the recent arrivals, and by early October he had completed interviews with 43 families.⁶⁷

The results of the survey were surprising. Rather than documenting shortcomings in La Crete's efforts to meet the needs of its new residents, the survey showed that most families believed that they had relatively few needs that had not already been satisfied, and that the community was making them feel welcome. The committee had thought that a shortage of housing and overcrowding would be identified as serious problems, but this did not prove to be true. Instead, fewer than 20 percent of the households included in the survey were found to be living in conditions classified as inadequate under provincial housing standards.⁶⁸ In most instances where standards were not being met, it was because large numbers of people were living in older mobile homes, but in these cases social service personnel were unable to intervene because the mobile homes were owned by one or more of the occupants. Some respondents did admit, however, that their problems in adjusting to La Crete included finding suitable housing and having to stay with relatives in the meantime.

The survey revealed that almost every head of a Bolivian returnee family had found a job, with forty percent working in the area's sawmills while others were employed in building construction or as labourers. Not every newcomer, however, was satisfied with his current employment situation. Anticipating the arrival of the winter logging season, more than a dozen men expressed interest in obtaining First Class truck driver's licenses so they could get better-paying jobs hauling logs to the sawmills.⁶⁹ Because barely more than one-third of family heads possessed English language skills, it became clear that programs in English as a Second Language (ESL) had to go hand-in-hand with job training. The committee made plans to provide translators at truck driver training sessions so language barriers would not prevent men from obtaining work at the start of the log haul, but its long range goal continued to be the provision of assistance to all newcomers, regardless of their specific employment objectives, in becoming more proficient in English. Indeed, the survey revealed that more than sixty percent of the Bolivian returnees were interested in enrolling in ESL programs, but several of these men expressed concern to the interviewer that they would be unable to find enough hours in the day to work, take English language classes, and spend quality time with their families.

Associated with adults' needs for job training and the development of language skills has been the provision of education for their children. Here, too, fears about the community's resources being stretched to the limit have thus far proven to be groundless. Instead of having to absorb 200 or more new pupils from Bolivia in the fall of 2002, the public school system enrolled only twenty-four, all from the Cupesi colony. In fact, as classes began and enrollment figures became known, it was clear that the original estimate of recently arrived school-age children was much too high. Thirty-five new students from Las Piedras II began classes at the Reinland school in La Crete, established by the Old Colony church in 2001, while a handful of additional children were enrolled at private schools in the outlying areas.⁷⁰ Just how this miscalculation of student numbers came about remains unclear, but part of the answer appears to be that many of the most recent returnees' children were still too young to begin school in 2002 and that some older children who were expected to enroll for classes did not do so.⁷¹ If this is correct, and families continue to arrive from Bolivia, there is no doubt that the need to provide educational services for these children will increase in the years to come.⁷²

Operation of the Reinland school demonstrates the flexibility that has distinguished the community's accommodation of the needs of new families from Bolivia. When this school was first opened, church

leaders anticipated a small number of students, but quickly saw enrollment climb to more than seventy, about evenly divided between children who had lived in La Crete for some time and brand-new arrivals. Overwhelmed by so many pupils, Reinland officials turned for help to the public school division, which agreed to provide some financial help and approved their use of a Christian curriculum for grades one through twelve. In the fall of 2002, the school division was partially subsidizing the school's operation while leaving classroom instruction in the hands of teachers hired by the church.⁷³ The level of cooperation between the school division and the Old Colony represents a radical departure from the contentious relationship that existed three decades ago, and is symbolic of changes that have occurred in La Crete since the first families left for Bolivia.

Provision of education for older children at Reinland encountered some stumbling blocks, but these did not prove to be insurmountable. When the school introduced an ESL program for teenagers from Bolivia, many of them refused to attend because they had been away from school for several years (or had never gone to school) and felt out of place in classroom settings. Overcoming these obstacles required tact and sensitivity to the prospective students' special circumstances. One Old Colony woman in particular has been instrumental in convincing these youngsters of the benefits of obtaining English language skills, for she herself came back from Bolivia as a teenager, spoke little English, and learned how difficult relocation to Canada can be for children of this age. Relating her own experiences has enabled her to gain their trust, and today increasing numbers of the older children are enrolled in the program, for they now realize that they must learn English to take advantage of vocational training before they enter the work force.⁷⁴

Many additional educational programs have been established for the benefit of the Bolivian returnees. Following the example of programs begun in southern Alberta for Mennonites arriving from Mexico, the La Crete Learning Society, an adult education provider, held evening ESL classes in 2001. When this program began, only eight students were enrolled, but by the end of the session twenty-six people were participating. The school division also operated a two-month ESL program for children between five and sixteen years of age, run by a veteran teacher from Buffalo Head Prairie, in anticipation of these children entering public schools the following year. In the fall of 2002, these programs were consolidated under the direction of Fairview College, which operated three separate ESL programs. Both daytime and evening classes were offered, and in-home visits were made available for mothers with pre-school children. At the same time, the Learning Society initiated its own

classes for mothers that emphasized use of the English language and the development of basic life skills, such as learning to shop on a budget, reading food labels, and understanding the meaning of notes that their children brought home from school. Finally, Head Start began a special program on Fridays for newly arrived children who could not speak English.⁷⁵ Together, these programs have been designed to reach every sector of the Bolivian returnee population, and to ease their transition to life in Canada. It is too early to judge each one's success, but their existence confirms a willingness on the part of the people of La Crete to help as much as possible.

The community's determination to provide educational services for all newcomers has carried over to assisting with health concerns and access to social services. The role of La Crete Support Services, dedicated to helping people obtain assistance from agencies that exist for their benefit, has been critical in this regard. Within a day or two of their arrival, most families from Bolivia visited this office, where Support Service personnel helped them fill out health forms and social insurance applications, apply for child tax credits, and get information about the broad range of social services that were available. If needed, they put families in touch with public health nurses who provided immunization shots, and made arrangements for transportation to out-of-town medical facilities.⁷⁶ As a complement to these services, the community also organized German-language workshops on women's health and other issues of a similar nature. An indication that these initiatives have been successful is seen in the survey results which showed that nearly eighty percent of families interviewed had received treatment at the local clinic, and that approximately one-third had utilized child and family services. Every respondent said that they were fully satisfied with what the community was doing to assist in these personal matters.

On the negative side, seven of the forty three families participating in the survey admitted that they had refused to be immunized, while others said that they intended to receive immunization shots but had not yet managed to get around to it. This was vexing to health care providers and of concern to the community as a whole because northern Alberta had recently experienced outbreaks of both measles and mumps, with the former affecting people connected with La Crete in early 2000 and the latter concentrated entirely within the La Crete community, where fifty-seven cases were reported in February, 2002. In both instances the source of these diseases was identified as Bolivia.⁷⁷ Some believed that the outbreaks were inevitable because of the number of people coming to La Crete from this Third World country, especially since the majority of new arrivals were not required to receive immunization shots because of their Canadian

citizenship. Community leaders remained hopeful that this problem, as well as others associated with sudden relocation, would be resolved with education and a better understanding of the Canadian way of doing things, but they understood that it will take some time before mutually satisfactory adjustments can be made.

Conclusion

Families returning to La Crete from Bolivia are coming back to a community that is very different from the one that their parents and grandparents left many years ago. In the 1960s, suspicion of government motives was high, cooperation between the community's churches was almost nonexistent, and angry confrontation or complete avoidance were normal behavior when disagreements occurred. Today, the role of government is generally accepted, church leaders engage in productive dialogue, and people are more willing to work out their differences. Adjusting to what La Crete has become during their families' absence has often been a bewildering experience for the people from Bolivia, but this has been offset by broad economic opportunities, particularly in non-agricultural pursuits, and by most residents' willingness to go out of their way to help. Indeed, as one person emphasized, it is important for La Crete to come together as a welcoming community, thereby eliminating barriers rather than erecting them, for the newcomers are not only part of the greater Mennonite family but are also direct descendants of the men and women who laid the foundation for a strong Mennonite presence in this northern land. The arrival of the Bolivian returnees is simply the latest phase in the social and economic evolution of La Crete, where so much has changed, and so much has remained constant, in the seven decades that have passed since the first Old Colony pioneers stepped ashore on the banks of the Peace River.

Notes

- ¹ *A Heritage of Homesteads, Hardships, and Hope* (La Crete, AB: La Crete and Area Then and Now Society, 1989), 21-31; David W. & Sarah (Wall) Fehr Family History, 1880-2001 (La Crete, AB: Fehr Family History Book Committee, 2001), 216-217, 236-237, and 317; Maria Braun, unpublished account of homesteading at Carcajou, on file at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives (hereafter MHCA), Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- ² Sarah Lehn Harder, "Fort Vermilion: A Farmer's Paradise," *Canadian Mennonite*, 16 November 1965, 8; Peter Goertzen, "Cultural Change," [1969], manuscript on file at MHCA; Frank H. Epp, "Movement into Northern Isolation Began in 1930s," *Mennonite Reporter*, 27 May 1974, 13; "Pioneers Remembered,"

Northern Pioneer, 9 June 1977, 4-6; *Heritage*, 31-32, 36-45, and 70-75; *Fehr Family History*, 152.

- ³ The name La Crete as used in this paper refers to both the entire area stretching from Blumenort in the northeast to Blue Hills in the southwest and the town itself.
- ⁴ These events are described in Dawn S. Bowen, "Preserving Tradition, Confronting Progress: Social Change in a Mennonite Community, 1950-1965," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 25 (1995): 53-77. La Crete's population in 1958 is taken from a letter from Diedrich Neufeld of La Crete to Rev. David P. Neufeld, 24 November 1958, in the David P. Neufeld Files (hereafter DPN), MHCA.
- ⁵ "Fort Vermilion News," *Peace River Record-Gazette*, 4 June 1959, 13; P.W. Friesen, "Old Colony, Sommerfelder Settlements in Northern Alberta Show Progress," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 17 September 1959, 4; Sarah Lehn Harder, "Retreat Brings Progress," *Canadian Mennonite*, 28 December 1965, 9; Frank H. Epp, "Struggles with the World and the Wilderness," *Mennonite Reporter*, 30 September 1974, 9; *The Clear Vision: A History of the Cleardale Area* (Hines Creek, AB: Cleardale History Book Committee, 1982), 49-71.
- ⁶ Letter from Jake and Agnes Petkau to Rev. and Mrs. Neufeld, October 1960, DPN, MHCA.
- ⁷ "Fort Vermilion News," *Peace River Record-Gazette*, 20 October 1960, 13; 22 December 1960, 16; 29 March 1962, 9; 12 July 1962, 8; "La Crete News," *Peace River Record-Gazette*, 2 February 1961, 9.
- ⁸ Henry A. Wiens, "Report on Trip to Fort Vermilion by the Board of Christian Service," 1962, DPN, MHCA. The number of families moving to British Honduras is reported in Harder, "Retreat Brings Progress," 9.
- ⁹ Wiens, "Report on Trip to Fort Vermilion," DPN, MHCA; Bowen, "Preserving Tradition," 72.
- ¹⁰ Peter Goertzen, "Group Disorganization," [1971], manuscript on file at MHCA; *Heritage*, 122-139.
- ¹¹ Edward W. Van Dyke, "Blumenort: Study of Persistence in a Sect" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1972), 96. A decade later many La Crete residents were still grumbling that sex education should be exclusively a family responsibility, and not part of public school courses such as biology or health. Wilfred Gilchrist, "Learning Systems in La Crete, Alberta," [1979], unpublished paper on file at Fairview College, Fairview, Alberta, 16.
- ¹² *Heritage*, 88-92; Friesen, "Old Colony, Sommerfelder Settlements," 4; Sarah Lehn Harder, *Ever into New Horizons* (Chilliwack, BC: Privately Published, 1999), 101; Rev. Andrew Knelsen, interview by author, 29 June 1989, La Crete, Alberta.
- ¹³ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 115-122; "Settlers from Mexico in Move to Bolivia," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 14 December 1967, 1; Frank H. Epp, "'Conservative' Colonists on the Bolivian Frontier," *Mennonite Reporter*, 30 October 1972, 7-9; author's interview with Rev. John Neudorf, La Crete, Alberta, 21 June 1989. The movement of Paraguayan Mennonites to Bolivia is summarized by Kelso L. Wessel and Judith A. Wessel, *The Mennonites in Bolivia – An Historical and Present Social-Economic Evaluation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1967), 12-22. The formative years of settlement in Bolivia by Old Colony families from Mexico is discussed in James Walter Lanning, "The Old Colony Mennonites of Bolivia: A Case Study" (M.S. thesis, Texas A & M University, 1971).
- ¹⁴ *Fehr Family History*, 63; Epp, "'Conservative' Colonists," 7; "Special Rights Granted by Bolivian Government," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 14 June 1962, 7.
- ¹⁵ Wilhelm D. Fehr, who had made his first trip to Bolivia four years earlier, was part of this group. The exact number of delegates is uncertain. Van Dyke has written that there were two individuals, one from the La Crete area and one from

Worsley, but Herman Banman and Carl Zacharias each say that the number was three, and the grandson of Wilhelm D. Fehr maintains that the party consisted of four men.

- ¹⁶ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 111.
- ¹⁷ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 111-112; "Mennonite Exodus," *Peace River Record-Gazette*, 5 July 1967, 1; "Mennonite Families Leave Fort Area," *Peace River Record-Gazette*, 2 August 1967, 5; "Migration from Canada to Bolivia Under Way," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 7 September 1967, 1; *Fehr Family History*, 63, 89-90, 162; *Heritage*, 294; personal communications to the author from Carl Zacharias, Mennonite Central Committee, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, November - December 2002.
- ¹⁸ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 112-113; *Fehr Family History*, 54; Herman Banman, interview by author, 30 June 1989, La Crete, Alberta.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in *Fehr Family History*, 95.
- ²⁰ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 113.
- ²¹ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 113; *Fehr Family History*, 55; *The Clear Vision*, 71; Zacharias communications.
- ²² "Bolivia-bound Mennonites Make Brief Stop in City," *Edmonton Journal*, 8 July 1968, 3; "Another Group Leaves for Bolivia," *Canadian Mennonite*, 16 July 1968, 1; "64 Old Colonists Leave Alberta for Bolivia," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 18 July 1968, 3; Epp, "'Conservative' Colonists," 7; *Heritage*, 265; Delbert F. Plett, ed., *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, 1875 to 2000* (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2001), 157; Zacharias communications.
- ²³ Quoted in Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 120.
- ²⁴ "Fort Vermilion News," *Peace River Record-Gazette*, 3 July 1968, 2; "Another Group," 1; *Heritage*, 339 and 439.
- ²⁵ Quoted in Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 129.
- ²⁶ Banman interview.
- ²⁷ This matter is discussed at length in Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 116-117 and 122-124. Holdeman Mennonites, officially known as The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, had maintained a presence near Fort Vermilion since the early 1950s.
- ²⁸ Bill Corbett, "Mennonites Break New Ground in Northern Alberta," *Canadian Geographic* 108 (April-May, 1988), 38; Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 133-135; *Fehr Family History*, 185 and 206.
- ²⁹ This estimate has been pieced together from family histories published in *Heritage* and the *Fehr Family History*, local newspaper items, figures provided by Van Dyke in "Blumenort," and from Plett, *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada*, 161, which states that 85 percent of the Worsley Old Colony congregation had moved to Bolivia by the end of 1968, leaving only nine families behind. It also takes into account the families who had already returned to La Crete from Bolivia.
- ³⁰ "Fort Vermilion News," *Peace River Record-Gazette*, 29 April 1970, 2; *Heritage*; *Fehr Family History*; homestead lease files for the La Crete area, 1967-1970, Provincial Archives of Alberta [hereafter PAA].
- ³¹ *Northern Pioneer*, 30 September 1976, 3; 23 February 1977, 11; 17 May 1978, 2; 11 April 1979, 2; 6 May 1981, 2-3; and 27 March 1985, 5; *Fehr Family History*; Henry Klassen, interview by author, 29 June 1989, La Crete, Alberta.
- ³² Susan Bourette, "Mennonites: Fading Faith, Dying Dream," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 August 1992, A4.
- ³³ *Fehr Family History*, 102-103 and 162.
- ³⁴ Abe Warkentin, *Strangers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach, MB: Die Mennonitische Post, 1987), 259-260; Zacharias communications.
- ³⁵ Only a few families remained in Las Piedras I in 1999, and today it is completely abandoned.
- ³⁶ *Heritage*; *Fehr Family History*, 93; Zacharias communications.

- ³⁷ *Fehr Family History*, 92 and 102-103.
- ³⁸ "Another Group," 1; *Heritage* 339 and 439.
- ³⁹ This process has been analyzed in great detail in Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 156-175. Van Dyke lived for extended periods with Old Colony families in both Blumenort, Alberta, and Blumenort, Bolivia, during these troubled times.
- ⁴⁰ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 165 and 252.
- ⁴¹ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 172-173; *Fehr Family History*, 72; *Heritage*, 386.
- ⁴² *Fehr Family History*, 30.
- ⁴³ Van Dyke, "Blumenort," 173.
- ⁴⁴ *Fehr Family History*, 43.
- ⁴⁵ *Fehr Family History*; *Heritage*; *Northern Pioneer*, 24 May 1978 and 28 November 1979; Neudorf interview; Klassen interview.
- ⁴⁶ *Heritage*, 214-215 and 261-262; *Northern Pioneer*, 25 March 1976, 3, and 29 April 1976, 2.
- ⁴⁷ *Heritage*, 336-344.
- ⁴⁸ Zacharias communications.
- ⁴⁹ Klassen interview.
- ⁵⁰ *Fehr Family History*, 98.
- ⁵¹ The origins of this transformation are analyzed in Dawn S. Bowen, "The Transformation of a Northern Alberta Frontier Community" (M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1990), 149-161.
- ⁵² *Northern Pioneer*, 27 March 1985, 5.
- ⁵³ This process is discussed in Dawn S. Bowen, "Agricultural Expansion in Northern Alberta in the Late Twentieth Century," *Geographical Review* 92 (2002): 503-525.
- ⁵⁴ *Fehr Family History*, 95-97; Inspector's Report, Supplementary Form, 15 January 1982, Land File SW 25-102-18-W5, PAA; Map of Property Ownership in Municipal District of Mackenzie No. 23, 1998.
- ⁵⁵ *Fehr Family History*, 25 and 34-35; Bourette, "Mennonites;" Jake Driedger, interview by author, 15 June 1999, Blue Hills, Alberta.
- ⁵⁶ *Fehr Family History*, 25; Bourette, "Mennonites;" Julius Friesen and Bill Siemens, interviews by author, 3 June 1998, Blue Hills, Alberta.
- ⁵⁷ *Fehr Family History*; Zacharias communications.
- ⁵⁸ *Fehr Family History*, 25 and 162; Lisa and Nettie Braun, interview by author, 12 June 1999, La Crete, Alberta (the names of these informants have been altered to protect their privacy).
- ⁵⁹ Jim Farrell, "From Bolivia to Northern Alberta," *Edmonton Journal*, 29 June 2002, A1 and A17; Jim Farrell, "Mennonite Settlers Rebuild in Peace Country," *Edmonton Journal*, 29 June 2002, B8; Zacharias communications. This information is confirmed by dozens of interviews and informal conversations between the author and residents of La Crete, including several Bolivian returnees, in 2001 and 2002.
- ⁶⁰ Author's interviews in La Crete, Alberta, with Brenda Friesen, Ivy Lane Registry, 8 June 2001, Liesa Peters, Director, La Crete Support Services, 2 July 2002, and Helen Braun, Director, Mackenzie Housing Authority, 3 July 2002; letter to the author from Twila Olson, Coordinator, La Crete Learning Society, 15 November 2002.
- ⁶¹ Bob Doerksen, "Committee Established to Study Growth in La Crete Area," *Northern Pioneer*, 17 July 2002, 6.
- ⁶² Helen Braun interview.
- ⁶³ Cal Cosh, Assistant Superintendent, Fort Vermilion School Division, interview by author, 3 July 2002, Fort Vermilion, Alberta; Susan McNeil, "School Division Planning for Challenging School Year," *Northern Pioneer*, 21 August 2002, 2.
- ⁶⁴ Farrell, "From Bolivia," A17; Helen Braun interview.
- ⁶⁵ Quoted in Farrell, "From Bolivia," A17.

- ⁶⁶ This group has named itself the Mackenzie Regional Community Development Committee. Unless otherwise indicated, the remainder of this paper is based on the author's attendance at the committee's first two meetings, held on 14 July 2002 and 15 August 2002, and frequent communication with committee members since the second meeting. The first meeting was held shortly after several committee members met with social service providers from Taber, in southern Alberta, where for more than a decade the return of conservative Mennonites from Mexico has produced circumstances similar to those that La Crete is now experiencing.
- ⁶⁷ The committee initially planned to gather information from fifty families. Four families contacted by the interviewer in July and August refused to participate in the survey, and during the following weeks the number of refusals increased sharply. To avoid the appearance of being overly intrusive and therefore losing the good will of the people it was trying to help, the committee decided to halt the process after 43 interviews had been completed.
- ⁶⁸ New Resident Questionnaire (sic) Summary, prepared by Simon Peters for the Mackenzie Regional Community Development Committee, [no date], copy in possession of the author.
- ⁶⁹ NRQ summary.
- ⁷⁰ Abe Peters, interview by author, 15 August 2002, La Crete, Alberta; personal communication to the author from John Bueckert, Fort Vermilion School Division, 15 October 2002.
- ⁷¹ Of the 99 children in the surveyed families who were fifteen years old or younger, 50 were under the age of six.
- ⁷² The school division is already making plans to build a new school in La Crete to accommodate the expected increase in enrollment. Bob Doerksen, "FVSD Trustees Plan for La Crete and Area Schools," *Northern Pioneer*, 1 May 2002, 6.
- ⁷³ Abe Peters interview.
- ⁷⁴ Author's interview with Anna Peters, La Crete, Alberta, 15 August 2002.
- ⁷⁵ Liesa Peters interview; author's interviews with Barb Peters, Director, La Crete Learning Society, and Treena Ward, Community Resource Worker, Silver Birch Child & Family Services Authority, La Crete, Alberta, 2 July 2002.
- ⁷⁶ Liesa Peters interview. An indication that increasing numbers of returnee families are making use of La Crete Support Services is found in a news item in November, 2002, reporting that the agency had hired a new employee "to help with the work load." Bob Doerksen, "New Position at LCSS," *Northern Pioneer*, 27 November 2002, 6.
- ⁷⁷ Katrina Wilson, "Measles Brought Back to Northern Alberta," *Northern Pioneer*, 7 June 2000, 7; Bob Doerksen, "Mumps Outbreak in La Crete," *Northern Pioneer*, 27 February 2002, 7.