

## **Ethnicity and Piety Among Alberta's "German" Baptists**

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One of Alberta's major Baptist unions has a definite ethnic origin among German immigrants. Strongly acculturated since its beginnings in the 1890s, it reflects many of the ambiguities of religion in Canada and the United States in addition to the complexities of Europe's politics and Christianity. Although the North American Baptist Conference (NAB)<sup>1</sup> warrants attention because of its historic ethnicity and because it is the largest (by a slight margin) of the Baptist bodies in Alberta (see Appendix I), of greater interest to the church historian is the way in which the NABs serve as a case study in transatlantic evangelicalism and the varied theological currents of the twentieth century.

The first GBs in Alberta homesteaded south of Edmonton in 1889. They were part of the massive Russian-German emigration motivated by changing policies toward the czars' once-favoured settlers. They brought with them the subculture of the German diaspora and the specific Baptist ethos developed by nineteenth-century evangelicalism in Eastern Europe.

### ***The German "Diaspora" in Eastern Europe***

German people spread eastward along the Baltic coast as the Hanseatic merchant League arose in the eleventh century. Permanent German populations accumulated in coastal shipping points and along the former Viking routes into the interior of what are today Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. Post-Reformation politics ensured a

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permanent Prussian hegemony in the Baltics, fluctuating with its own and Polish, Lithuanian and Russian dynastic vicissitudes.

Poland's kings during the seventeenth century invited Flemish and Frisian Anabaptists to apply their wetlands-drainage technology and agricultural skills to make the Marienburg coastal marshes around Danzig productive. To encourage this immigration, the Mennonites received special privileges which later were confirmed in perpetuity.<sup>2</sup> Although the bulk of nineteenth-century German emigration came to North America and a few were attracted to South America (Brazil and Paraguay) in the aftermath of the Napoleonic upheavals, thousands of Germans resettled to eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> This German "diaspora" were for the most part, farmers, small businessmen, artisans and craftsmen accustomed to cottage industry.

The three great powers of the eighteenth century – Prussia, Russia and Austria – all developed similar strategies for the "inner colonization" of hereditary and newly-acquired territories in order to increase productivity, expand agricultural development, create wealth, improve native crafts and industry, and secure regional control. First western Poland, then Volhynia and Galicia, finally the Volga, Transcaucasus, Crimea and Ukraine were the major regions the respective governments sought to colonize. By inducements of land grants, goods, travel assistance, even cash payments, the governments wooed the citizens of other nations or tempted their own subjects to relocate. Immigrants would be free to practice their respective religions as well as to establish schools in their vernacular.<sup>4</sup>

The Protestant diaspora Germans organized synodical structures in the places where population density permitted. However, most congregations were small and less than affluent so resident pastors were few; the ministers served a number of points. This scarcity of clergy left local church life for many years in the hands of lay leaders. Lutherans, for example, often depended upon the local school teacher to catechize the children, to bury the dead, to lead the weekly worship services, even to conduct Bible studies and prayer meetings. A variety of devotional books and postils (sermons for the church year) were available for these purposes. An ordained pastor would perform confirmations, weddings, and Eucharist when he visited each congregation on his "circuit."

Roman Catholic settlers were served by their priests in comparable circuits; the native population had traditional access to the Russian Orthodox ministry. The Mennonites developed system of church organization that (by state-church standards) was an entirely lay ministry.

### *Nineteenth-century Continental Evangelicalism*

Baptist growth among diaspora Germans in eastern Europe is primarily a part of the larger nineteenth-century evangelical movement on the continent. Anglo-american evangelicalism stirred all of Europe in the nineteenth century. The evangelical message, however much caricatured, is a restatement of the basic Protestant principle of salvation by grace through faith. Evangelicals understand that to be a Christian one must repent of sin and believe Christ has atoned for sin, “my sin.” Christianity, like any set of ideas and behaviours, easily becomes habit and custom; conviction is often nominal. Evangelicalism, by its call to conversion and faith, challenged nominal confession and sought to normalize intentional Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

Evangelical enthusiasm for piety and good works attracted aristocrats and peasants, whether Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, even the occasional Roman Catholic. It was in large measure a lay movement. Bible and tract societies arose to provide edifying and evangelistic literature in the homelands and in the eastern colonies. It built on existing Pietist institutions but pressed into other locales, in partnership with the Pietists or on their own initiative. For practical reasons, evangelicals usually ignored confessional issues and distinctions.<sup>6</sup> However, nineteenth-century Baptists, Methodists and Darbyists couched the evangelical message in distinctive ecclesiological proposals.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to such formal efforts, evangelicalism also flowed into Europe through the pens of immigrants to North America who here were confronted with the energy and novelty of revivalism and a Wesleyanized nineteenth-century church life: “. . . countless family connections across the Atlantic . . . had developed with the emigrants. Millions of people were connecting links; and by means of letters, literature, and visits to the homelands, Europe was influenced.”<sup>8</sup>

The new activism and revivalism joined easily with the Pietist sympathies found in significant measure throughout the German and Swedish diaspora no less than in their west European homelands to generate a distinctive *Erweckungsbewegung* or *Réveil*. With or without Pietist predispositions, people everywhere experienced spiritual renewal; and each new convert became a witness to spread the awakening.

In southern Russia, an evangelical Lutheran, Eduard Wuest, became

the agent of revival among Mennonites that produced the “Mennonite Brethren Churches” and the “Krimmer Mennonite Brethren.”<sup>9</sup> In Poland, a newly-converted Lutheran schoolmaster, G.F. Alf, heard about Prussian Baptists and invited them to come give advice to his evangelical Bible study group that was beginning to question the practice of infant baptism.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, evangelical colporteur-evangelists sparked an awakening that resulted in the formation of a new church or a Baptist missionary came with deliberate intent.

There was both official and popular resistance to this European evangelicalism. Synods disciplined; governments imprisoned, fined and banished; mobs disrupted services and abused leaders and followers; families disavowed children and siblings. A sort of new “history of martyrs” developed that detailed injustice and hostility, suffering and heroism in apostolic and apocalyptic terms. Evangelicals who left the traditional churches to become Baptists or Darbyists were particular objects of opprobrium. As “new Donatists” they added “schism” and “rebaptism” to their “enthusiasm” and thus offended law as well as taste.

### ***Baptists Amidst the Evangelical Revival***

The “churchly” evangelicals had to endure this intolerance in both western and eastern Europe. Thus continental Baptists began in a situation of harassment. This circumstance, once the upheavals of the 1850s subsided into an uneasy, often suspicious public toleration, often disposed them to a quietest attitude.

Nineteenth-century evangelicalism infused the older Pietist, Puritan, and confessional hymnody with a new fervour; it embraced the eighteenth-century Wesleyan hymnody as its own, and it forged a new style of “Gospel song.” German Baptists adopted the revival and Sunday School hymnody made accessible by Walter Rauschenbusch. The American-born GB pastor and professor at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, translated many of the songs of Sankey, Crosby and others. Music in a gospel mood marked GB worship and evangelism, and nurtured piety in family devotions. Fiddles and guitars often accompanied congregational singing even in the poorer meeting places. Likewise choirs for women, men, youth and children appeared early in the development of most churches.

Baptist ecclesiology required general participation and the cultivation of local leadership. But the Baptist Union in Germany also supported

itinerant workers, gifted as evangelists and church planters, whose influence standardized programs, understandings and practices.

The members of the scattered village fellowships were reckoned members of the central church in the region. So the “church” experience of many was customarily a “house church” one. Consequently, the gathering of the whole church in its central location, by its very rarity, became a powerful experience of worship and fellowship.

Evangelicals tend to be biblicists. German Baptists, too, were “people of the Book” in a pietistic way. Access to higher education was difficult for the diaspora Germans; the Baptists especially were not often landed, wealthy or prominent. Evangelical literature was devotional rather than critical, homiletical rather than scholarly. Spurgeon was highly regarded.

These descriptions of GB life in the small towns and farming villages of eastern Europe shared the styles of life, worship and church activity in the German “homeland.” Both were influenced by anglo-american evangelical standards in reaction to the perceived apathy and impotence of the state-churches from which the first generation of converts came.

### ***German Baptists within North American Evangelicalism***

The founders of Alberta’s GB churches arrived in two significant stages from the German diaspora and the homeland: pioneer homesteaders (1880-1920), and post-World War II refugees (1950s). Each wave brought and reinforced the basic ethos just described. These newcomers also merged into the structures that North America’s GBs had built and for whom the larger North American evangelical ethos had been determinative since these ethnic churches began.<sup>11</sup>

German Baptist churches in North America appeared in the 1840s among immigrants to New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. Immigrant German evangelicals, and agents of the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) assigned to evangelize the new Americans, won converts and formed them into churches. The pastors of five GB churches in New York, Pennsylvania and Ontario assembled in Philadelphia in 1851 to plan a comprehensive strategy. Only after the American Civil War which had interrupted immigration were there a significant number of Germans who came to North America as Baptists; for the first twenty-five

years of the movement, it was a movement peopled by Lutherans, Reformed and Roman Catholics who embraced a new way of being Christian after arriving in the new country.

The new convention quickly took up the evangelical concern that Christian workers be theologically educated. German Baptists were giving rudimentary training to their missionaries and ministers in Hamburg. Rochester Theological Seminary inaugurated a German department and called Walter Rauschenbusch's revered father to the first chair. August Rauschenbusch was a devout, university-trained German Lutheran Pietist who had been persuaded to Baptist principles while German secretary of the American Tract Society. The pattern of education he instituted (and that his students who later joined him on the faculty preserved) "was almost entirely biblical. There was little, if any, work in the formal discipline of theological dogma in the curriculum designed by Rauschenbusch."<sup>12</sup>

By 1889 (when the first NAB church was organized in western Canada at Ebenezer, SK), the NAB "General Conference" had five regional conferences totalling 182 churches and missions with 15,049 members. Although they depended on the assistance of the ABHMS and the American Baptist Publication Society (ABPS), their ethnic associations kept them self-consciously distinct from the bodies whose help was so valuable.

English-speaking Canadian Baptists also supported German (and Swedish) Baptist work in the west. Alexander Grant, pastor (1889-97) of Winnipeg's First Baptist Church, and C.C. McLaurin, missionary-at-large and superintendent (1901-26) of what became the Baptist Union of Western Canada (BUWC), were strong advocates of evangelism among immigrants. This local encouragement, however, was less influential than the ethnic links to the American evangelical milieu. Conference offices, the Rochester seminary and the preponderance of memberships (only about 30% of NABs today are in Canadian churches) has ensured that the NAB centre of gravity is in the United States.

### ***German Baptist Settlement in Alberta Pioneering: 1890-1920***

German Baptist work in Alberta fits into the story of the province's development. "Russification" of czarist territories and Austro-Hungarian political setbacks were jeopardizing German privileges just at the time

Canada and the United States were intensifying efforts to draw immigrants to the North American prairies.<sup>13</sup> Arriving in the territorial period, GB pioneers in Alberta and the southwestern corner of Saskatchewan organized nearly twenty-five churches in the years before World War I. These were spread in a crescent from south and east of Medicine Hat through Calgary, north to Edmonton and eastward again wherever concentrations of Germans accumulated. The earliest, Rabbit Hill, was organized southwest of Edmonton in 1892; the latest, now Grace Baptist of Calgary, got its start twenty years later.

The first Baptist families moved into the Heimthal area south of Edmonton in 1889, scattering among Moravians and Lutherans. Some came directly from Europe; some had tried making a livelihood in the Winnipeg area for a time. Most had tried to farm the arid townships south of Irvine and Dunmore; at least one had gone to Texas first, before hearing of more favourable prospects in Alberta.<sup>14</sup>

Seventeen charter members organized the Heimthal (now Rabbit Hill) Baptist Church in 1892. It functioned according to the continental Baptist patterns of a village house church; the leadership was shared by the men and services included singing, Scripture reading, prayers and sermon. But it deliberately identified itself with existing Baptist bodies by inviting NABs from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the United States as well as Canadian Baptists to a recognition council. "Following the lead" of Baptists already organized in Canada may be seen as both willing acculturation and due to minority status.

Only after the Rabbit Hill church was organized and recognized did its first pastor arrive. The pastor who came was F.A. Mueller, a GB missionary in Volhynia until the summer of 1892. The congregation he left had commissioned him to locate a place for them to settle in "America." After Mueller undertook his ministry with the newly organized church, he also made arrangements for his Volhynian flock to come. The next year more than thirty families arrived, the majority settling about twenty-five kilometres southeast of Heimthal, in the Fredericksheim neighbourhood south of Leduc.

This congregation was the easiest to organize of the several evangelistic preaching points Mueller was trying to establish. The Rabbit Hill church letter to the Northwestern Conference of July 1893 reported:

The church holds its worship services in Heimthal and Leduc which

are well attended. In the city of Edmonton, we hold a service twice a month; and once [a month] in Wetaskiwin. The prayer meetings enjoy lively participation. The church is united in love. The Sunday School is being blessed. This is a good field for the distribution of Bibles, Testaments, and tracts.<sup>15</sup>

The church life and the pastor's outreach matched the Old World customs and New World expectations.

The distance from Rabbit Hill and the large number of GBs in Friedrickheim justified an independent congregation; in 1894, 141 members were dismissed from Rabbit Hill to found the new church. The large charter membership at Leduc is unique. Of fourteen opening rolls of churches organized before 1920, the average is twenty-one, and the largest only thirty-two.

Congregations among the immigrants did not always begin in the same manner. While some gathered the Baptists from among the newcomers to the area, others arose from the efforts of a single Baptist family. West of Edmonton an immigrant homesteader-preacher, Edward Wolfe, began to farm in the Glory Hills neighbourhood. These Volhynians were primarily German Reformed. They did not organize a church immediately but held weekly lay-lead Sunday School and worship services. Wolfe took the opportunity when speaking at these community services to plant seeds of Baptist concerns – personal conversion, separation from the world, believer's baptism and the like. The procedure is reminiscent of how revival first came to many eastern European villages through an awakened Lutheran teacher and how Baptist congregations subsequently formed. In 1901, from among the Reformed Christians in the area, several families organized themselves into a Baptist church.<sup>16</sup>

Mueller's successor as pastor at Rabbit Hill was a former Swiss Methodist, Abraham Hager. He succeeded in founding a NAB church in the city only after he left the country site and made his home there. The nucleus of the First GB Church of Edmonton (1900) were the young women from the Leduc and Rabbit Hill churches who worked as domestic servants and clerks in the two towns straddling the North Saskatchewan River; the immigrating tradesmen were the prospects whom the minister cultivated. Hager helped people to find housing and employment and to deal with government offices; he also faithfully presented the Gospel and nurtured the saints.<sup>17</sup> Early meetings were in the city firehouse and in the



newly built First Baptist Church.

During the first decade of the century, three congregations were organized by Baptists who were not direct Old World immigrants. Since the 1880s, many Russian-Germans from settlements along the Black Sea around Odessa (Moldavia and southern Ukraine) had chosen to settle in the US and prospered in Oregon and the Dakotas. By 1900, Canadian land promoters were able to attract some GBs across the 49th Parallel to the Camrose, Trochu and Carbon areas. Such immigrants were quite acculturated to New World conditions and wealthier than new arrivals direct from Europe. German Baptist growth continued to conform to settlement patterns in the province.

These churches usually shared pastors; more often, they had to conduct their spiritual lives under lay leadership, for pastoral placements among them were short and irregular. The regional fellowship they organized in 1916 (the Saskatchewan-Alberta Central Association) welded them together and sustained their determination in the hard times ahead.

Mission assistance from the GB Home Mission Society in Illinois and from the Baptist Union of Western Canada (BUWC) was essential to support most pastors and construct church buildings and parsonages. Perhaps because they were dependent on this outside help, even the "settled" preachers were astonishingly peripatetic; on foot, by buggy and by train, they ranged far beyond the natural borders of their own church community to edify and to redeem.

Three types of fulltime itinerant ministers were employed by the GB Conference to plant and nurture churches in pioneer areas. A colporteur was a Bible, tract and literature salesman. As he peddled books, he was an evangelist, a gatherer of GBs, a Bible teacher and prayer group leader with an eye to organizing them into a Baptist church.

The second, the *Reiseprediger*, was a conference or district missionary; he served the pastorless churches as advisor and preacher. He built on the colporteur's work and other leads to establish new congregations, also.

The third itinerant provided by the denomination was an evangelist, available to churches anywhere in Canada or the United States for special meetings. Several times the conference evangelist held memorable campaigns in Alberta churches. Churches were not dependent upon a professional for evangelistic outreach, however. Every pastor was expected to be an evangelist. Annual crusades were customary, usually lead by a visiting pastor from elsewhere in the province, sometimes by the local pastor

himself. Apart from sustaining evangelical zeal, these services always succeeded in bringing the church's children and neighbours to declare their faith in Christ and soon to join the fellowship.

Frontier conditions required this kind of organization of all the denominations ministering on the prairies, of course. The eastern European immigrants came with generations of experience in beginning and maintaining a viable church life amidst pioneer conditions. The Baptists in particular were familiar with the ethos of evangelicalism and flourished in a social and political environment that encouraged free churches. They had the special boon of an existing ethnic denominational fellowship whose half century of experience in the New World forestalled fruitless experimentation and provided a framework for foreign and domestic mission as well as for a trained ministry. But in general outlines, the methods, the organization and the piety they brought from eastern Europe was largely congruent with the patterns in use by the Germans who already had a fifty-year history in North America.

This first period of GB development in homestead and town had planted eighteen churches; only Calgary seemed hopeless as the sabres rattled for World War I. The largely rural GB churches, generally, experienced no problems as a result of the Alien Enemies Act. Their perceived "spiritual arrogance" caused more resentment among their neighbours than did their ethnicity. But that was a response now so familiar as almost to be expected. Canada's political situation ensured that at least there were no physical or civil risks in leaving one's childhood church. Yet, especially for those of Lutheran or Roman Catholic background, there continued to be powerful family pressure against "going to the Baptists."

Educated in public schools, the children were being Canadianized; and the churches even without the pressure of wartime hysteria were moving toward English. In language, organization and style of church life, GBs quickly naturalized. The Germans, generally, were disposed to assimilate. Contradictorily, Sunday Schools often were utilized to teach the German language as much as Scripture lessons, but the principles and standards of the Sunday School movement were pushed by *Der Sendbote* and other NAB denominational publications. Young people's societies provided leadership training for the coming generation.

***Consolidating: 1920-1950***

The years 1920-50 saw the foundation of only seven new churches but it was a period of great national change in which all the churches shared. The key social events were the drought and depression of the 1930s and World War II. The Canadian prairie churches in the second period kept pace with the institutional developments of their convention in ways sometimes distinctive to this region.

The GB churches in these years were getting older and bigger; they were beginning to urbanize (or at least “town-ize”) as farmers retired and their children entered businesses and professions. The 1930s forced massive relocations throughout the province as farms dried out and small towns shrivelled across once lush prairies. While two areas gained GB churches as a result, other areas lost.

With the help of the CPR and CN, GBs organized an Immigration and Colonization Society (hereafter NABICS) in 1929 to assist newcomers fleeing “Bolshevism.”<sup>18</sup> The railroads were the primary solicitors for the newcomers and their indiscriminate selections created religious tensions in host families when those they sponsored turned out to be Lutheran, Reformed or Roman Catholic, and indifferent or even hostile to Baptist convictions. Although the churches gained little, the temporary labourers and dependents were welcomed as a mission field brought to their door.

The denomination organized a Young People’s and Sunday School Worker’s Union (YPSSU) in 1922. An innovation stylistically patterned on structures used by other denominations, it also preserved the long-standing evangelical concern for developing spiritual maturity in the next generation. Its practical benefit to NABs was “in conserving the young people for the denomination and in assisting in the transition from the German to the English language.”<sup>19</sup> The Bible school movement was one specific outcome of this denominational decision.

In 1929, the Northern Conference (NABs of western Canada) adopted a plan to hold four-week Bible schools in each of its four associations to supplement the occasional provincial youth rallies and the short Bible schools held previously.<sup>20</sup> This became a key instrument in the NAB evangelical agenda of discipleship, church leadership and witnessing. A local church hosted teachers and students for several weeks. In the daytime, courses in Bible, teaching skills, instrumental and vocal music, conducting and the devotional life were taught by pastors from the

participating churches and guest lecturers; evenings were given over to evangelistic meetings at which the instructors preached and the young people sang, played and testified.

These “floating” Bible schools contributed greatly to knowledge, skills, friendships and marriages. For a few years after 1933, the NABs used the building in Wetaskiwin that the Swedish Baptists had purchased for similar purposes. Finally, land was purchased in Edmonton and a residential school constructed in 1939 – the Christian Training Institute (CTI). Courses were extended and care could be given to developing faculty and library. Since the first course in January 1940, the school has united the NAB churches and contributed to their growth, especially in Alberta. CTI (since 1968, North American Baptist College) has not so much answered the “threat” of better-known Bible schools as given a denominational alternative with a different piety and direction for service.

Apart from the immigrant pastors and early conference workers recruited from the Alberta churches in the first twenty years of GB work here, virtually all the pastors serving in Alberta after 1910 were alumni of the German Department of Rochester Theological Seminary. This education at a single seminary created a cohesion and institutional homogeneity not only in Alberta but also across the denomination which has been of incalculable influence in its corporate life until the past twenty years.

The thirty years from 1920-50 also shook the heirs of North American nineteenth-century evangelicalism deeply. The NABs, however, in great measure escaped the fundamentalist controversy, though it has been marked by it. Administratively and structurally, for reasons more pragmatic than principled, the NABs agencies had progressively taken on lives of their own, independent of the American and Canadian Baptist bodies who had contributed so much to their beginnings. By 1919, for example, the NABs had reached such a level of prosperity that the BUWC contributions to NAB home mission efforts were no longer necessary. North American Baptists, by default, received from their European brethren an African mission after World War I. The Rochester seminary was entirely NAB-run with only tenuous connections to its mother institution.

While a few in the 1940s tried to raise issues at the triennial conventions in imitation of those which had divided Northern and Canadian Baptists in the 1920s, the NAB pursued a stance both irenic and conservative, consistent with their older evangelical and Pietist roots and found no one to pillory or idolize. Adolf Schlatter’s biblical writings appear on

GB pastors' bookshelves more frequently than does Ritschl, Harnack or Troeltsch.<sup>21</sup> Doubts about the theological integrity of the seminary faculty were dramatically resolved by moving the school from the tainted Rochester area to antiseptic Sioux Falls, SD. Leaders and churches were influenced by fundamentalist rhetoric simply because it was the language most similar to our theological conservatism; some of the slogans became common coinage. The holiness and pentecostal churches, for example, also adopted these issues to inveigh against outsiders whose apostasy had not been prevented by the advantages provided by the Wesleyan experience. But the suspect voices to be ignored or guarded against were always located outside our circles. The problems of the NAB churches were not heresy but the age-old, everyday venality defined by Scripture and evangelical mores.

These were years for the churches' and the denomination's roots to deepen and mature. The Germanness of the churches was waning, albeit slowly. To illustrate, it was only after 1940 that the Edmonton church changed its name from "Erste deutsche Baptisten Gemeinde" to "Central Baptist Church"; in 1943, it took the major step of conducting the Sunday evening(!) service in English. The denomination dropped its ethnic label in 1946 for a name which continued to indicate that its member churches were located both in Canada and in the United States.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the period only a German Bible class for older members remained in many churches. In some cases, the pastors spoke only English. Yet the network of fellowship and ministry which had been forged in the early years still had an ethnic quality. In the post-World War II period, the ethnicity both intensified and collapsed.

### ***Changing: 1950-***

The post-war years brought optimism, prosperity, change and growth. A longtime station of the Carbon church organized as a daughter church. The rural churches outside Camrose and Wetaskiwin merged with their daughters in town. Many churches built and remodelled parsonages and churches. Churches of the first era that had never reached critical mass finally gave up the ghost but twenty new churches were born to replace them in the next twenty years.

Suburbanization became a trend in the larger cities. Central Baptist, Edmonton, organized two daughter churches in 1951. Lauderdale had been

a northside mission station for many years; McKernan was built in the south near CTI to draw NAB families spreading into the southern developments of the city. A decade later, Central released 70 members to found Capilano Baptist.

Some of this outgrowth would have developed in any case, but, conjecturally, it would not have occurred as did had it not been for the massive immigration of Germans displaced during World War II and its aftermath. Generous relief shipments of food and clothing first forged ties of compassion. Then Canada opened her doors to the refugees. The GBs who came from eastern Europe and from Germany itself brought (and encountered) a differently developed ethos than had their forebears. Many were Baptists in the Old Country, although evangelism among the immigrants was effective.

Over 7,000 were assisted entirely or in part by the re-activated NABICS which worked closely with the Baptist World Alliance refugee service.<sup>23</sup> Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge were the three major centres of influx in Alberta with some gains also in Medicine Hat. As Abraham Hager had done in Edmonton fifty years before, Henry Pfeiffer, Central's pastor from 1950-56, now energetically duplicated. He met immigrants at the train depot, found housing, directed them to employment and accompanied them to government offices. His energy, and above all, his evangelistic challenge astounded, overwhelmed and persuaded the newcomers of the claims of Christ; so by conversion and baptism as well as transfers of church letters, church membership mushroomed. Numerically, the new Canadians came to outnumber the old ones, so in Calgary, Edmonton and Medicine Hat the churches which welcomed them soon took on the complexion of the newcomers.

The established NAB churches suffered numerous strains over the recent arrivals. The new freedoms, the unfamiliar ways, the Canadianness of the welcoming churches, the different customs and standards even among the immigrants, the strong personalities of lay leaders and pastors now coming from Europe, and numerous more subtle differences generated tensions which could not be contained. These contributed in part to the formation of the new English-speaking NAB churches mentioned above.

But old "First German Baptist" could not retain even all of the immigrants, due in part to cultural differences between Volksdeutsche and Reichsdeutsche among them. Calgary spawned two German and one English-speaking daughters between 1953 and 1960, largely as a result of

the inflexibility and insensitivity of its Canadian-born pastor. In Medicine Hat, the more Canadianized families also left to found a new church. Even before Pfeiffer left Edmonton, a German group had withdrawn to form a church more to their liking; on the heels of his resignation, another church was organized by some of the recent arrivals. Two other “German” churches were organized in the 1960s.

The post-war years also brought the inauguration of a conference-wide “church extension program,” a new version of the pioneering “home missions.” Leaders recognized that the immigrants would inevitably (and probably more rapidly) follow the same process of acculturation which the existing NAB churches had undergone. They also saw that while the move to the suburbs threatened to drain the membership of established NAB churches, it also offered opportunities for evangelism and new churches. So, as in the first generations, aid was solicited for pastors’ salaries, land purchase and building construction, and Alberta NAB churches therefore set about starting new churches in growing areas of cities where there were existing churches who could “mother” the infant effort. Soon the vision expanded to encompass growing communities that seemed to lack any strong evangelical ministries. Ethnicity provided only the institutional base for support; it was irrelevant to the constituency of the new churches.

While church-planting was ethnically open, institutions from the ethnic era kept earlier spirituality alive. CTI continued to encourage spiritual growth and to train lay leaders. Increasingly, however, it served as a stepping stone to university and, hence, for the urbanization of the farm-reared. Likewise, it aided in the assimilation of the immigrants. They wanted Bible training, but they also needed high school diplomas and English language skills.

Some of the students also felt called to pastoral ministry. But many of these young men lacked the academic foundations for a full seminary program and the Bible school courses were designed to train students for lay roles. So in 1958, a three-year undergraduate theological course for men(!) to “serve our Canadian churches in a bilingual capacity” was approved.<sup>24</sup> Within a decade, the restriction on pastoral training to “German-speaking” candidates was dropped; in addition, a new BRE program admitted women. The school was renamed North American Baptist College and relocated. The undergraduate pastoral training matured, in 1980, into a full post-baccalaureate seminary (renamed “Edmonton Baptist Seminary” ten years later).

Until EBS began its MDiv programs, NABS in Sioux Falls continued to inculcate the nuanced evangelicalism of the NABs in the pastoral candidates who were, for the most part, drawn from and sent into NAB churches. The GB heritage was maintained even though the faculty composition was changing.

To what degree ethnicity remains a vital characteristic of NAB congregations is difficult to assess. Virtually all the churches which grew out of the post-war immigrations, and in some cases were begun in trauma to preserve the German traditions, have faced and survived the transition to English. Ironically, the two oldest urban churches, Central (Edmonton) and Grace (Calgary), are the most German of the surviving ten elders (Central is also the most stylistically diverse in its five Sunday worship services). The call to German immigrants has been replaced with a vision for growing places; church extension remains a major concern, rooted in the nineteenth-century evangelical agenda though shaped by twentieth-century church growth ideology. The issues of North American evangelicalism are increasingly the issues of North American Baptists.

### ***Conclusion***

The more than 8,100 NABs in Alberta, assembled in more than fifty churches, “are the heirs of heroic efforts among immigrant pioneers on prairie and in woodland.”<sup>25</sup> Several strands interweave, mostly ignored, in their structures and character. They are very much a part of the wider story of Alberta’s development and the larger story of German immigration over 100 years. More significant, as has been sketched here, is the spiritual milieu of continental and American evangelicalism. As I have observed elsewhere, “it is not [our] ethnicity, but [our] Baptistness which stands in jeopardy” precisely because “the ethos which first addressed and has constantly nourished us was the much-transformed Anglo-American evangelicalism of the mid-nineteenth century [on the continent] and the successive permutations it has undergone since then, particularly in the United States.”<sup>26</sup>

Nearly fifteen years ago, the senior professional NAB historian commented on the theological tensions that then disturbed the NABC over “inerrancy” (now the issue is, euphemistically, “women in ministry”). As a theologically conservative and experientially Pietistic body, he said, we have intellectually embraced the neo-evangelical scholasticism of Princeton



theology and the struggle to hold it together with the older evangelical Pietism from which we sprang is generating undefined tensions among us.<sup>27</sup> With the dilution of the ethnic character of the conference, the issues of the enveloping North American evangelicalism are gaining in strength among NABs.

North American Baptists have distinctively interwoven continental and North American nineteenth-century evangelicalism while being sensitive to (and bewildered by?) the twentieth-century transformations of the movement. Ethnicity cannot guarantee that they will preserve the former balance, but the cultural, ethnic and evangelical diversity currently contained within the denomination makes the institutional unity much more fragile than NABs took for granted in the earlier times of spiritual homogeneity.

### **Endnotes**

1. The official title of the German Baptist denomination in Canada and the United States since 1946. "GB" will be used when ethnicity is the identifier, and "NAB" when their church institutions are the referent.
2. J.J. Hildebrand, *Hildebrand's Zeittafel* (Winnipeg: by the author, 1945), 7-20.
3. Mack Walker, *Germany and the Emigration, 1816-1885*, Harvard Historical Monographs, 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).
4. R.P. Bartlett, *Human Capital: The Settlement of Foreigners in Russia, 1762-1804* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 59; cf. J. Töws, "Foreword," in *Unsere Kolonien: Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte und Statistik der ausländischen Kolonization in Russland*, by A. Klaus, tr. J. Töws [from Russian] (Odessa: Odessaer Zeitung, 1887), v.
5. Mark A. Noll, David Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles and Beyond, 1700-1990* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1993); and George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994) regrettably ignored the continental concern of the nineteenth-century evangelicals and treated the movement only in the United Kingdom and its former colonies.

6. “. . . [T]he very nature of the evangelical coalition . . . demanded that they settle for a truncated doctrine of the church” (Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 165).
7. The Baptist movement began during the seventeenth century among expatriate English separatists in Holland was not an English version of the sixteenth-century Täufer movement, although as both the Arminian and the Calvinistic Baptists arose, each consulted with Dutch Mennonites on the administration (not the theology) of baptism. Thus, more than two centuries after the first Swiss Täufer group appeared and more than one century after the first English Baptist church was organized Johann Gerhard Oncken organized the first continental Baptist church at Hamburg in 1834.
8. Gunnar Westin, *The Free Church through the Ages* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958), 277. The Swedish original is entitled, *Den kristna friförsamlingen genom tiderna* (1954), and the German version translation is called, *Geschichte des Freikirchentums* (Kassel: J.G. Oncken Verlag, 1956).
9. Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), 204-27.
10. Joseph Lehmann, *Geschichte der deutschen Baptisten*, vol. 2 (Cassel: J.G. Oncken Nachfolger, 1900), 231-33.
11. Frank H. Woyke, *Heritage and Ministry of the North American Baptist Conference* (Oakbrook Terrace, IL: North American Baptist Conference, [1976]); Edward B. Link, “North American (German) Baptists” in *Baptists in Canada*, ed. Jarold K. Zeman (Burlington, ON: Welch, 1980), 87-103. A sabbatical in 1989 allowed me to make personal visits to several of these early churches to collect church histories, interviews, archival materials and impressions.
12. Stephen Brachlow, “A Perspective on the Pietistic Heritage of North American Baptists and the Current Inerrancy Discussion”, Paper presented at the Great Plains Pastors’ Conference, North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, SD, 22 April 1980, 9.
13. Heinz Lehmann, *The German Canadians, 1750-1939*, tr. Gerhard P. Bassler (1937; reprint, St. John’s: Jespersen Press, 1986); J.N. McCrorie, “Historical Background to Prairie Settlement,” in *Visions of the New Jerusalem*, ed., Benjamin G. Smillie (Edmonton: NeWest, 1983), 13-26.

14. James G. MacGregor, *A History of Alberta*, rev. ed. (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1981), 165-66; Howard Palmer with Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990), 72; Helen Hieberts, et al, eds., *South Edmonton Saga* (Edmonton: South Edmonton, Papaschase Historical Society, 1984), 610-11, 950, 1046-47.
15. *Verhandlungen*, Nordwestliche Konferenz (1893), 100. The Northwestern Conference at that time comprised the churches of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and “the British Northwest.” In 1902, the churches in the three prairie provinces withdrew to form the Northern Conference.
16. Nora Albrecht and Doris Horne, eds., *Along the Fifth* (Stony Plain: Stony Plain Historical Society, 1982), 105; *Verhandlungen*, Nördliche Konferenz (1905), 4, 9-10.
17. Minnie A. Falkenberg [daughter of Abr. Hager], “Beginning of Our Church Work Here in Edmonton”, manuscript of public address, 1956.
18. William J.H. Sturhahn, *The Came From East and West . . .* (Winnipeg: North American Baptist Immigration and Colonization Society, 1976), 289-93.
19. Woyke, *Heritage*, 299.
20. *Verhandlungen*, Nördliche Konferenz, (1929), 32; (1930), 62.
21. As was a late nineteenth/early twentieth-century “mediating”-style theologian who stood rather alone in his concern for NT studies to transcend the mere study of technical problems, see *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1957), ca. 1420.
22. From “General Conference of German Baptist Churches in North America” to “North American Baptist General Conference;” “General” was dropped in the 1960s when regional conferences were discontinued.
23. Sturhahn, *From East and West*, 65-117.
24. *Minutes of the 32nd General Conference Sessions* (1958), 39.
25. David T. Priestley, “Baptist ‘Home Mission’ among Alberta’s German Immigrants,” unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Baptist Heritage Conference, North American Baptist College, unpublished paper, June 1990, 22.
26. Priestley, “Baptist ‘Home Mission,’” 23.
27. Brachlow, “Pietistic Heritage of North American Baptists,” 1.

### Appendix I

Canada's Baptists are organized into five denominational groups with countless additional independent congregations of a baptistic polity that may or may not use the name "Baptist" in their official title. The Baptist Union of Western Canada (BUWC), as part of the Baptist Federation of Canada, is the oldest and historically within the nineteenth-century "mainline" Protestant churches. Two other Baptist bodies originated out of the theological controversies that strained the BUWC in the late 1920s – the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches (FEBC) and the Canadian Conference of Southern Baptists (CCSB). The two remaining conferences derive from evangelism and church-planting among non-British immigrants that began at the end of the nineteenth century – the North American Baptist Conference (NABC) has a German heritage; the Baptist General Conference (BGC) has a Swedish. Both are fully assimilated into the Canadian milieu and, particularly in suburban congregations, are as ethnically diverse as the country itself. The NABC, however, unlike the BGC, has kept its European heritage more visible (and audible) because it received repeated immigrant infusions after the first spate of growth in the territorial period.

In 1992, the cumulative total membership recorded by the five Baptist denominations in the province was 20,300, a mere .8% of a total population of 2,545,553 (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup> Three-fourths of these belong either to the NABC or the BUWC.

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1. This figure is significantly below the 3% of the province's 2.2 million residents who in 1981 identified themselves as Baptists. Conjecturally, the Baptist practice of restricting membership to self-confessed believers and not counting children and nominal adherents overlooks many who are reckoned as Baptist for census purposes, while unaffiliated congregations (and their adherents) will account for another part of the difference.

*Table 1. Membership of Five Baptist Bodies in Alberta (1992)<sup>1</sup>*

	BUWC	NABC	BGC	FEBC	CCSB	TOTALS
Members	6,911	8,106	1,696	1,881	1,706	20,300
Churches	49	47	19	30	15	160
Missions	6	4	NR	2	6	16 <sup>2</sup>
Locales	30	29	13	25	10	79 <sup>3</sup>

## Appendix II

All the members of the scattered village fellowships were reckoned members of the central church in the region. Hence, the 1898 statistics for the Baptists organized by then into three associations show average memberships 2.2 times the average membership of NAB church in Alberta in 1992.

ASSOC	CHS	MEMBS	BEGIN	AV.MEMB
Rus-Poland	11	3,870	1858	352
W. Russian	15	6,822	1858	455
S. Russian	11	2,465	1869	224
TOTAL	37	13,157		355

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1. Statistics later than 1992 have not been completed by all bodies. 1991 figures were used when no report was recorded for 1992. Not all bodies report "membership" in missions, so for consistency, those figures were subtracted from the totals when given by the denominational statistician (sources included the respective convention's published annual reports [1992-94]).
  2. Includes two Mustard Seed Street Church Ministries (Calgary and Edmonton) jointly supported by BUWC and NABC, reported by both bodies.
  3. This is not a simple total, because more than one conference has an organized church or mission in sixteen of Alberta's cities and towns. All five have congregations in Edmonton and Calgary; four are represented in Red Deer; three other cities have churches from three of the conventions (Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Wetaskiwin); ten have two unions serving the Baptist constituency. Uncounted independent Baptist churches cause further duplication.

