Old Colony Mennonite Women's Lives in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1940s

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Abstract: This article explores documents and photographs that record the migration of two Old Colony Mennonite women from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s. It focuses on the lives of two women, Sara Wiebe and Anna Enns, and their families. The archival materials document their arrival and travel companions. This study illustrates a researcher’s ability to analyze a limited archival record to broaden our understanding of Mennonite immigration to Mexico and the role of women in the Mennonite community at this time. Not only do these archival documents help us understand how women helped establish villages and schools in ways that conformed to their religious beliefs, but they also show us that they were migrating for better or different economic and professional futures as well as for preserving family bonds. This expands the existing story of Mennonite emigration from Canada to Mexico and the existing scholarship on Mennonite women at that time. [Abstract by author.]

Keywords: Religion in Mexico; Mennonite women; Low German Mennonites; Russian Mennonites

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INTRODUCTION

In 1925, Sara Wiebe, her husband, Franz, and their children migrated from Canada to Mexico. The 36-year-old would have boarded a train near her home in Manitoba and then traveled to Texas before crossing the border and reaching her final destination in the state of Chihuahua in Northwestern Mexico. There, near the present-day city of Cuauhtémoc, she settled among thousands of other Mennonites, including some members of her husband’s family. Migrating as part of a larger community was a pattern not unfamiliar to Sara Wiebe; yet, it was outside of the norm for migration to Mexico. It was so unusual, in fact, that the Mexican government created an entirely new paper trail to track this group.

The Mexican government created a special document, “Lista de inmigrantes menonitas/List of Mennonite Emigrants” to record the Mennonites’ arrival in Mexico in the 1920s. A few years later, that government developed foreign resident cards that were used to record the presence of all foreigners living in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1940s. Historian Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp has analyzed thousands of foreign resident cards that belonged to immigrants that would now be called Arab or Muslim, in order to tell the larger story of immigration to Mexico. Elsewhere in my work, I have examined some foreign resident cards that record the presence of Mennonites and Mormons to shed light on their experiences in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. No scholar, however, has considered the passenger lists and foreign resident cards that belonged to immigrants that would now be called Arab or Muslim, in order to tell the larger story of immigration to Mexico. Elsewhere in my work, I have examined some foreign resident cards that record the presence of Mennonites and Mormons to shed light on their experiences in Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. No scholar, however, has considered the passenger lists and photographs that occasionally accompany those documents. Most studies of Mennonites in this time period, moreover, focus on the role of male church leaders in migration. This article thus expands existing research by attending to the lives of everyday people. I propose that examining the passenger lists and foreign resident cards in their historical context and focusing on the presence of two Mennonite women and their families in these documents yields a better understanding of the Mennonite community’s departure from Canada and their first two decades of life in Mexico.

MENNONITES IN CANADA

The majority of Mennonites who migrated to Mexico, like Sara Wiebe, belonged to the Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde, or Old Colony Mennonite Church. Like most Anabaptists, this church traces its history to the Radical Reformation. Members of what later became this group originated in the Netherlands in the 16th century before moving to what is now Poland, then on to Chortitza [Khortitsa], which was the first and oldest Mennonite colony in Ukraine. In the late 19th century, about 8,000 Mennonites emigrated from Ukraine to Canada, including Franz Wiebe, who was Sara Wiebe’s husband. At the same time as some Mennonites migrated to Canada, about 11,000 Mennonites migrated to what are now the states of Kansas and Nebraska in the United States.

The Old Colony Church was the most conservative group that emigrated to Canada. This meant that they were the most determined to follow a separate and communal way of life. They lived in blocks of land they called colonies, which were then divided into villages. It was led by a Vorsteher or secular leader and an Aeltester or Oom, a bishop who served as the colony’s religious leader. Each village in this block of land would be on a single street, with a school, likely a church, and a village mayor. In this way, the Mennonites ran their own affairs and the secular leader would interact with the outside world as necessary. Their schools were conducted in the German language and the Old Colony Catechism, its Hymnbook, and the Bible served as the sole textbooks. Members of this Church were firm in resisting all governmental overtures about teaching English in their schools; and they had strict dress codes and rules about the use of technology.

1 This was a unique way of recording immigrants entering Mexico. People of other religious backgrounds, such as Mormons, had emigrated in groups, also seeking freedom from religious persecution, but none of them received their own type of entry documents. For more information about Mormons see B. Carmon Hardy’s Solemn Covenant.
2 Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp’s So Far from Allah, 1-8.
3 For my previous work on these documents, see Rebecca Janzen, Liminal Sovereignty, 1-32. For additional information, see Juan Manuel Herrera H.’s “Informe sobre el Grupo documental: Departamento de Migración; Registro de Extranjeros,” a 1989 report on these registration cards

4 Harry Leonard Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 267-69.
5 R. Janzen, Liminal Sovereignty, xx.
MIGRATION TO MEXICO

This separate lifestyle was not to last. Shortly after World War One (1914–18), the provincial governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where the Mennonites were living, passed laws making attendance at English-language public schools compulsory. Scholars have shown that many Mennonites in Canada understood that there were many obstacles in that country to be able to continue their way of life. William Janzen, for instance, has written extensively about the challenges Old Colony Mennonites faced. In one article, he describes his parents’ experiences as children in Saskatchewan. He recalls that his father attended public school and was forced into patriotic declarations each morning. Other Old Colony people who opted not to send their children to these schools faced heavy fines. This was clearly an untenable situation.

The most conservative people, including many members of the Old Colony Mennonite Church, opted to migrate rather than adapt to these new rules. Historians have emphasized the negotiations Mennonite leaders made with the Mexican government in order to be able to live in the ways their religious beliefs demanded. These negotiations were crucial to the Mennonites’ decision to move to that country. Between 1922 and 1926, approximately 6,000 Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan migrated to Mexico. Calvin Wall Redekop movingly describes their journey by train and celebrates that the Mennonites arrived safely in their new homeland. He claims that “Canadian Old Colony villages were literally transplanted” in Mexico. They re-established their colonies and set up schools, churches, and ways of taking care of widows and orphans. The church was led by a bishop and a council of ministers who were able to exercise more authority in Mexico than they had in Canada. They regulated many aspects of life in the colony—farm tractors with rubber tires were prohibited and village schools were carefully controlled.

MENNONITE LIFE IN MEXICO FROM THE 1920S TO THE 1940S

Mennonite leaders and scholars writing during the Mennonites’ first few decades in Canada highlight the community’s successes and the challenges they faced. Bishop Isaak M. Dyck, who had encouraged Mennonite migration to Mexico, wrote a book about the experience. He clearly understood that the Old Colony people were following God’s call when they left Canada for a new country. He was especially pleased that they could establish their own schools in Mexico. In 1945, an American Mennonite leader, J. Winfield Fretz, gave a comprehensive report on Mennonites in Mexico, in which he stated that the Mennonites were superior farmers when compared to their neighbors. Three years later, Walter Schmiedehaus, the German consul in Northwestern Mexico, called the Mennonites hardworking pioneers. He lauded the Mennonites’ success in establishing their schools, churches, and farms. These broad perspectives put the Mennonites’ experience in a positive light.

Even though these leaders had a largely positive interpretation of the Mennonite experience in Mexico, they also recognize that life was challenging. Fretz stated that:

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7 Mexican president Álvaro Obregón and Mennonite leaders signed an agreement in which the president promised that Mennonites would be exempt from military service and swearing oaths. They would be free to practice their religion in the way they chose, as well as organize their own schools and land use. For the full text see Calvin Wall Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 251. The exceptions were not an agreement, not a contract for colonization or immigration. For more information on some challenges associated with having an agreement rather than a contract, see Martina E. Will, “The Mennonite Colonization of Chihuahua,” 357n5.
8 Redekop, The Old Colony Mennonites, 17.
9 Martha Chávez Quezada, “La colonización menonita en el estado de Chihuahua,” 80-81; R. Janzen, Liminal Sovereignty, xx-xxi; Sawatzky, They Sought a Country, 62;
11 R. Janzen, Liminal Sovereignty, xx.
12 Isaak M. Dyck, Die Auswanderung der Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde von Canada nach Mexiko, 86. Much of this book quotes passages from the biblical book of Exodus as if proving that the Mennonites were a persecuted group who had to go to Mexico for safety; see, for example, 89-90.
13 J. Winfield Fretz, Mennonite Colonization in Mexico, 20.
14 Walter Schmiedehaus, Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, 146.
15 Schmiedehaus Ein feste Burg, 246.
The first ten years of life in Mexico were exceedingly difficult for the Mennonites. There was the unfamiliar climate, the strange soil, the new weather conditions … and the generally primitive conditions of living in the area in which they settled. In addition to these natural factors, the Mennonites suffered heavy financial losses…

David Quiring echoed these remarks several decades later, as he noted that the agricultural conditions of Northwestern Mexico made life for farmers accustomed to Western Canada very difficult. Historian Andrea Dyck makes a similar observation based on letters the Mennonites in Mexico wrote to a Canadian Mennonite newspaper. Their letters described the “tremendous adversity of farming in the early years, and the self-doubts [they experienced] … when faced with the hardships of pioneering.” Still other scholars have focused on the Mennonites’ land conflict with neighboring ejidos [public land], and the violence and theft the Mennonite community experienced as part of this conflict. These interpretations of Mennonite life in Mexico create a general impression of a challenging experience.

Few scholars have focused on people’s daily lives; their limited observations in this regard touch on issues of health care and a gendered division of labor. Some reports lean more towards legend than history, as in the case of José Luis Domínguez, who claims that a Mennonite woman gave birth in a makeshift tent the day the community arrived in Mexico. This anecdote reminds us that childbirth in the early 20th century was a treacherous endeavor. María Wiebe Penner’s recollections go into more detail. She recalls that tasks were divided by age and sex. Her father and all but one of her brothers looked after the crops, and one brother made and maintained the furniture. Her mother was in charge of cooking and making clothing. Her mother was in charge of cooking and making clothing. Maria and her sisters helped with sewing, looked after the chickens, and did light fieldwork. Each day of the week, the women and girls also had to do a specific chore: laundry took place on Mondays; they baked bread on Wednesdays and Saturdays; and they cleaned for guests on Fridays. This schedule reminds us that farming is a never-ending series of chores. The Mennonites’ poor crop yields would have made these daily challenges even more difficult.

**SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

This article delves into some of these challenges and contributes to the discussion of Mennonite life in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1940s by offering some observations about the lives of Old Colony Mennonite women. It uses the paper trail the Mexican government created, namely, passenger lists, photographs on passenger lists and foreign resident cards, as it explores the lives of two women, Sara Wiebe, whom I mentioned at the beginning of the article, and another woman, Anna Enns.

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18 Andrea Dyck, “And in Mexico We Found What We Had Lost in Canada,” 33.
20 Domínguez, *La otra historia*, 68.
These sources are somewhat limited. In recent years, scholars of Mennonites in Mexico have conducted oral history interviews to describe everyday life, including the experiences of women. They emphasize the importance of understanding people’s lives in their own words. I analyze the available historical documents with this in mind, using an approach common in Latin American cultural studies. I employ strategies other scholars, such as Bianca Premo and John Mraz, have used to analyze bureaucratic documents with limited personal information, which then enables them to develop plausible hypotheses about the documents’ historical context. Historian Premo, for example, writes about everyday people in 17th and 18th century Peru by looking at their presence in court cases. He gives a general perspective on the time period and then examines a few court cases in depth in order to develop a complex understanding of how the Spanish empire manifested its power over its subjects in Peru. Curator and historian John Mraz has researched the early 20th century Mexican Revolution in a similar way. He analyzes photography from the Mexican Revolution to tell the history of photography and the stories of women and children during that time. This is a challenging project, as many of the photographers and most of the women and children who are the subjects of these photographs are not identified. He recognizes that the scant evidence has led him to use phrases like “it appears” and “it seems to have been.” I incorporate Premo’s methodology as I heed Mraz’s advice to formulate hypotheses, take risks and make mistakes.

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26 These include Royden Loewen’s Village Among Nations and Luann Good Gingrich’s Out of Place. Pedro Castro’s article, “The ‘Return’ of the Mennonites from the Cuauhtémoc Region to Canada,” in the 2004 special issue of the Journal of Mennonite Studies, and Hans Werner’s article, “Not of this World” in the 2016 special issue of the Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies, offer significant studies of everyday life.

27 Bianca Premo, Children of the Father King, 6.
28 Premo, Children of the Father King, 8.
29 John Mraz, Photographing the Mexican Revolution, 10.
30 Mraz, Photographing the Mexican Revolution, 8.
31 Mraz, Photographing the Mexican Revolution, 8.
CASE STUDIES:
SARA WIEBE AND ANNA ENNS

The first recorded presence of Sara Wiebe, Anna Enns, and their families is on passenger lists that record the arrival of Mennonites from Canada in Mexico. The Mexican government created these documents, called “Lista de inmigrantes menonitas/List of Mennonite Emigrants,” as a way to record immigrants in family groups. This document responded to the need a Mexican border agent had identified in 1921. This bureaucrat, a Mr. Ruiz, was stationed at the border between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. He outlined his concerns in a telegram he sent to the federal government in Mexico City about the five thousand Mennonites who had arrived at the border. The resulting document lists all members of a given family unit by name and age. It lists the father first, followed by the mother, and then by the children. The father, as head of the family, signed the document, and then two other men, including the bishop, confirmed that the family belonged to the Mennonite community. This document responds to Mennonite beliefs, as none of the Mennonite men who signed this document swore to tell the truth. The Mexican consul in El Paso and the federal government in Mexico City then signed and stamped the document as well. This document allowed the Mennonites to maintain a certain degree of religious freedom and satisfied the bureaucrats’ need to process the entry of many people into Mexico in relatively brief periods of time.

Sara Wiebe and Anna Enns drew my attention because the “Lists of Mennonite Emigrants” that record their families are part of a small number of lists that also include photographs. Another reason I selected these two women is because they, and the majority of their family members, appear on a set of documents produced in the 1930s and 1940s. Not all Mennonites complied with the Mexican federal government requirement that all non-Mexicans residing in that country from 1926 to 1951 register. Since Sara Wiebe and Anna Enns do appear on them as well, these documents also give a sense of their first decades of settlement in Mexico. Reading these documents together expands an existing understanding of migration to include motivations beyond preserving the religious community and German language religious education for children. It emphasizes the ways that the challenges Mennonites experienced in the first years of settlement affected women in the community.

“Lists of Mennonite Emigrants” and Emigration for Education, Extended Family, and Economic Opportunity

Sara Wiebe represents a fairly typical experience of Old Colony Mennonite migration to Mexico, seeking specific educational opportunities for her children and maintaining family bonds. This interest in education conforms to what Mennonite leaders at that time discussed and what historians later observed. The interest in preserving family ties expands the existing understanding of this historical movement of people. In 1925, Sara (Krahn) Wiebe and her husband Franz emigrated from Canada to Mexico. She was 36 years old and Franz was 35. They emigrated with their six children, Sara: age 13, Peter, age 9, Franz, age 8, Anna, age 6, Abraham, age 3 and Helena, age 1. Sara and Franz most likely wanted their children to receive religious education in the German language, and the way to do this was by migrating to Mexico. A family photograph, where the children surround the parents, emphasizes the importance of the Wiebes’ children (Figure 1).

32 Telegram from Ruiz to Customs Agent Angel Martínez, May 21, 1925, NC-899-8-109, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico.
33 Lists of Mennonite Immigrants, NC-899, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico.
34 Lista de inmigrantes menonitas/List of Mennonite emigrants, Franz Wiebe and family, June 17, 1925, NC-899-8-68, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico.
35 In Old Colony families, it was common for children to be named first after maternal and paternal grandparents, and then, if the names had not already been used, after their parents. This context, and the children’s ages suggest that Sara and Franz Wiebe’s family did not leave any children behind in Canada.
36 Photograph of Sara and Franz Wiebe and family, June 17, 1925, NC-899-8-68B, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico.
Figure 2: The Wiebes’ “List of Mennonite Emigrants”
It was an anomaly, as not every family included one. It does not conform to the style of passport photographs from the time period; instead, the children sit and stand around the parents. Sara and Franz Wiebe’s eyes are closed, and Sara looks down. Helena, age one, is in the far forefront of the picture and thus appears to be the largest person in the photo. Anna is in the center foreground, and the younger Sara Wiebe is in the center of the background. All three girls look directly at the camera, as do the two older boys. These gazes, positioning, and the fact that the youngest child dominates the photograph, were likely the result of an inexperienced photographer taking a picture of people who also were not used to photography. Nevertheless, it emphasizes the fact that the children were important, and, in the case of the Wiebe family and other Mennonites, the reason for leaving Canada. The Wiebes’ decision also meant that they could continue to live near other members of Franz’s family. According to foreign resident cards issued in the 1930s, Sara and Franz Wiebe entered Mexico on the same date as Franz’s brother Philipp Wiebe and Franz’s younger sister or niece, Margaretha. Upon their arrival in Mexico, they were reunited with Franz’s brother Jacob. This passenger list, as well as the foreign resident cards, both confirm historians’ accounts of migration and expand them, encouraging us to pay attention to the way that migration deepened some family bonds, even as distance would have severed others.

The presence of Anna Enns’ family in the “Lists of Mennonite Emigrants” and later, on the foreign resident cards, gives more insight into economic reasons for leaving Canada, in addition to the motivations related to education. In 1925, Anna (Rempel) Enns and her husband Jacob A. Enns migrated to Mexico with their two children, Katharina, age 3, and Abraham, age 1. Jacob signed his family’s “List” in such impeccable handwriting that I have the impression that he would have been a teacher or other type of community leader who wrote regularly (Figure 3). He may have wanted to migrate to Mexico in order to continue teaching in a German language environment. The family may also have migrated for economic reasons. Neither Anna nor Jacob was the oldest child, as evidenced by the fact that their children, who would have been named after their grandparents, do not share names with either parent. This means that neither Anna nor Jacob were positioned to inherit land. The family photograph glued to the back of their entry into the “List” also suggests that they were not the most pious family (Figure 4). Jacob wears a coat, a vest, and a shirt with a collar, leaving room for a forbidden necktie. Anna still wears a head covering but her ease in front of the camera suggests that in spite of community understanding that photographs were a forbidden graven image, this might not have been their first family photograph. They might not have had as strict an understanding of separation from the surrounding society as their church leaders, testing the boundaries of acceptable behavior in the Old Colony community. Nevertheless, they migrated to Mexico with other members of their church, seeking a better future.

Foreign Resident Cards and the Challenge of Settlement in a New Country

The documents that record foreigners’ presence in Mexico give shape to the scholars’ discussion of the early decades of Mennonite settlement in Mexico. Anna Enns and her family appear to have found the educational freedom they were seeking through migration, as well as better economic opportunities. The Mexican government produced a registration card for Anna Enns in 1935 using her birth name, Anna Rempel Wiebe.
FIGURE 3: THE ENNS’ "LIST OF MENNONITE EMIGRANTS"

LISTA DE INMIGRANTES MENONITAS.
LIST OF MENNONITE EMIGRANTS.

Padre
Father

Madre
Mother

Nombre de Familia
Family Name

Jacob A Enns

Lista de Edades
Age List

1. Jacob A Enns

2. Winna

3. Katharina

4. Abraham

5. Abraham

6. No.

7. CONSULADO GENERAL DE MEXICO

8. EL PASO, TEXAS, JUN 22 1925

9. P. A. R. CONSUL GENERAL

10. CONSUL PARTICULAR

11. INMIGRANTES MENONITAS

12. MENNONITE EMIGRANTS

13. EDAD

14. Years old

El subscrito declara que la anterior es una lista correcta de los miembros de su familia.

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that the above is a correct list of my family and members.

____________________________

Firma (Signature)

Los subscritos certificamos que cuya firma antecede es menonita, así como sus familiares y miembros de nuestra colonia.

We the undersigned do hereby certify that...

____________________________

Firmas (Signatures)

Bishop

(SEAL)
This half-page document tells us that she lived in Campo 6, Cuauhtémoc, also in the Manitoba colony.42 In 1949, the government issued a card for her husband, under the name Jacobo A. Enns Redekop. A bureaucrat inadvertently Hispanicized his first name, drawing him into the country where he had resided for more than half his life.43 Their children’s foreign resident cards suggest that they had settled nearby. In 1939, Abraham Enns Wiebe was said to live in Campo 5, and in 1941, Katharina Enns Rempel had married and lived in Campo 6, which meant both children remained near their parents.44 This family managed to keep each other close. They were living in one of the villages in the Manitoba colony that was closest to the nearby town of Cuauhtémoc, and so they could have had contact with outsiders, perhaps satisfying Jacob Enns’ interest in writing and in wearing clothes that skirted the edge of respectability within his Old Colony community.45 These documents suggest that Anna and Jacob Enns had found a better future in Mexico.

On the other hand, the documents that record the presence of Sara Wiebe’s family in Mexico illustrate the many difficulties Old Colony Mennonites faced in their first decades of settlement in Mexico. In 1933, the Mexican government issued Franz Wiebe a foreign resident card for his family. As he was the head of the household, the names of his wife, Sara, and their children, appeared on the back of his card. It stated that he lived in Campo 5, Cuauhtémoc, in the Manitoba colony.46 Two years later, in 1935, the Mexican government issued Sarah Wiebe her own card, under the name Sarah Krahn Wiebe. The names of her three youngest children, Anna, Abraham, and Helena, were on the back. She may have merited her own card and head of household status because her husband had died. The document states that she lived in Campo 40, in the same colony.47 She may have moved in with her oldest daughter, Sara, who had been living in that village since at least 1934, or her son Franz, who had been living there since at least 1935, when the government issued them registration cards.48 Peter, however, does not appear in the archival database that would later collect all these registration cards. He may have returned to Canada, died, or declined to register. Sara Wiebe’s family, like those of many who emigrated from Canada to Mexico, experienced different naming conventions. In 20th century Mexico, people could have up to four names. A first name, a middle name, a paternal surname and a maternal surname. Married women would often adopt their husband’s surname in social environments. This would not be equivalent to a legal name change. Mennonite women, however, adopted their husband’s surname after marriage and occasionally used their maiden name – the equivalent of the Mexican paternal surname – as a middle name. Mennonite men, for their part, used their paternal surname as their only surname, and sometimes informally adopted their maternal surname as a middle name. The possibilities for confusion abound. For more information about common and uncommon misidentification on foreign resident cards, see R. Janzen, *Liminal Sovereignty*, 1-32. In spite of the variations in names, it is likely that these foreign resident cards belong to Anna Enns and her children, Abraham and Katharina. Their ages and dates of entry into Mexico confirm the information in the “List of Mennonite Emigrants” for the Enns family and the residences listed were among the first villages Mennonites established in Mexico.

42 “Rempel Wiebe, Anna,” Servicio de Migración, Registro de Extranjeros, February 15, 1935, Migration Collection, Canada Series, box 16, file 113, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico.
44 “Enns Wiebe, Abraham,” Servicio de Migración, Registro de Extranjeros, May 18, 1939, Migration Collection, Canada Series, box 3, file 293, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico; “Enns Rempel, Katharina,” Servicio de Migración, Registro de Extranjeros, February 17, 1941, Migration Collection, Canada Series, box 3, file 288, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico.
45 It may have given him some contact with the Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to Mexico in the 1920s, and who sought greater integration with their host country than members of the Old Colony Church. For more information about these Mennonites, see, for example, Sawatzky, *They Sought a Country*, 77-82.
46 “Wiebe Wolf, Franz,” Servicio de Migración, Registro de Extranjeros, August 4, 1933, Migration Collection, Canada Series, box 20, file 255, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico.
47 “Krahn Wiebe, Sarah,” Servicio de Migración, Registro de Extranjeros, April 6, 1935, Migration Collection, Canada Series, box 10, file 255, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City, Mexico.
challenges due to death, family separation and accompanying economic challenges. Her family had changed significantly only a decade after the family photograph was taken.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the documents and photographs that record the migration of Sara Wiebe and Anna Enns and their families from Canada to Mexico, and documents that attest to their presence in Mexico in the ensuing decade. This analysis employed an approach common in Latin American studies, of integrating a relatively limited amount of documentary evidence with the historical context to develop a plausible hypothesis regarding the time period. Their names on the “Lists of Mennonite Emigrants,” and in the photographs that accompany those lists, show that migration was more than establishing colonies, dividing them into villages and ordering life in the way that the church community wanted. It gives us a record of when they arrived and with whom, and it is clear that they were migrating for a better future. This included the opportunity to educate their children in German, take advantage of economic opportunities, continue working as a teacher, and preserve family bonds. Closely examining the foreign resident cards reminds us that Mennonite settlement in Mexico was not only endless chores or poor crops. Some, like Anna Enns and her family, established themselves in ways that would not have been possible in Canada and enjoyed significant religious freedom. Others, like Sara Wiebe, attempted to reach the same goals, but in light of her husband’s death and her oldest son’s possible out-migration, she moved within Mexico and faced new challenges.

This detailed understanding of two women and their families expands the existing understanding
of Mennonite migration from Canada to Mexico. By emphasizing the experiences of everyday people, and, particularly, the lives of women, this article goes beyond Mennonite leaders’ hopes for recreating their ideal community in Mexico, or American Mennonite leaders’ descriptions of the ways that Mennonite women were like peasants elsewhere. It gives contours to the recollections of women like María Wiebe Penner, who shared about some of her mother’s and stepmother’s experiences. In light of the limited presence of women in any document or recorded history from this time period, this article has articulated possible implications of the economic challenges Mennonite women experienced in this community.

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