

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 2008

Review of *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid~Twentieth~Century Rural Disjuncture*. By Royden Loewen

Hans Werner
University of Winnipeg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Werner, Hans, "Review of *Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid~Twentieth~Century Rural Disjuncture*. By Royden Loewen" (2008). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1317.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1317>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture. By Royden Loewen. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. xv + 331 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Royden Loewen's recent book displays all the insights and delicious ironies we have come to expect from him. In this study, Loewen compares the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites of the Rural Municipality of Hanover, Manitoba, with those of Meade, Kansas, during a time of dramatic change in rural life. Loewen begins with an analysis of what historian John L. Shover termed "the Great Disjuncture" itself, the fragmentation and scattering between the

1930s and 1980s of a once unified rural society, followed by a chapter focusing more specifically on the environment: the image of the snowdrift for Manitoba and the dust bowl for Kansas. The third chapter traces the development of a middle class in both locations. Loewen shifts his focus dramatically for the next two chapters to the radical divergence of religious sensibilities in both places. His analysis of the influence of North American evangelicalism on the *Kleine Gemeinde* suggests that it provided continuity with their earlier religious understanding and a bridge to being more like their non-Mennonite neighbors. For the most conservative of their number who would seek out the jungles of Belize, the evangelicalism of Canada spurred them to remember an earlier golden age in Manitoba but to reinvent conservative traditions thousands of kilometers away.

The next two chapters concentrate on gender in both locations, but use a feminine Kansas and a masculine Manitoba as the venues of analysis. Here Loewen reads his sources carefully to tell us about the changes the rural disjuncture brought to notions of gender. Finally, he turns his attention to the diaspora of the *Kleine Gemeinde* more specifically. One chapter seeks out the *Kleine Gemeinde* of Spanish Lookout, Belize, while the other observes the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites who ended up in the cities of Winnipeg and Denver.

The book concludes that dispersion was the most important consequence of the rural disjuncture and produced remarkable diversity among a group with historically shared understandings. According to Loewen, as a result of the rural disjuncture the *Kleine Gemeinde* people created new understandings from "inherited ethnoreligious symbols and an imagined regional and even national culture."

Diaspora in the Countryside is a rich cultural history that tells a compelling story of how change came to southern Manitoba Mennonites in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. It enhances our understanding of how rural Mennonites became urban, how the manliness of farm work was overtaken by the new

masculinity of the football player, how farm women became homemakers and then professional women, and how being Mennonite was redefined in diverse ways.

HANS WERNER
Department of History
University of Winnipeg