

NECESSARY IDEALISM

a history of
WESTGATE MENNONITE COLLEGIATE



JANIS THIESSEN

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JANIS THIESSEN

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Cover:

Images from Westgate's recent and distant past overlay abstract shapes coming together in the form of the streetside entrance and facade of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate's campus in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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Contents

Illustrations	ix
Foreword <i>Bob Hummelt, Principal of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate</i>	xì
Acknowledgements	xv
Introduction	1
1. The Founding of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate	11
<i>“The core of our Mennonitism is healthy”</i>	
2. Language and Religious Education at Westgate	43
<i>“To be a good Mennonite, you don’t have to sing in German”</i>	
3. Westgate’s Supporting Churches	77
<i>“Faith remains a gift of God”</i>	
4. Expansion and Debt	109
<i>“The school is life, and life means to grow and to grow together”</i>	
5. The Student Experience at Westgate	149
<i>“Life also has another side”</i>	
6. Working at Westgate	193
<i>“Life also has another side”</i>	
Conclusion	233

Appendix A.	Principals of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate	238
Appendix B.	Chairs of the Board of Directors of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate	239
Bibliography	240

Illustrations

- 1.1 Mennonite Educational Society membership certificate (courtesy of Paul Neustaedter)
- 2.1 Students in a chapel service at Westgate
- 2.2 The “rise of the guitar” – music in the senior lounge
- 2.3 Westgate logo, 1995.
- 4.1 Mansion before renovations by Sisters of the Sacred Heart
- 4.2 Mansion after renovations by Sisters of the Sacred Heart
- 4.3 Construction of the gymnasium, 1977–78
- 4.4 Mennonite Festival of Arts and Music, Polo Park shopping mall, 1974 (centennial of the Mennonites’ arrival in Manitoba)
- 5.1 Westgate Sings, the first recording of the school choir, 1970
- 5.2 Demolition of the Art Barn
- 5.3 Victory!
- 5.4 Westgate logo, 1974

Foreword

Writing this foreword, I glance up from my very large office window that frames a wonderful view of the Assiniboine River. As a student of history with a few summers working as a guide and character animator at historic Lower Fort Garry, I have looked downstream many times over the last three decades, imagining the traffic of Indigenous folk, fur traders, and the occasional steamboat that plied the river long before the stately mansions of Armstrong Point lined the bank. The elite neighbourhood transitioned over time, and some of the larger properties housed schools. Although its first classes in 1958 were held in the education wing of First Mennonite Church, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate was by 1964 one of several fledging schools established in the “Gates.”

I knew little about Mennonites when I found myself on Westgate’s teaching staff in 1982–83, coincidentally the academic year the school was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. Many stories were shared, often by the key players in those foundational years, about how the school was formed and how it remained viable when so much changed in Winnipeg and in educational practices and philosophies during the first quarter century of the school’s life. As I prepared for my classes that first year, it was clear that many of the students and most of the staff were still fettered by the ties that bound them to tenets and traditions established before their

time. Perhaps these ties came from family connections, where their parents and other relatives had attended Westgate. Or perhaps these ties were cultural, where church and family histories marked by the migration that many Manitoba Mennonites shared were still discernable to me, a welcomed “outsider.”

I am struck today, though, by the realization that currently less than half of the student body comes from homes whose parents are members of a Mennonite church. While it is difficult to be objective after thirty-five years’ marinating in a Mennonite brine, nevertheless I can still see distinct traces of those ties, those tenets of faith and service that offer Westgate students a world view that is grounded in Christ’s teachings. Over the years the school has embraced all that is good in pedagogical change, something I believe the early visionaries would approve of. I also feel that those who conceptualized and facilitated the development of this school in those first years would be pleased that Westgate continues to transmit its vision to another generation of young people.

The Board of Directors agreed that a history of the institution’s first fifty years needed to be written. Whereas a coffee table–style book would have captured some of the memories of alumni and staff, it seemed that a scan of fifty editions of yearbooks would do much the same. There was interest instead in casting Westgate’s history before a critical eye, where it could be placed in a context that would inform not only the wider Westgate community but also scholars and readers of independent faith schools in Canada. Dr. Janis Thiessen offered that critical eye, belying the notion that a former student and staff member would not be able to fairly evaluate the historical record. As a prolific writer of history and Professor of History at the University of Winnipeg, Dr. Thiessen appreciates the nuances of the classroom, the staffroom, and the school boardroom that give meaning to the

meeting minutes and the recorded personal interviews she has used in her research.

Those close to the school will perhaps smile at portions of the book that give solid evidence of success where the school followed the path that its visionaries set before it. Those same readers may wince when hindsight casts an uncomfortable light on the few difficult times. It is this ability to affirm the good and the ability to accept and learn from the unfortunate that keeps an organization healthy. Whereas faith needs some indisputable truths, questioning and healthy conversation fosters a deeper faith, and this learning community was in large measure conceived from the need to offer an environment where a faith in God is not imposed on the student but invited and nurtured.

Since the celebration of Westgate's fiftieth anniversary in 2007–8, the school's property at 86 West Gate has seen significant redevelopment. The story of the tumultuous if not miraculous ten years of this development will need to wait until a history of the next fifty years will, I hope, be written. The present campus, modern yet simple in design, fully accessible to students and staff of all abilities, has been built only because the Anabaptist Christian hopes and ideals of women and men remain both relevant and vibrant in today's secular society.

Bob Hummelt

Principal,

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate

Acknowledgements

There are many people and organizations to thank for their role in nurturing this book into existence. Not least of these is Westgate itself. It is not every organization that gives *carte blanche* to its researcher, opening its archives without reservation and allowing complete editorial freedom in the writing of the manuscript. Such openness is, perhaps, not surprising, given the origins of the school as an alternative to some of the more narrowly evangelical Mennonite schools then in existence. Given the restrictions so many people and organizations attempt to place on historians' research and writing, however, such openness cannot be taken for granted.

The Spletzer Foundation and the Chair in German-Canadian Studies at the University of Winnipeg provided valuable funding for this research. Their financial assistance allowed me to initiate an oral history project, with the assistance of principal Bob Hummelt, which served to collect the stories of twenty-five individuals with long and strong ties to the school. These interviews, with the consent of those interviewed, will be deposited at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg.

Minutes of meetings at Westgate were recorded in German in the early years. I studied German during my three years in junior high at Westgate but regret that I remain far from fluent. Thankfully, the University of Winnipeg granted

funds that allowed me to hire Andrea Shettler to take notes on many of these German-language records. Former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel also assisted me with translation efforts. In addition, my mother, Margret Thiessen, volunteered her time to translate some German documents.

A number of other people provided assistance in various forms throughout this project. Former student Charlotte Enns loaned some Westgate yearbooks. Former teacher and vice-principal Helene Riesen provided access to primary sources, as did Ozzie Rempel and former board member Paul Neustaedter. The staff of the Mennonite Heritage Archives – Conrad Stoesz, Corey Dyck, and Connie Wiebe – assisted in locating source material. Laureen Harder-Gissing and the staff at Conrad Grebel College Archives were also helpful in this respect. Bob Hummelt and Neil Ens searched the Westgate files to find fitting photographs for the book.

Brian Froese and Paul Doerksen at Canadian Mennonite University Press exhibited much patience with me during the writing process, and I am grateful for their support of this project. The comments on the manuscript by the Press's anonymous reviewers and by copyeditor Maureen Epp assisted me greatly during revisions.

Finally, many thanks to those who agreed to be interviewed for this project. My thanks to the many who spent time with me or Bob Hummelt, reflecting on their experiences with the school. Interview participants and other readers may not always agree with the interpretation of events I offer in the pages that follow, but I hope that they will see value in the ways in which their experiences and memories are reflected and re-examined here.

Introduction

I was a junior high student at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate from 1983 to 1986 and worked as a teacher there from 1995 to 2011. It was at Westgate that I first learned to build a quinzee, to paddle a canoe, and to hold the attention (however briefly!) of a room full of grade 9 social studies students. Westgate gave me the opportunity to travel with students to Ottawa, Montreal, Québec City, and Washington, DC, to prepare sushi with them during interterm, and to assist them in setting up distillation apparatuses during chemistry class. Westgate's staffroom – that crowded venue that served as lunchroom, prep area, staff washroom, kitchen, lounge, and photocopier room – was where I engaged in discussions and debates about effective pedagogy, Christian discipleship, and current events. Many of the stories recounted in this book were ones I first heard, in various forms, from my longer-serving colleagues around the staff table. Their affectionate commitment to the “Westgate family” was one that I came to share.

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, founded in 1958 as Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI), celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2008. A few years prior to this milestone, a committee of alumni, faculty, and board members was formed to plan celebrations. This committee mooted the idea of a history book in 2007, and I was invited to be its author. I suggested that a serious academic book be produced – not

merely a coffee-table pictorial or celebratory monograph – that examined the entirety of the school’s history, positive and otherwise. Thankfully, the board and administration at the time shared my interest in such a project. A grant was obtained from the Spletzer Family Foundation and the Chair in German-Canadian Studies at the University of Winnipeg, which allowed me to organize an oral history project that would be added to the archival collection of the school’s history as well as serve as additional source material for this book.

Interview participants were sought in a number of ways. Advertisements were placed in two national Mennonite church periodicals: the *Canadian Mennonite* and the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. Additional ads were placed in the church bulletins of the individual churches that were members of the provincial conference, Mennonite Church Manitoba. Participants also were solicited through a posting on the school’s website and on Facebook. All current board and staff members were requested to participate, by volunteering to be interviewed and by suggesting names of potential interviewees. Ultimately, more than two dozen interviews were conducted.

The interview process used for this project was a variation of the four-stage life history process outlined by German oral historian Alexander von Plato.¹ In the first phase, participants were asked to tell the story of their lives. The second stage asked questions to clarify details of the life story just shared that may have been unclear. If not shared during the first stage, participants were to provide details about their parents’ occupations and church membership,

1 von Plato, “Contemporary Witnesses and the Historical Profession.” Parts 7 and 8 of Alexander Freund’s extensive interview with von Plato provide further explanation of this four-stage process. See Freund, “Oral History as the History of Experience (*Erfahrungsgeschichte*).”

their own church membership, and why they decided to become involved with Westgate. The third stage addressed issues of particular interest to the research. Questions asked included, for example: How was Westgate different from other schools? Can you describe memorable people? events? challenges? Additionally, interviewers were encouraged to ask about memories of various facility moves and expansions, of the school's relationships with neighbours, and of celebratory events (graduation, dances) that have changed over time. Other questions that were asked at this stage included: What did/does being Mennonite mean to you (as a child, student, teacher, parent, board member, or pastor)? What did Westgate teach you about what it meant or means to be a Mennonite? How do you think that understanding of Mennonite identity has changed over time? The final stage of von Plato's process is a confrontation or debate phase. Here, participants were asked what they believe to be the future of a school like Westgate, given that membership in Mennonite churches is declining in Canada. In essence, they were asked to justify, from their experience, the ongoing life of the institution – a question of interest to the historian in that it requires interviewees to probe more deeply into their history with the school and their understanding of Mennonite identity.

At the time I began this research project, I was employed as a teacher at Westgate. Recognizing the challenge of fitting in this research with my teaching duties, administration suggested that I choose some colleagues to assist me in conducting interviews. Westgate principal Bob Hummelt was able to take time from his busy workdays to interview former Westgaters. Hummelt began teaching at Westgate in 1982 and was appointed principal of the school in 2007. His assistance was invaluable.

This book is, in some ways, a social history of ethno-religious identity in the context of this school. During the re-

search phase, I sometimes feared that interview participants would fixate instead on the standard topics of traditional institutional histories (leaders, finances, building campaigns) or present uncritical triumphalist accounts of the history of the school. And I wondered how my relationship with the school and my identity as a Mennonite might affect interview participants' willingness to discuss openly any potentially challenging aspects of Westgate's history. Former principal Frank Neufeld and former teacher Anna Penner, for example, were unwilling to discuss First Mennonite Church's religious conflicts with other Mennonites and the subsequent effect on the early years of Westgate. I speculate that their reluctance to do so may have been in part a result of their understanding of Christian forgiveness. During my interview with former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel, he asked to have the recorder turned off at various points in order to discuss aspects of the school's history more candidly (and off the record) with me – as a colleague rather than as a researcher. While I am no longer employed at Westgate,² I nonetheless have a long personal history with the school as both a former student and teacher, which doubtless shaped the way interview participants responded to me. I have conducted other oral history projects³ where I shared an ethno-religious identity with my interviewees, so this phenomenon was not new to me. I consoled myself with the knowledge that it is not really problematic if interview participants prove reluctant to discuss the process of identity negotiation hinted at by the archival records, as Alessandro Portelli has shown that silences and misrememberings have their stories to tell too.⁴

2 In July 2011, I accepted a tenure-track position in the Department of History at the University of Winnipeg.

3 Thiessen, *Manufacturing Mennonites*; Thiessen, *Not Talking Union*.

4 Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*; Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*; Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out*.

Historian Robert Orsi argues that religious identity is not fixed but is developed in the context of, and in response to, particular historical and material conditions. This history of Westgate suggests that the school was a significant site where Mennonites debated their identity as an ethno-religious group in a new urban environment and sought to redefine Mennonite identity for the post-Second World War generations. Archival records reveal that church pastors, school board members, teachers, students, and others made competing claims for authority in the construction of this identity. Together with the archival record, oral history interviews provided some helpful insights into this process of negotiation.

The history of ethnic and religious private schools has taken on new significance in Canadian history since multiculturalism became official government policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Krukowski, writing in the wake of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963–69), noted the emotional responses at the time – positive and negative – to the demands for government funding of programs and institutions to transmit ethnic identity to young people.⁵ Krukowski deplored the ignorance of history exhibited by many participants in these debates, observing that German was the language of instruction in schools in the Maritimes in the eighteenth century and in areas settled by “Minnonites” [*sic*] in Ontario in the nineteenth century. He estimated the number of private ethnic schools in Canada in 1968 as more than 500 and their enrolment as between 75,000 and 85,000.⁶ The majority of these schools, however, did not have their own buildings or even hold classes every weekday. Instead, they tended to offer classes on weekends and operated out of a “parish hall, club room, [ethnic] as-

5 Krukowski, “Canadian Private Ethnic Schools,” 199–200.

6 *Ibid.*, 201.

sociation's headquarters or private houses," though some also used public school buildings. Instructors at these schools were often underpaid or were volunteers, and not all were qualified teachers.⁷ Individuals, ethnic associations, fundraising events, and tuition provided funding to operate these schools – a revenue stream whose inadequacy fed demands by private school supporters for public funding.⁸ Krukowski viewed the continued existence of these schools as “a sign of the recognition of Canadian cultural pluralism as a national resource, yet to be developed in a well-thought-out manner, but benefiting all groups and Canada as a whole.”⁹

Westgate's early history is typical of this description of Canadian ethnic schools in the late 1960s. In later decades, the school's move to new buildings, its declining emphasis on German language and culture, and the persistent debates about whether the school was “religious enough” reveal its struggles with questions of ethno-religious identity and integration with the larger society. Women played significant roles in the ongoing success of Westgate: the financial precariousness of the school throughout much of its history and the vital function of fundraising undertaken by the ladies' auxiliary were focal points of both interviews and board of directors meeting minutes. Ultimately, this book is one step toward generating the kind of detailed analysis that is needed of the role that these hundreds of ethnic schools have played in the story of Canadian cultural pluralism. Historian Ted Regehr suggests that Mennonite schools like Westgate were “agents of accommodation, but not of assimilation.”¹⁰ The history of Westgate – and possibly of other such private schools – defies simple categories of assimilation or cultural

7 Ibid., 202.

8 Ibid., 203.

9 Ibid.

10 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 271.

resistance.

Unlike many commissioned institutional histories, this one examines both the positive and negative aspects of the organization. In addition, the intention of the project from the outset has been to produce a peer-reviewed academic work with appeal beyond the immediate audience of Westgate supporters. To that end, the book is organized thematically rather than chronologically, so that casual readers and education history researchers alike may delve into those chapters of greatest interest to themselves. The origins of Westgate are outlined in Chapter 1, which provides a brief overview of the history of private schooling in Canada, about which a survey history has yet to be written.¹¹ This chapter describes the process of forming the school, initially known as Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI), its changes in location and governance, and its mission and purpose. The changing emphasis on use and knowledge of the German language, the teaching of religion, and personal perspectives on faith at Westgate are topics addressed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses the tensions between the “liberal” religious origins of the school and the demands of the church congregations and parents who were the financial supporters of the institution. Chapter 4 examines the expansion of the school over the years. It highlights the significant role played by the Westgate ladies auxiliary in eliminating the debt incurred by the school’s expansion in the 1970s and 1980s. Moving from the structural to the more personal, the

11 There are numerous histories of individual private schools, most of them privately published, however, and most of them celebratory. The history of Mennonite education in Manitoba in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been assessed by graduate students: see, for example, Bergen, “The Manitoba Mennonites and Their Schools from 1875–1924”; Klassen, “A History of Mennonite Education in Manitoba”; and Klassen, “A History of Mennonite Education in Western Canada.” Histories of Manitoba Mennonite schools include F. Epp, *Education with a Plus*; G. Epp, *Roots and Wings*; and Ens, *Die Schule Muss Sein*.

last two chapters focus on the stories of staff and students. These two groups are, in effect, given the last word – and quite rightly. Chapter 5 explores the student perspective, addressing music and the arts; sports, outdoor education, and study tours; dancing; the short-lived girls’ dormitory; dress codes; student councils; and student celebrations, including graduation. The final chapter describes work life at Westgate over the years, including methods of staff evaluation and the provision of salaries and benefits. This chapter concludes with personal reflections by Westgate staff members, past and present.

The book’s title, *Necessary Idealism*, is taken from the initial conversations of those individuals who ultimately founded the school. Nine men and one woman met in February 1957 to discuss forming another Mennonite high school in Winnipeg. Doing so, they concluded, would require not only significant funds but also “the necessary idealism.”¹² This idealism was tested throughout the school’s history, by those both within and without, and the school changed somewhat in response. Despite those changes, the core nature of the school persisted: Westgate was an alternative, not only to the secular world but to the limits of the Mennonite one.

12 See Chapter 1 for further discussion of this meeting.

— *“The core of our Mennonitism is healthy”*

1 . The Founding of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, originally known as Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI), was founded by Mennonites in Winnipeg in 1958.¹ It is one of hundreds of small ethnic private schools that had proliferated across Canada by the mid-twentieth century.² The particular form of ethno-religious identity that the school attempted to inculcate in students differed from the Mennonitism promoted by other Mennonites in the province, and also changed over time. As a result, the school’s history – and possibly the history of other similar schools – defies simple categories of assimilation or cultural resistance.

Private Schools in Canada: A Brief Overview

The history of private schooling in Canada remains limited

1 Parts of this chapter were published earlier in Thiessen, “Education for Identity.”

2 See Krukowski, “Canadian Private Ethnic Schools.”

in both scope and method. Many of the earlier studies in this field focused on the historical reasons for the creation of denominational schools and the legal battles involved in maintaining their existence.³ More recently, examination of religious schooling has centred on the question of public funding of private schools, the expression of religious identity within the public school system, and the role of independent schools in perpetuating class divisions.⁴ Historical study of individual private religious schools has tended to be conducted by the schools themselves, often in conjunction with the celebration of an anniversary of their founding. These institutional histories are often celebratory if not hagiographic.⁵

Some of the oldest religious private schools in Canada were founded by either Catholics or Anglicans. British Columbian historian Jean Barman provides an overview of private schooling in that province, noting that these schools sought to provide “a sound, thoroughly English education.”⁶

-
- 3 Two of the more popular subjects of study in this area were the denominational schools in Ontario and the “Schools Question” in Manitoba. For the history of denominational schools in Ontario, see, for example, Walker, “The History of Ontario Separate Schools”; Stamp, *The Historical Background of Separate Schools in Ontario*; Gaffield, *Language, Schooling and Cultural Conflict*; and Shapiro, “The Public Funding of Private Schools in Ontario.” Early work on the Manitoba Schools Question includes Clark, *The Manitoba School Question*; Crunican, *Priests and Politicians*; Cook, “Church, Schools, and Politics in Manitoba”; Cook, Brown, and Berger, *Minorities, Schools, and Politics*; and Jaenen, “The Manitoba School Question.”
- 4 Paquette, “Public Funding for ‘Private’ Education”; Magsino, “Human Rights, Fair Treatment, and Funding of Private Schools in Canada”; Khan, “Canadian Education”; Dickinson and Dolmage, “Education, Religion, and the Courts in Ontario”; Miller, “Should There Be Religious Alternative Schools within the Public School System?”; Wayland, “Religious Expression in Public Schools”; Maxwell and Maxwell, “Going Co-Ed”; Maxwell and Maxwell, “The Reproduction of Class in Canada’s Elite Independent Schools.”
- 5 Examples include Penton, *Non Nobis Solum*; Isaac, *Elim*; Gingrich, *Mission Complete*; F. Epp, *Education with a Plus*; Ens, *Die Schule Muss Sein*. A rare exception to these school-endorsed histories is FitzGerald, *Old Boys*, which is based on seventy-one interviews with former students and is highly critical of its subject, Upper Canada College.
- 6 Barman, “Marching to Different Drummers,” 3.

By the early twentieth century, public schools supplanted private ones in British Columbia, with the exception of Catholic schools that served the significant Catholic minority in that province. The situation changed with the immigration of Protestants of very different religious beliefs in the early twentieth century. Many of these immigrants had attended or supported private schools in Britain. They believed strongly in the institutional church as “indispensable to faith,” rather than emphasizing faith as a personal choice “practiced as easily in a ‘non-denominational’ [public school] classroom as anywhere else.”⁷ Their immigration temporarily reinvigorated Anglican private schools in Canada. After the First World War, however, demographics compelled these schools to attract more non-British and non-Anglican students to ensure their survival.⁸ Such students were attracted in part by the potential the schools offered for upward mobility.

While the legacy of Anglo and French schooling is well known, Canada also has a long history of religious schools founded by ethnic groups that were neither English Protestants nor French Catholics. The Mennonites, for example, were convinced to immigrate to Canada in the late nineteenth century in part by federal government promises that they could create their own education system. Mennonite interest in education, according to John W. Friesen, can be traced back to Prussian Mennonites, who believed in a minimalist education that would “perpetuate the German language and acquaint their children with the Bible and Mennonite distinctives.”⁹ A popular contemporary perception of ethno-religious private schools such as those of the Mennonites is that they were created to perpetuate narrow understandings of religious belief and to limit – or at

7 *Ibid.*, 6.

8 *Ibid.*, 9.

9 Friesen, “Studies in Mennonite Education,” 133.

least carefully direct – the integration of students with the wider society in which they found themselves. The history of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate provides some contrast to this perception. Westgate was established as an alternative to existing Mennonite schools as much as to the public school system. Westgate’s founders believed the existing Mennonite high schools in the province of Manitoba provided too narrow a perspective, both religiously and socially. The formation was thus the opposite of a trend that had occurred among Mennonites in the United States a generation earlier. There, schools like Hesston College were formed in part as an objection to the perceived laxity of older Mennonite institutions like Goshen College.¹⁰

Victor Peters, one of Westgate’s founders, promoted a vision of the school as an alternative to Anglo-Canadian assimilation, even as he invoked Anglo-Canadian scholars and politicians in support of his perspective. The school’s objective was not to preserve a static representation of Mennonite culture and belief, but – in his words – to “take on the good aspects” of non-Mennonites while “discarding the less valuable aspects” of Mennonite tradition.¹¹ Over the years, this process resulted in Westgate defining Mennonitism in ways that at times led to demands that the school enforce exactly the kind of static definition of identity the founders had wanted to avoid.¹²

Private schools are prime sites for examining the ways in which ethnic and religious minority groups in Canada created, maintained, and redrew boundaries between themselves and the host society.¹³ How have minority groups created

10 Hartzler, *Education among the Mennonites of America*, 165.

11 Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, private collection, untitled typescript with handwritten notation: “V. Peters *an die Gruenderversammlung?*” Unless otherwise indicated, all Westgate documents are held privately by Westgate Mennonite Collegiate.

12 See Chapter 3 for further details.

13 Such private schools provided an alternative to the public schools’ function as “es-

institutions to preserve their identities in the face of majority culture(s)? How have those involved in the operation of such institutions (teachers, administrators, board members, financial supporters) reshaped their mission over time? How have various stakeholders (students, parents, churches, others) received, reinterpreted, or resisted the schools' messages? And how was ethno-religious identity itself shaped, challenged, and redefined in the process? These questions are at the heart of this half-century history of one Manitoba private school: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate.

The Founding of Westgate

On February 12, 1957, a group of eight men and one woman from Winnipeg's Schoenwieser Mennonite Church (later renamed First Mennonite Church) met to discuss the possibility of creating a Mennonite high school in Winnipeg.¹⁴ As its later name attests, this church was the first Mennonite church in Winnipeg, established by a collection of Mennonite churches in Manitoba that had united under one conference banner in 1926.¹⁵ The school's primary purpose, the group agreed, would be to provide religious instruction as well as education in the German language.¹⁶ The school also would serve as a "missions opportunity for the commu-

entially agents of cultural and linguistic assimilation." Levin and Riffel, "Dealing with Diversity," 5.

- 14 Those in attendance were church elder Johann H. Enns, pastor Jacob J. Schulz, Abram A. Vogt, John Konrad, Elizabeth Peters, Hans Klassen, Dr. John A. Peters, Franz Neufeld, and Victor Peters, Committee member Isaac Klassen was unable to attend. Minutes of Initiative Committee meeting, February 12, 1957.
- 15 Marlene Epp and Alf Redekopp, "First Mennonite Church (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* [hereafter GAMEO], December 2015, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=First_Mennonite_Church_\(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada\)&oldid=146970](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=First_Mennonite_Church_(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada)&oldid=146970).
- 16 United Mennonite Educational Institute (Leamington, ON) had been formed with similar objectives in 1945. Driedger et al., *United Mennonite Educational Institute*, 36.

nity,” though the minutes of the meeting do not specify the nature of that mission.¹⁷ Those present raised two significant reasons for potential opposition to creating such a school. The first was the expense. The second was “the question of whether there was the necessary idealism” for such a task among Winnipeg Mennonites.¹⁸

Despite these misgivings, a number of determinations were made at the meeting. The group elected to refer the question of establishing a school to the annual congregational meeting (where church members would discuss congregational life and make collective decisions). Pastor J.J. Schulz raised the possibility that the education wing of the Schoenwieser church could house the school, and suggested that the school be organized on the basis of a *Verein* (society). In other words, rather than being owned and controlled by the church itself, the school would be organized and governed by interested individuals who paid a membership fee to join the educational society. Schulz suggested 100 members at \$50 each should be recruited before further action be taken – a wise suggestion, given that the church had just taken on much financial responsibility with an expansion of the Concordia Hospital and the Bethania Home for the Aged and Infirm (now Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home).¹⁹ Church elder Johann H. Enns countered that the amount of the fee should be provisional, and those assembled accepted both suggestions. It was noted that other Mennonite church congregations were interested in the initiative, including

17 Westgate teacher Anna Penner noted that the children of many post-Second World War Mennonite immigrants were completely unfamiliar with Mennonite history. Perhaps this was the community mission the founders envisioned. Anna Penner interview.

18 Minutes of Initiative Committee meeting, February 12, 1957.

19 Ingrid Loebb, “The Founding of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,” *Celebrating a Vision of Faith: Mennonite Educational Institute/Westgate Mennonite Collegiate 25th Anniversary, 1958–1983*, Westgate newsletter, 2.

Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church and Bethel Mennonite Church (both in Winnipeg), as well as those at St. Elizabeth (40 km south of the city) and Pigeon Lake (25 km west of the city).²⁰

The question of a Mennonite high school in Winnipeg had been raised at congregational meetings of the Schoenwieser church at least two years earlier.²¹ The initiative then had been that of Elizabeth and Victor Peters, who were inspired by their brother Dr. John Peters to attempt to establish a private urban Mennonite school for the sake of their daughter, whose health issues made public school attendance difficult.²² The story is that they were discussing opening their home on Grosvenor Avenue to other students to solve their home-schooled daughter's "problem of companionship and regular contact with children" when Dr. John Peters stopped by. He "immediately saw the value of a form of instruction which would incorporate elements of the Mennonite identity, and was so enthusiastic that he overthrew the idea of a home-school and undertook to initiate plans for a 'real' private school supported by interested Mennonites." The vision for the school was that it should be "a centre of academic excellence, a place where intellectual curiosity and independent

20 Minutes of Initiative Committee meeting, February 12, 1957.

21 At the annual congregational meeting of the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church in January 1956, elder Johann H. Enns "reminded those in attendance, that a year earlier the question had been raised about a private Mennonite high school. No action had been taken." 30th anniversary publication, Mennonite Heritage Archives (hereafter MHA), XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

22 The Peters's daughter had rheumatic fever; Elizabeth Peters resigned her teaching job to teach her daughter at home. Both Victor and Elizabeth Peters (née Dyck) had migrated to Canada from the Soviet Union in the 1920s and pursued academic careers (Elizabeth as professor of German at the University of Manitoba, and Victor as professor of history at Minnesota State College). 25th anniversary catalog, "The Founding of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate," MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; *Westgate Perspective* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 3; "Dr. Victor Peters: 1915–1998," *Mennonite Historian* 24, no. 3 (September 1998): 11; Susan Huebert, "Peters, Victor (1915–1998)," *GAMEO*, 2007, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Peters,_Victor_\(1915-1998\)&oldid=113862](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Peters,_Victor_(1915-1998)&oldid=113862).

thinking would be fostered and where Mennonite values, traditions, and culture would be transmitted, in addition to the regular school curriculum.”²³

The proposed school was not the first such Mennonite educational institution in Manitoba – or even in Canada. Russian Mennonite immigrants to the province in the 1870s had established the Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna (south of Winnipeg) in 1889. MCI was the first Mennonite school in Canada.²⁴ Ten other Mennonite schools existed in Canada at the time of Westgate’s founding, though only three have survived: Rosthern Junior College (RJC, established in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, in 1905), United Mennonite Educational Institute (UMEI, established in Leamington, Ontario, in 1944), and Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI, founded in Winnipeg in 1945).²⁵ The latter, however, was operated by a different conference of Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren, who tended to be more socially conservative and religiously evangelical than those Mennonite churches that made up the General Conference.²⁶ The Schoenwieser church itself had a reputation as being among the more liberal of the varied Mennonite churches in Manitoba.²⁷ Nor was the society/

23 *Westgate Perspective* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 3.

24 See the official history of the school: Ens, *Die Schule Muss Sein*.

25 David Schroeder, “A Sacred Charge,” pamphlet, ca. 1962, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; “Educational Society to Found Church School in Winnipeg,” *Canadian Mennonite* 6, no. 10 (March 7, 1958): 3; Melvin Gingerich, “United Mennonite Educational Institute (Leamington, Ontario, Canada),” *GAMEO*, 1959, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=United_Mennonite_Educational_Institute_\(Leamington,_Ontario,_Canada\)&oldid=78398](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=United_Mennonite_Educational_Institute_(Leamington,_Ontario,_Canada)&oldid=78398); J.G. Rempel, “Rosthern Junior College (Rosthern, Saskatchewan, Canada),” *GAMEO*, 1959, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Rosthern_Junior_College_\(Rosthern,_Saskatchewan,_Canada\)&oldid=114380](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Rosthern_Junior_College_(Rosthern,_Saskatchewan,_Canada)&oldid=114380); Richard D. Thiessen, “Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada),” *GAMEO*, 2016, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_Collegiate_Institute_\(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada\)&oldid=141298](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_Collegiate_Institute_(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada)&oldid=141298).

26 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 258.

27 The church had taken an active role, for example, in the creation of Winnipeg’s

Verein principle a new suggestion. Other Canadian Mennonite schools such as MCI, MBCI, RJC, and UMEI had used it successfully.²⁸ And Westgate was one of several North American Mennonite schools to be founded in the decade of the 1950s – though the only Canadian one.²⁹



FIGURE 1.1. Mennonite Educational Society membership certificate (courtesy of Paul Neustaedter).

The Initiative Committee had been elected by the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church in January 1956; they found it challenging to secure support for the idea of a new Mennonite high school.³⁰ Though assistance had

Concordia Hospital in 1928 and Bethania Personal Care Home in 1946.

- 28 Ens, *Die Schule Muss Sein*, 11; G. Epp, *Roots and Wings*, 16; Driedger et al., *United Mennonite Educational Institute*, 8. The Manitoba Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches took over governance of MBCI from its educational society in 1964.
- 29 The others were Bethany Christian Schools (Goshen, IN, 1954), Christopher Dock Mennonite High School (Lansdale, PA, 1953), Clinton Christian High School (Goshen, IN, 1950), Conestoga Christian School (Morgantown, PA, 1952), Hartville Christian High School (Hartville, OH, 1956), and Sarasota Christian School (Sarasota, FL, 1958). Melvin Gingerich and William D. Hooley, "Secondary Schools," *GAMEO*, 1990, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Secondary_Schools&oldid=143650.
- 30 25th anniversary catalogue, "The Founding of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate," MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; 30th anniversary

been requested from the Sargent Avenue, Bethel, Lichtenauer, Springstein, Glenlea, and Schoenfelder Mennonite churches,³¹ by June 1957, only forty Mennonites were interested in the idea. Half of the supporters were from the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church and half from the North Kildonan Mennonite Church. Nonetheless, there were sixty-one in attendance at a meeting to found the educational society on November 18, 1957, in part due to a letter campaign that assured people that their attendance did not commit them to membership in the society. The letter circulated noted that the school was to be established in response to “a number of very valuable cultural properties that require attentive care.... Our German mother tongue has been for centuries the bearer of this culture and our faith.”³² The society was named the Mennonitischer Bildungsverein von Manitoba (Mennonite Educational Society of Manitoba), and the proposed bylaws were presented to those assembled. Membership fees were set at \$50, with a \$5 annual renewal. Members, it was decided, would have to pay only 80 percent of the school fees (which would range from \$120 to \$150, dependent on grade) for their children to attend the new school. On account of the low numbers in attendance, a decision on appointing a chair and executive of the new society was postponed.³³

At this meeting, Victor Peters gave a speech that out-

publication, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; minutes of board of directors meeting, February 12, 1957.

- 31 25th anniversary catalogue, “The Founding of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,” MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.
- 32 According to the letter, the school would teach Mennonite Christian religion, church history, and Mennonite history in German, and all government-prescribed subjects in English. “Educational Society to Found Church School in Winnipeg,” *Canadian Mennonite* 6, no. 10 (March 7, 1958): 3.
- 33 Minutes of the founders meeting of the Mennonite Educational Society, November 18, 1957. The first board was chosen on January 20, 1958. 25th anniversary catalogue, “The Founding of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,” MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

lined the vision for the new high school in some detail. Peters described the efforts of the proposed school's Initiative Committee and stated simply that the two greatest obstacles to the creation of the school were finding the necessary finances and teachers. He declared that he was personally encouraged, however, by two things. First, testimony by Mennonite teachers and trustees before Manitoba's Royal Commission on Education³⁴ showed that the broader "society places great worth on our [Mennonite] spiritual and cultural values." Second, though "our Mennonite leaders often have failed, the core of our Mennonitism is healthy."³⁵

Peters weaved the history of Canada and of education together with a reflection on North American sociology to argue for a specific role for the new school. He gave an overview of the British North America Act, English-French relations in Canada, British private schools, and the Manitoba Schools Question. He then explained that in the United States, all immigrants were expected to conform to the colonial American ideal, losing their identity in the melting pot of assimilation as they were formed into "real Americans" by the school system. In Canada, by contrast, there was "no clear picture of what a Canadian is," so the effort instead was to try to make all new Canadians into *Engländer* (English people). With time, Peters declared, "one not only noticed that this was impossible but also, in and of itself, not desirable." Public education was "not working" in the United States, and the "rapid assimilation process, in itself criminal," was bringing about the weakening or destruction of family, relationships, and church.

To support his views that such "American assimilation"

34 This commission, chaired by former Deputy Minister of Education Dr. Ronald Oliver MacFarlane, reported in 1959.

35 Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, private collection, untitled typescript with handwritten notation: "V. Peters an die Gruenderversammlung?"

was to be avoided, Peters invoked a number of authorities, including Canadian historian W.L. Morton and Dr. R.O. MacFarlane, chair of Manitoba's Royal Commission on Education and former Deputy Minister of Education. Together with such men, Peters believed that

each cultural group should try to preserve that which is good in its own culture and take on the good aspects of other cultural groups, at the same time discarding the less valuable aspects of its own culture. In this way the peoples (Voelker) and cultural groups (Kulturgruppen) in Canada could nurture themselves – there will be no Balkanization of our country.³⁶

Such a process could “lead to a cultural enrichment” of Canada. And such a process would require the creation of more Mennonite private schools.

The proposed new Mennonite high school in Winnipeg, Peters noted, would join the ranks of an already established group of ethnic and religious schools in the city. Jewish, French, and Ukrainian schools had good reputations, not to mention the “fantastic” private schools established by “fellow citizens of Anglo-Saxon background” which attracted students from “the best and most influential families.” The government posed no threat to these schools as long as their supporters were also voters, he said. Rather, the real danger to the ongoing success of such schools lay within these ethnic and religious communities themselves, in the form of either “an inferiority complex or simply ignorance.” The dedication of the church ministers, schoolteachers, and the (largely Mennonite) school board in southern Manitoba – together with the attitude of Winnipeg Mennonites themselves – would show that, like these other ethnic and religious groups,

36 Ibid.

the Mennonites too wanted to preserve their intellectual and spiritual heritage.³⁷

Perhaps Peters's vision struck a chord with the Winnipeg Mennonites assembled at the founders' meeting. Perhaps the desire to provide an urban General Conference Mennonite alternative to the rural MCI and the Mennonite Brethren collegiate in Winnipeg was the determining factor. Whatever the case, the Mennonitische Bildungsinstitut (Mennonite Educational Institute) began looking for a property to rent in the summer of 1957. North Kildonan was the preferred location, but it was doubted that anything suitable would be available there. The Fort Garry School on Portage Avenue could be rented, but the cost of \$400 per month was deemed expensive.³⁸ A teacher-principal, Frank Neufeld, was hired in March 1958,³⁹ but when Dr. John Peters died in the spring of 1958, the future of the school was momentarily in doubt. The board of directors met together with Frank Neufeld "and with considerable resolve, decided to proceed."⁴⁰ The school opened on September 2, 1958, in the basement Sunday school rooms of the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church at 922 Notre Dame Avenue, with Frank Neufeld as both principal and teacher, Anna Penner as teacher,⁴¹ and thirty-nine students.

37 Ibid.

38 Minutes of Initiative Committee, July 11, 1957.

39 Neufeld was to be paid \$5,500 for the 1958–59 school year; for 1959–60, his salary was raised to \$6,500. Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 17, 1958; letter to the treasurer, September 30, 1959.

40 Personal correspondence with Frank Neufeld, March 11, 2011. The initial board of directors consisted of Dr. John A. Peters (president), Karl Fast (vice-president), Dr. P. Enns (treasurer), Victor Peters (secretary), Abram Vogt, Henry Becker, Henry Riediger, August Dyck, Ernest Enns, Gerhard H. Peters, Theodor Schroeder, and Isaak Klassen. Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 20, 1958.

41 Anna Penner's initial annual salary was \$2,800; for 1959–60, she received \$4,950. Minutes of board of directors meeting, August 25, 1958; letter to the treasurer, September 30, 1959.

The Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI)

Frank Neufeld was born in the Soviet Union and came to Canada with his parents at a very young age. He graduated from MCI in 1943, married three years later, and began teacher training. After working for eleven years in the public school system, he was asked by the Mennonite Educational Institute's board to become the teaching principal at the newly formed school. Neufeld was employed at the school from 1957 until 1965. Though he worked to the end of the 1964–65 academic year, he submitted his resignation to the board in December 1964. He said he found it too difficult to be simultaneously a full-time administrator, teacher, and fundraiser for the school. The board urged him to stay, he said, but he declined. Neufeld said he was “amazed at how quickly” the board could find secretarial help after his departure and assign only administrative (and no teaching) duties to the principal, yet would or could not do so for him. It was a matter of regret for Neufeld as well that he did not receive any pension from the school.⁴²

After his work at Westgate, Neufeld became a school inspector for the province of Manitoba and worked with the Department of Education until he took early retirement in 1985. From that date until 1991, he served as liaison to independent schools in Manitoba. This position presented him with opportunities to observe Westgate from a different perspective. He was somewhat disappointed by the relaxed interactions between staff and students he witnessed in the late 1980s, which he interpreted as an absence of respect for authority.⁴³

Recalling his time as teacher and principal at Westgate, Neufeld noted that he had had “very excellent people to

42 Frank Neufeld interview.

43 *Ibid.*

work with” and would not have joined the school had it not been for the “deep sense of commitment” of the first board of directors. He commented that he had been the one to ask Karl Fast – the teacher who became the heart of the school’s religion and German programs in its early years – to join Westgate. Neufeld was instrumental in helping Fast to obtain the necessary credentials for teaching.

Neufeld recalled that at first, only three churches supported the school: the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church (in Winnipeg), and the Mennonite churches in North Kildonan and Pigeon Lake (which had historic ties to the Schoenwieser church).⁴⁴ While Neufeld was reluctant to discuss the controversial theology of the Schoenwieser church and its effects on the founding of Westgate,⁴⁵ he acknowledged that the leadership in these three churches was “on the same wavelength.” Two of the first Ältester (elders) of the Schoenwieser church, Rev. Johann H. Enns and Rev. Johann P. Klassen, did not support literal interpretation but “emphasized the intent and the spirit” of the Bible.⁴⁶ As a consequence, the more religiously conservative Mennonites in the province viewed the Schoenwieser church as theologically suspect.⁴⁷

Matters came to a head in 1945, when Rev. Enns delivered an address on the life and thought of sixteenth-century Anabaptist Hans Denck at a conference attended by other Mennonite pastors and deacons. He spoke uncritically of Denck’s universalist beliefs; that is, that all would eventually be saved, including those condemned to hell. The Schoen-

44 See also Enns, *Jubilate*, 50.

45 Historian Ted Regehr notes that the “prolonged conflict” between the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church and “the Manitoba and Canadian conferences made the founding of a new high school problematic.” On the other hand, he observes that “some of the initial funding came from conference dues withheld by First Mennonite during its dispute with the conferences.” Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 257, 258.

46 Enns, *Jubilate*, 63.

47 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 178.

wieser church's liberal theological views,⁴⁸ together with its members' participation in "worldly" activities,⁴⁹ resulted in a series of public condemnations by other Mennonite individuals and organizations and, ultimately, the congregation's withdrawal from membership in the national and provincial conferences.⁵⁰ While he would not discuss these events during our interview, Neufeld did recall that there was a "strong perception that because of earlier disagreements among church leaders, only three churches were involved at the start" in the founding of Westgate. He said that there was "considerable questioning by other churches" of the need for an urban Mennonite school, but that other Mennonite churches later joined as financial supporters of Westgate.⁵¹

Neufeld had noted the religious liberality of the school when he was asked to reflect on his experiences on the occa-

48 The church council emphasized that "human knowledge of the end times and eternity is incomplete, that they should be regarded as a great mystery of God, and that the primary concern of Christians should be the discharge of their responsibilities during their short span of life on earth." Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 181. Former Westgate teacher Anna Penner shared the prevailing opinion among Manitoba Mennonites of the Schoenwieser church: "They had a reputation as heathens." Anna Penner interview.

49 For example, the church was not averse to its members dancing, social drinking, card playing, or acting. The church's *Jugendverein* (young people's group) presented dramas at Winnipeg's Austro-Hungarian Hall and at Prosvita (the Canadian Ukrainian Institute's hall) at a time when many Mennonites were morally opposed to theatre productions. The *Jugendverein's* activities led to the founding of the Winnipeg Mennonite Theatre. Enns, *Jubilate*, 46, 79; Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 178.

50 The church was readmitted to national membership in 1949 (after Rev. Enns was forced to agree with the conference's condemnation of universalism) and to provincial membership in 1968. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 179–82. A footnote in the church's anniversary history remarks, "The foregoing is the official version of this happening; unofficially more can be told about this unfortunate affair than is cited here or will be found in official Conference reports or minutes." Enns, *Jubilate*, 63–64.

51 Neufeld joined First Mennonite Church as a member in either 1945 or 1946, and so would have been in the congregation when Rev. Enns was undergoing questioning and condemnation by provincial and national church leaders. Neufeld transferred his membership to North Kildonan Mennonite Church in the mid-1950s. He has been very active in this congregation and has served on the executive of the Conference of Mennonites of Manitoba, as church moderator, as choir conductor, church council chair, and church anniversary committee chair.

sion of Westgate's twenty-fifth anniversary.

*The [board of] directors were convinced that direction and challenge could best be given to their youth through open and honest study of the academics, of faith issues, of reasons for value systems, of scientific investigation, of fine arts influences, of community and church dynamics, of the need for critical analysis, and of the need for a critical perception of current issues and concerns facing the youth within the larger community.*⁵²

Neufeld stated that communicating the history of the Mennonite faith was an important part of this process. The consequences of such an education would be significant for not only the students but the broader Mennonite church and society as a whole.⁵³ Gerhard Peters, one of the charter members of the Mennonite Educational Society, had expressed this view in the promotional catalogue for the school in its fourth year of operation. The school would provide a Christian education so that students would “not lose themselves in the American melting pot” but instead “contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God within their communities.”⁵⁴

Anna Penner, the other original employee of Westgate, was born in Canada, the daughter of the minister of Niverville Mennonite Church. Like Frank Neufeld, she is a graduate of MCI. She said she had “always taught among Mennonites” in Manitoba.⁵⁵ Her first school was near Steinbach, at Burwalde. She also taught at Carothers, at Argyle, and

52 Frank Neufeld, “Reflections on Westgate – The Early Years,” Westgate yearbook, 1983.

53 Ibid.

54 G.H. Peters, “Kurzer Bericht ueber die Entstehung des Mennonitischen Bildungsinstituts – Winnipeg,” *Katalog* (1961–62), 16.

55 Anna Penner interview.

in Niverville. She saw an advertisement in the Mennonite German-language periodical *Der Bote* for a teaching position in grades 7 and 8 at the Mennonite Educational Institute, and applied. She was interviewed by members of the board of directors at the corner of William Avenue and Isabel Street in Winnipeg, rather than in the church that was the school's first facility. Penner taught only briefly at Westgate, quitting to raise her family. Frank Neufeld was her colleague and principal, whom she described as "old school. He held the reins tight."⁵⁶ Like Neufeld, Penner was unwilling to go into detail about the suspicion with which other Mennonites viewed the Schoenwieser church and the subsequent effect on the formation of Westgate. She too observed that the North Kildonan and Pigeon Lake Mennonite churches were early supporters of Westgate, and that though "other Mennonites were not interested," they "slowly realized the value" of the school.

Karl Fast was the third employee to be hired (in the second year of the school's operation, 1959–60).⁵⁷ When Frank Neufeld asked him to teach at Westgate he declined, as he had no teaching certificate and believed his English was not good enough. Neufeld then approached the provincial Department of Education, explaining that Fast had completed teacher training in Russia and Germany and that because of the war, he might not have certificates. Neufeld also approached a university registrar and arranged for Fast to receive provisional second-year status. Fast thus completed some further education and obtained his teaching certificate. For the second school year, 1959–60, Anna Peters taught

56 Penner recalled that Neufeld expelled a student for smoking in the church building that housed the school. At the time, the school had been open for less than a month. See also minutes of board of directors meeting, September 29, 1958.

57 Karl Fast's initial salary was \$3,600, deliberately chosen to match his previous salary as a teacher in the public school system. Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 2, 1959.

grades 7–8, Frank Neufeld taught grades 10–11, and they shared grade 9. Karl Fast taught the German and religion classes.

Fast described the early challenges the school faced in finding supporters: at first, some believed Westgate “would be a school for the children of the elite. That’s what Westgate Mennonite Collegiate never intended to be and never was.”⁵⁸ Rather, the school’s purpose was to meet the “ethnic and religious needs” of students, “so that they would fit better into the churches, into the immediate community and thus become worthy citizens of the country their parents selected as their chosen homeland. What a noble and ideal objective for obtaining an education!”⁵⁹

The teachers were responsible to teach eleven subjects daily. Storage of chemicals in the church was prohibited by fire regulations, so Neufeld would transport materials for chemistry classes between the school and his home. Sports at the time “consisted mainly of ping-pong” but also football and baseball. Mennonite history and religion classes were conducted in the German language, as was *Morgenandacht* (morning devotions) – “a very official and serene worship service”⁶⁰ held each morning:

*All the teachers sat up front, like preachers in a church; however, the service began with the singing of the National Anthem. This was followed by a hymn and the sermon (only delivered by male teachers, of course) closing with prayer and announcements.*⁶¹

58 Karl Fast, “Looking Back on a Good Experience Teaching Our Youth,” *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 19.

59 Ibid.

60 Charlotte Enns, tribute to the history of the school, Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

61 Ibid.

Male responsibility for religious education did not change at Westgate until the 1960s.⁶²

The first year of operation also saw the first graduation class. Five students were fêted at a celebration on July 14, 1959, that ended with a banquet. Ingrid Neufeld, Edith Peters, Theodor Loewen, Henry Dueck, and Hans Klassen each received a book as a graduation gift.⁶³ A class photo was taken and framed by board member Paul Neustaedter, a tradition he maintained for many years.⁶⁴

Changes in Location and Governance

The school's existence in the education wing of the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church was never seen as a long-term solution. A committee was formed to find an independent location that would house the school alone; the budget was set at \$19,000.⁶⁵ Preferred neighbourhoods were Elmwood, East Kildonan, and North Kildonan.⁶⁶ The purchase of the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church at 343 Edison Avenue was considered, and the board of directors made an offer of \$15,000.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the purchase agreement could not be signed in the name of the Mennonite Educational Society, as the school had not yet been incorporated. Instead, the executives of the board of directors signed the contract: Dr. P. Enns, Rev. Isaak Klassen, David Rempel, and Karl Fast. A loan was obtained from the Imperial Bank

62 The General Conference Mennonite Church first permitted women to be ordained as ministers in 1974. Harold S. Bender and John A. Esau, "Ordination," *GAMEO*, 1989, <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Ordination&oldid=101100>.

63 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 2, 1959; Charlotte Enns, tribute to history of school, Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

64 Paul Neustaedter, "Memories from My Life," private manuscript, 1995, courtesy of Paul Neustaedter. These graduation class photos still hang at Westgate.

65 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 22, 1958.

66 Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 19, 1958.

67 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 27, 1958.

on Henderson Highway in East Kildonan for \$18,500. And the decision was made to create a finance committee.⁶⁸

Incorporation of the Mennonite Educational Society occurred in 1960. Its charter members were Ernest Enns, Karl Fast, Rev. Isaak Klassen, David Rempel, Henry Riediger, Gerhard H. Peters, Paul Neustaedter, Rev. Jacob Wiebe, Rev. Jacob Warkentin, Theodor Schroeder (of the rural municipality of Ritchot), Abram Vogt (of Steinbach), and August Dyck (of the rural municipality of Cartier).⁶⁹ The society's purpose was "to maintain a school or schools for the daily instruction of children in accordance with the laws of Manitoba and in addition to provide instruction in the Mennonite faith, history and traditions, and in German as a second language."⁷⁰ Society members had to be eighteen years of age or older, pay a \$50 membership fee and \$5 annually, and be a member of a General Conference (GC) Mennonite or Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) church, or be someone "whose beliefs are similar."⁷¹ Board members, however, had to be at least twenty-one and be a GC or CMC church member.

The former North Kildonan MB Church required renovations prior to its functioning as a school. Frank Neufeld and the executive of the board of directors took on this responsibility initially. Abram Isaak, Isaak Redekop, and H. Wiebe were considered for the position of principal builder, and the task fell to Abram Isaak.⁷² He presented the board with a plan for the renovations, with costs estimated at \$1,500.⁷³ As the newly formed school "could not afford to

68 Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 29, 1958, and January 11, 1959.

69 The Mennonite Educational Society of Manitoba Incorporation Act, S.M. 1960, c. 106.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 16, 1959.

73 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 17, 1959.

hire people” to do the renovations, “board members and volunteers did most of the work – carpentry, painting, plumbing, and electrical.”⁷⁴ Ultimately, the total cost of renovation was \$5,600.⁷⁵

Board members and school supporters worked hard to convert the church into a useable school facility. The board only hired people for those tasks that required permits or inspections; all other work was done by volunteers.⁷⁶ Board member Paul Neustaedter recalled the challenge of painting the church ceiling, which was high and arched. Fellow board member and church pastor Isaak Klassen was also a house painter. Together, Neustaedter and Klassen painted the ceiling. While Neustaedter held the tall wooden ladder, Klassen climbed to the top and started painting. But he also started discussing Albert Schweitzer’s philosophy of “Reverence for Life,” swinging his paint-laden brush to emphasize his points and sending whitewash everywhere. In this way, it took several evenings to finish the ceiling.⁷⁷

The board considered giving Mennonite Educational Institute a new name with this move. Board members Abram Vogt, Rev. Isaak Klassen, and Gerhard H. Peters were tasked with considering options in late 1960.⁷⁸ By early 1961, it was decided that the name of the school would not be changed, and that the question would be revisited in the future.⁷⁹ In 1962, the issue of a new name was revisited in detail in a document presented to the board by Abram Vogt.⁸⁰ The naming of the school was compared to the naming of a child. It is difficult to choose an arbitrary name for a child,

74 Neustaedter, “Memories from My Life.”

75 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 2, 1959.

76 Paul Neustaedter interview.

77 Ibid.

78 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 1, 1960.

79 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 21, 1961.

80 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 6, 1962, and October 30, 1962.

particularly when compared with the simplicity of the tradition of naming a child after its father, grandfather, or uncle. “Does the child not resemble these family members? Why should naming a school be any different?”⁸¹ One suggestion was that the school be named after its location (much like Rosthern’s Mennonite school). Another suggestion was that it would be a mistake for the school to add to its existing name. Alternatively, the school could be named in honour of a memorable historical figure, such as Hans Denck, “without a doubt one of the greatest scholars among the Anabaptists.” Another possibility was Heinrich Franz, “the most famous schoolmaster among the Mennonites in Russia.” Other options were Johann Cornies, Bernhard Harder, Heinrich Heese, and Peter Holzrichter, or simply “Friesen” (“a German tribe that many Mennonites consider to be the origin of their ancestors”). While biblical male names could be used, they ran the risk of sounding “Catholic.” Instead, biblical place names were to be preferred, such as Bethania, Bethesda, and Elim. Biblical concepts also could be used in naming, such as “grace.” The document concluded that “the name chosen will barely help the school; on the contrary, it is the school that should make the name renowned.”⁸² Final suggestions included the school’s existing name (Mennonite Educational Institute, MEI); Winnipeg Mennonite Highschool (WMHS) or Mennonite Highschool in Winnipeg (MHW); Kildonan Mennonite Highschool or Mennonite Highschool in Kildonan; Mennonite Central Highschool or Central Mennonite Highschool or Centre Mennonite Highschool; Heinrich Franz High School Lehranstalt; Hans Denck High School; Friesen’s Akademie; Johannes Schule; and James High School Jakobus.⁸³ Ultimately, the decision was made to

81 [Abram Vogt], “Naming the MEI of Winnipeg,” typescript, 1962.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

keep the name Mennonite Educational Institute.⁸⁴ It was not until 1965 and the relocation to a former Catholic convent on West Gate that the school was renamed: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate.⁸⁵

The relocation to West Gate allowed the school to have larger facilities in a more central location. The Convent of the Sacred Heart was located in a former mansion at 86 West Gate in Armstrong's Point, a wealthy neighbourhood in the heart of the city. The house had been built in 1901 for Rockley Kaye, the vice-president of a wholesale grocer and meat-packing company. The two-and-a-half-storey Tudor revival home had a limestone foundation, brick veneer on the main floor, and half-timbering and stucco on the upper floors. Inside were fourteen rooms, seven fireplaces, two verandas, a greenhouse, a balcony, and beautiful quarter-cut oak stairs. With its purchase by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1950, the house underwent dramatic renovations so that the "only original features [were] found on the first floor."⁸⁶ In 1952, the upper half storey became a full storey, much exterior and interior ornamentation was removed (including the half timbering and the balcony), the interior layout was significantly changed, and a major addition (stylistically unconnected to the original mansion) was added to the rear of the house.⁸⁷ The school purchased this building in 1964, attaching a second addition in 1978 to the nuns' first addition. All these "unsympathetic alterations," the city's Historical Buildings Committee lamented,

84 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 30, 1962.

85 This choice was overwhelmingly preferred to the other alternatives, which were to rename the school as Westgate Collegiate (Mennonite) or to keep the original name of Mennonite Educational Institute. Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1965.

86 Murray Peterson, "86 West Gate: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate," Historical Buildings Committee, April 1989.

87 *Ibid.*

have reduced this structure to a shadow of its past.... For all intents and purposes, [86 West Gate] ceased to be a landmark in, or even complementary to, Armstrong's Point after the 1952 renovations. What once could have been considered one of the area's and the city's most beautiful homes was irreversibly changed.⁸⁸

These two moves by the school – first to Edison Avenue and then to West Gate – were accompanied by changes to the structure of the educational society and the board. In the early 1960s, it was decided that every church that financially supported the school would be allowed a voting representative on the board of directors. It was also decided that members of the board of directors could be re-elected only once,⁸⁹ and that educational society memberships would become transferable and heritable.⁹⁰

The board of directors in 1980 reflected on the origins and purpose of the school in light of the challenges they faced. Westgate “was founded to provide young people with an education that invests in people, within an institutional structure that functions as a Christian community.” The founders “saw this school as a necessary and integral part of furthering the faith of the fathers, for whom no means was too great to foster and support Mennonite education (this included threat of and actual immigration – Manitoba School Question, etc).” The 1970s were a challenging decade, with a million-dollar debt and an average student-to-staff ratio of eleven to one. The low point was 1971, when the school had an enrolment of only seventy-seven. The question frequently asked during those years was: “Do we close the

88 Ibid.

89 Annual general meeting reports, February 3, 1963.

90 Annual general meeting reports, January 14, 1962.

school in December or wait till June?"⁹¹

By the 1990s, having weathered the financial crisis, the board revised its governance structure. The constitution was amended, changing the board membership from twelve to a minimum of three and a maximum of 100 (later altered to a minimum of six and a maximum of fifty).⁹² Two representatives from each church financially supporting the school were made directors (three representatives from each church with a membership of more than 700). In addition, two representatives of the parents' association, one staff representative, the school's principal, one alumni representative, a representative from the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba, and two members-at-large formed the board.⁹³

Governance remained largely unchanged until the early twenty-first century. By this time, the composition of the student body was only approximately half Mennonite. Changes were made to streamline the operation of the board (limiting its size) and to ensure a voice for non-Mennonites on the board. The Mennonite Educational Society of Manitoba Incorporation Act was repealed in 2010, so that the school would be governed solely by The Corporations Act. Constitutional bylaws were amended in 2011 to allow for fewer board members. Each church supporting the school was to appoint only one board representative, for a total of thirteen directors from congregations. An additional four board members could be recruited at the discretion of the board to ensure that the skills required for governance would be available. Board representatives of the alumni association and the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba were

91 "Policy Statement," November 1980.

92 Annual general meeting reports, May 27, 1991; minutes of board of directors meeting, September 16, 1991.

93 Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, "Board Structure and Method of Operation," August 24, 1992.

eliminated (indeed, appointments from these two groups had not been made for some years). Monthly board meetings were reduced to three per year. Staff representatives were granted voting rights (their status had been unclear earlier). And the board chair would be appointed by the board itself rather than elected by the educational society membership at its annual general meeting.⁹⁴

Mission and Purpose of the School

Paul Neustaedter, one of the first board members of the school, observed that its purpose was “to offer children of Mennonite homes a richer curriculum which included Mennonite history, religious instruction, and German.”⁹⁵ The school started very small and was unable to offer some of the options available in the public system: industrial arts, an “elaborate music room,” home economics, art facilities, “or even art appreciation.”⁹⁶ These things worried Neustaedter, as they were an important part of schooling. However, the school was fortunate to find “enough idealistic teachers who gave above and beyond what the curriculum demanded.”⁹⁷

The school also was less evangelical than the other Mennonite schools in the province. There were “no annual prayer or revival meetings to encourage students to find Jesus,”⁹⁸ unlike at MBCI or MCI. Westgate was both more secular and more academic, Neustaedter explained, because it was an urban school (unlike the rural MCI). As well, the church that had first supported the school, Schoenwieser Mennonite, was “not evangelical. Some may say we lack missionary zeal and

94 Annual general meeting, governance structure sub-committee report, November 28, 2011.

95 Neustaedter, “Memories from My Life.”

96 Paul Neustaedter interview.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

maybe we do but we never have been evangelical. It's possible that we wanted a school that suited our disposition."⁹⁹ This sentiment is echoed in the school's twentieth-anniversary yearbook, dedicated to the founders of the school, which expressed the "hope that the school will continue to grow according to the goals these men have set and the students will live up to the motto: 'FRISCH, FREI, FROMM, und FRÖHLICH' [fresh, free, pious, and merry]."¹⁰⁰

Others echoed Neustaedter's perception of the school and its purpose. Charlotte Enns, a former student, parent of students, and former board member, observed that in the 1950s, the founders "feared that it would become a school for the elite and exclude many families."¹⁰¹ Instead, the school was to be "a place for the average Mennonite student; the dull and sharp, the quiet and the trouble-makers have always been at home in the Westgate setting."¹⁰² Former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel observed that this description of Westgate students was still accurate in the twenty-first century: "What we get are regular and ordinary and full-spectrum kids."¹⁰³ The importance placed on Mennonite distinctives with respect to history, religion, and values, together with the varied church backgrounds of students, "resulted in a struggle regarding which direction the school should establish. The result was that religious values be taken on a personal level; through the guidance of the Christian influence of the teachers each student should be motivated to find their place."¹⁰⁴

This comparative religious freedom – emphasizing individuality over evangelicalism – shaped the creation of the

99 Ibid.

100 Westgate yearbook, 1974–75. This motto originated with nineteenth-century German educator Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.

101 Charlotte Enns, tribute to the history of the school, Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

102 Ibid.

103 Ozzie Rempel interview.

104 Charlotte Enns, tribute to the history of the school, Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

school's mission statement in 1993. A committee, consisting of two staff members, two board members, the board chair, and the principal, was formed to draft the statement.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, two drafts were prepared: one by the committee, and one by staff members. Staff members suggested the following as a mission statement:

*Westgate Mennonite Collegiate is committed to being a Christian School grounded in the Anabaptist tradition. It is our challenge as a Mennonite school to instill in our students a desire to strive for a Christian ideal in a secular society. Within this framework we endeavour to provide our students with a well rounded education.*¹⁰⁶

This statement was later revised by the staff:

*Westgate Mennonite Collegiate is a Christian School grounded in the Anabaptist tradition. It is the school's mission to provide a liberal educational experience, which will empower and inspire students to pursue a Christian ideal in a secular world.*¹⁰⁷

The board's mission statement committee suggested the following:

*Westgate Mennonite Collegiate is a Christian School grounded in the Anabaptist tradition. It is the mission of the school to provide an education which will inspire students to pursue a Christian ideal as people of God in a secular world.*¹⁰⁸

105 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 20, 1993.

106 Mission statement drafts, n.d. [ca. 1994].

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

The board debated the merits of these statements and questioned some of the terminology used. What exactly was the purpose of the mission statement? What was the meaning of the term “liberal”? Was it necessary to mention the curriculum?¹⁰⁹ Was “empower” a buzzword of the 1990s? Was “people of God” an inclusive or exclusive phrase?¹¹⁰ Yet another draft was produced as a result:

WMC is a Christian school grounded in the Anabaptist tradition. It is the mission of the school to provide a well-rounded education which will inspire and empower students to live as a people of God in a secular world. (alternate final phrases: “to live as a people of God” or “to live in a secular world as part of the people of God.”)¹¹¹

After further discussion, the board chose the phrasing: “to live as (a) people of God” but were unable to decide whether or not the indefinite article should be included. They decided “the staff should have the final say in this matter.”¹¹² The staff opted for the following:

WMC is a Christian school grounded in the Anabaptist tradition. It is the mission of the school to provide a well-rounded education which will inspire and empower students to live as people of God.¹¹³

109 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 17, 1994.

110 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 21, 1994.

111 Mission statement, n.d. [ca. 1995].

112 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 16, 1995.

113 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 18, 1995.

The choice of “people of God” rather than “a people of God” was significant. Westgate’s reason for being was not to proselytize the one true way but to encourage students to find their own religious direction amidst the global diversity of God’s followers.

Conclusion

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate was one of hundreds of private schools established in Canada in the twentieth century. Such institutions were the initiative of various immigrant groups eager to preserve their traditions, and they eventually became a part of the multicultural fabric of the nation. Westgate’s staff passed on the core elements of the Mennonite faith and heritage to their students. Knowledge of the German language and Mennonite religious beliefs were valued by the school’s founders, but so too were rejection of negative aspects of the Mennonite tradition and embrace of the broader urban environment in which they lived.

The small staff of Frank Neufeld, Anna Penner, and Karl Fast worked together with the parents, church members, and other supporters that constituted the board of directors, ladies’ auxiliary, and educational society to make the school a reality. Whether contained in a church basement, a renovated former church building, or a mansion-turned-convent, Westgate somehow managed to persist despite the limitations of its finances and facilities. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, a revised governance structure and a new mission statement ensured that the school would have a clear direction for its next fifty years.

*“To be a good Mennonite, you don’t
have to sing in German”*

2. Language and Religious Education at Westgate

“From the first day of Westgate’s existence it was obvious that the new school would be the object of constant and ever-increasing worries and concerns.”¹ So wrote Karl Fast in 1981, reflecting on his teaching career at the school. Westgate was a school founded by members of one of the most “liberal” Mennonite congregations in the city, funded by that and other churches and yet governed by an educational society rather than by the churches themselves. The school had been established to provide students with a Mennonite Christian education; knowledge of the German language, culture, and tradition; the Christian influence of their teachers; and “protection from the negative influences and atheistic tendencies of public schools.”² Doing so to the satisfaction of the various supporting churches and parents was, at best, a challenge; at worst, impossible.

1 Karl Fast, “Looking Back on a Good Experience Teaching Our Youth,” *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 19.

2 Karl Fast, “Die Entstehungsgeschichte unserer Schule,” *Katalog der Hochschule des Mennonitischen Bildungsverein* (Mennonite Educational Institute, 1963–64).

The German Language

For many Mennonites of Russian/Ukrainian origin, the German language was an important means of transmitting faith and culture. As Ted Regehr explains in his history of Mennonites in Canada,

*Some saw it as an effective barrier against outside influences. Others, who had been raised and had their most treasured spiritual experiences in a German milieu, loved the language and were convinced that its loss would deprive them of cultural, literary, aesthetic, and religious treasures. Still others simply felt uncomfortable or threatened by any suggestion that their most sacred activities should be conducted in a language that they did not fully understand or appreciate. And then there were some who saw a language transition [to English] as inevitable but hoped that older and younger members would still be able to communicate with one another.*³

At the school's founders' meeting in June 1957, it was decided that religion and Mennonite history would be taught in German.⁴ By 1962, of eight Mennonite educational institutions in Canada, only Westgate and Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) were teaching such courses in German – the others had moved to using English.⁵ German was the language used in chapel services at Westgate in the 1960s,

3 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 313.

4 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 18, 1957.

5 The eight Mennonite schools were Westgate, MCI, Rosthern Junior College (SK), United Mennonite Educational Institute (Leamington, ON), Canadian Mennonite Bible College (Winnipeg, MB), Mennonite Bible Institute (Didsbury, AB), Swift Current Bible Institute (SK), and Elim Bible School (Altona, MB). David Schroeder, "A Sacred Charge," pamphlet, ca. 1962, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

and students were required to speak only in German on Tuesdays and Thursdays (with grade penalties if they did not do so).⁶ By the mid-1960s, however, the catalogue promoting Westgate to potential students and their parents was no longer offered solely in German, though the religion courses continued to be taught in that language. Later, the use of German was restricted to a language course, and French soon outstripped it in popularity. While German language education continued to be offered at all grade levels, by the 1980s, Westgate had joined the other Canadian Mennonite schools in accepting that the German language was not essential for the transmission of Mennonite religious beliefs and values.

Debates about the importance of the German language at Westgate began as early as 1965.⁷ One of the challenges was that Mennonite churches and the Mennonite community in Winnipeg were, in the words of principal Frank Neufeld, “giving up the struggle to preserve the language.”⁸ School founder Victor Peters, consulted by the board in 1965, suggested that it was “psychologically advisable” that German and perhaps also religion be taught by a variety of teachers, and that French courses also be offered.⁹ It was agreed that “bringing in the English religion classes should not change anything,” and teacher Karl Fast was asked to coordinate the bilingual offering of these courses in September 1965.¹⁰ Both English and German continued to be used in the school’s chapel services.¹¹ Increased use of the Gothic

6 William Kruger interview.

7 Minutes of board of directors meetings, May 4, 1965, and June 1, 1965.

8 Principal’s report, annual general meeting, January 17, 1965. The transition to English in General Conference Mennonite churches occurred in the 1960s. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 314.

9 Minutes of board of directors meetings, June 1, 1965, and February 24, 1965.

10 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 6, 1965. The English-language religion classes would be taught by a paid minister, “provided his church gave permission.”

11 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 6, 1965.

script in German classes was proposed in 1965, but the board expressed concern that the German language should not be too closely identified with this outdated typographic form, and the only textbook using it was dropped.¹² The result was that German at Westgate was taught “basically for the purpose of communication” rather than the transmission of heritage. The teaching of German, Westgate founder Victor Peters declared, should have “an uninhibited approach”; though many Mennonites were abandoning the language, “only a few strongly object to the German” at Westgate.¹³ Increasing emphasis was placed on basic conversational German, as “an increasing number” of students did “not have a workable knowledge of German.”¹⁴ Meetings of the board of directors, however, would continue to be conducted (and minutes recorded) in German until the end of the 1960s.

In the early 1980s, the province of Manitoba began planning German-English bilingual education.¹⁵ A government-sponsored pilot project was considered at Westgate at this time that would offer grade 7 social studies in German. Assistance would be provided by Harold Ohlendorf, a consultant from Germany, and Prof. James Cummins from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).¹⁶ A public meeting was planned for January 14, 1986, to discuss the project.¹⁷ OISE’s National Language Centre¹⁸ was “willing to provide a professional assistant for staff development, planning, and evaluation” of immersion or bilingual German

12 Ibid.

13 Minutes of meeting of board and Bethel Mennonite Church council, October 19, 1965.

14 Principal’s report, William Kruger, January 1967.

15 Government of Manitoba, Education and Training, “International and Heritage Languages: German,” <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/languages/german/>.

16 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 18, 1985.

17 Memo from Rudy Regehr to parents and friends of Westgate, n.d.

18 Now known as the Centre for Educational Research on Languages and Literacies (CERLL), <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cerll/>.

classes at Westgate.¹⁹ Despite strong encouragement from the Manitoba government's Department of Education, German language teachers at Westgate expressed only "guarded support" for the idea.²⁰ Ultimately, it was determined that the pilot project was "unworkable" at Westgate, and instead an advanced German class was added for students with a background in German or who had come from bilingual programs elsewhere.²¹

The declining importance of German for the preservation of Mennonite faith and heritage in the urban environment, together with the rising importance of French after the 1969 passage of the Official Languages Act, resulted in further changes to the German program at Westgate, as at other Canadian Mennonite schools. French, which had been offered only occasionally in the early years of the school, was reintroduced in grade 7 in 1982 at the recommendation of the faculty.²² The board's education committee observed in 1990 that while German was "the heritage language," French was "becoming an ever increasingly necessary job requirement."²³ It was decided that German would continue to be compulsory at the junior high level, while senior students would have the option of taking French instead.²⁴

Three years later, the question arose as to whether German should be mandatory for *any* students. Was it "a mod-

19 Memo from Abe Peters to Westgate board, February 3, 1985.

20 Henry Fast, education committee report, minutes of the annual general meeting, April 28, 1986.

21 "Discussion of the Proposal to Extend German at Westgate," n.d.

22 "French Report," n.d. [ca. 1987]. French had been offered by correspondence in 1967–68. Faculty recommended at the annual general meeting in 1981 that French be offered at the junior high level and not scheduled at the same time as German, "as many students would want to take both." 1967–68 Catalogue, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; Staff report, annual general meeting, 1981; MHA, Vol. 832, Mennonite Collegiate Institute Dormitory Records, Folder 5; Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Materials, 1977–1981.

23 Minutes of education committee meeting, October 15, 1990.

24 Minutes of education committee meeting, December 17, 1990.

ern language' or a 'heritage language?'" The latter reason for studying German was rapidly "losing credibility," yet some school supporters wanted compulsory German to continue.²⁵ "Preserving the German language was one of the reasons for forming Westgate," those present at the school's 1993 annual general meeting concluded, though the roster of only seven students in the grade 12 German program was cause for concern.²⁶ Board chair Gerald Gerbrandt, however, stated:

*I am not sure the priority given to German at Westgate, based on the historical reality of Mennonites in Manitoba being largely of German background, can any more be defended. I realize this assumption is debatable (and should be debated).*²⁷

He suggested that junior students be required to take either German *or* French, and that time dedicated to language instruction be increased "so that the students have a better chance of truly learning the language."²⁸

The churches that were the financial supporters of the school had differing opinions on the importance of the German language at Westgate, shaped in part by the average age of the congregants and the congregations' own use (or lack thereof) of German. First Mennonite Church members "always focus on what is happening with the German issue," the board was told.²⁹ For them, it was "a very emotional issue." Northdale Mennonite Fellowship (which had been formed by Mennonites wanting more English in their church)³⁰ sup-

25 "Staff-Board Workshop reporting document," April 19, 1993.

26 Minutes of annual general meeting, November 1, 1993.

27 Gerald Gerbrandt, "Preparing Westgate for Year 2000," August 27, 1993.

28 Ibid.

29 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1994.

30 MHA, Northdale Mennonite Fellowship fonds description, http://www.mennonite-church.ca/programs/archives/holdings/MB/MB_NorthdaleMF.htm.

ported the end of compulsory German classes at Westgate but expressed “concern about losing Mennonite ethnicity.”³¹ Bethel Mennonite Church members believed teaching German was “not an ethnic issue.”³² Charleswood Mennonite Church was similarly unconcerned about the implications for ethnic identity but wanted compulsory second language education (in either German or French) until at least grade 11. Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church and Springfield Heights Mennonite Church supported Gerbrandt’s proposal. Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, however, was worried about the financial implications of expanding the language program.³³

Throughout the 1990s, the board debated these findings and their implications. It observed that the “demographics of our churches have changed. There are some churches that have a substantial German content in their worship. Others have none. As a school, we need to recognize this fact and adapt our program to the needs of our churches and the educational backgrounds of our students.”³⁴ The question was raised, “By removing the compulsory language requirement, how will Westgate deal with bands of students who were previously gainfully occupied studying German?”³⁵ In other words, what would prevent students, freed from compulsory second language study, from wreaking havoc in the hallways during their spares? One board member suggested that the school “should offer financial incentives” to students to study German; this idea “garnered mixed reactions.”³⁶ The education committee was tasked with thinking of ways to enhance Westgate’s second-language programs, particularly

31 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1994.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 “Second language learning at Westgate,” n.d. [ca. 1994].

35 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1994.

36 Ibid.

German.³⁷

German teacher Karl Langelotz reflected positively on the many changes over the years to the German-language program at Westgate. At first, the school tried to “carry out its original mission to teach well and teach the Mennonite and Christian story, as well as unique traditions like the Mennonite choral tradition and the German language. The early board would have pushed those areas,” he noted. Since then, “those imperatives have faded. To be a good Mennonite, you don’t have to sing, or sing in German.” Westgate’s German instructors teach German as “a world rather than a heritage language. It hasn’t hurt the program. The transition has been good.” German, Langelotz concluded, is no longer “a distinctive for Mennonites, even in the churches.”³⁸

Former board member Paul Neustaedter expressed more regret for the decline in significance of German at the school. He noted that former principal William (Bill) Kruger “sent a letter once a month, written in German, to school supporters. For subsequent generations of school supporters, these German letters mattered less, so eventually these reports stopped” and publication of an English-language school newsletter (*Westgate Perspective*) began instead. The consequences of the decline of German for the choral tradition at the school also were somewhat disappointing for Neustaedter. School choirs at the Westgate fundraising banquets would perform “this strange music and it created discontent among earlier supporters; now there are no German *Lieder* [songs] and there is no classical music. It may be sophisticated but it doesn’t win our hearts.”³⁹

Teaching Religion, Transmitting the Faith

37 Ibid.

38 Karl Langelotz interview.

39 Paul Neustaedter interview.

For a decade or two, German was seen as essential for the teaching of religion at Westgate. But what of the actual content of those religion courses? And how else were religious belief and practice a part of the school? Religion and worship were present at Westgate in a variety of ways: in chapel services, integrated into academic subjects, through the moral example of teachers, and explicitly in religion courses at each grade level. Initially, grade 7–9 students were taught the history of the Christian church, and students in grades 9–11 were taught Mennonite history. Grades 7 and 8 learned psalms and hymns, General Conference Mennonite Church catechism was taught in grades 9–10, grades 10–11 were taught “The Study of Our Faith” and studied “Character Development.”⁴⁰ Karl Fast, the second teacher hired at Westgate, created detailed curricula for the religion courses for which he was responsible. Grade 7 focused on the Old Testament, Psalms, and *Kernlieder* (core religious songs) such as “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden,” the Martin Luther classic “Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott,” and the so-called Mennonite hymn, “Nun danket alle Gott.” Church history in this grade included biographies of religious poet Karl Spitta, religious author Gerhard Tersteegen, hymn author Paul Gerhardt, theologian Martin Luther, and theologian Nicolaus Zinzendorf; the histories of Chrysostomus, Boniface, and Augustine; and the spread of Islam and Western Christianity.⁴¹ Grade 8 religion included study of the New Testament and Psalms; biographies of religious author Joseph Mohr, composer Franz Grüber, theologian Joachim Neander, religious poet Christian F. Gellert, and Christian martyr Germanicus; as well as more *Kernlieder*. Church history at this grade level incorporated the establishment of the Catholic church, the early Anabaptists and

40 Westgate yearbook, 1960.

41 Karl Fast’s religion class notes, ca. 1959–60, courtesy of Ozzie Rempel.

Mennonites, and the Thirty Years' War (making use of C.H. Wedel's *Kurzgefasste Kirchengeschichte*). The second volume of Paul Schaefer's *Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten!* was used with grade 9 students, who learned about the Jesuits, defenselessness or pacifism/non-violence (*Wehrlosigkeit*) in the historic Christian church, and the General Conference Mennonite Church catechism.⁴² The history of Russian Mennonites to 1945 was taught in grade 10, using an extraordinary range of German-language scholarly sources.⁴³ In addition, students in grades 10 and 11 studied "Doctrine" with Hans Legiehn's *Biblische Glaubenslehre*. Volume 3 of *Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten!* was used in grade 11 to study Mennonite history, while grade 12 students received an overview of the Bible using A. Hennecke's *Kurze Einführung in die Heilige Schrift*.

Chapel services (also known as devotions) were held for fifteen minutes every morning. These began with the singing of the national anthem, followed by a Bible reading, prayer, and hymn.⁴⁴ Speakers were invited from the broader Mennonite community (such as missionaries and Mennonite Central Committee workers) to deliver brief *Andachten* (brief sermons and/or prayers). In the school's first year, however, principal Frank Neufeld delivered all the sermons; later, staff

42 For the latter, students used C.H. Wedel's *Meditationen zu den Fragen und Antworten unseres Katechismus*.

43 These included J.S. Postma's *Das niederlaendische Erbe der preussisch-russ-laendischen Mennoniten*, Heinrich Goertz's *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, D.H. Epp's *Johann Cornies*, Echo-Verlag's *Die Kubaner Ansiedlung*, Franz Bartsch's *Unser Auszug nach Mittelasien*, H. Goertz's *Die Memriker Ansiedlung*, Echo-Verlag's *Am Trakt*, P.P. Dyck's *Orenburg*, G. Lohrenz's *Sagradowka*, J.J. Hildebrand's *Die Mennoniten-siedlungen in Sibirien*, and A. Lowen and A. Friesen's *Unsere Flucht ueber den Amur*.

44 Minutes of meeting of Westgate board of directors and Bethel Mennonite Church council, October 19, 1965. In later years, the singing of "O Canada" did not occur. Principal Gail Schellenberg informed the board in 2005 that the school had incorrectly believed it "had an exemption" from flying the flag and singing "O Canada." Overt symbols of nationalism had been eschewed by Manitoba Mennonites in the past – see, for example, discussion of the Manitoba Schools Question in Clark, *The Manitoba School Question*. Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 16, 2005.

shared in these duties⁴⁵ – though initially only the men. Pastors and other leaders in the General Conference Mennonite Church were invited to deliver brief sermons as well.⁴⁶ The purpose of these services (together with the religion courses) was to cultivate “a Christian spirit” in the school.⁴⁷

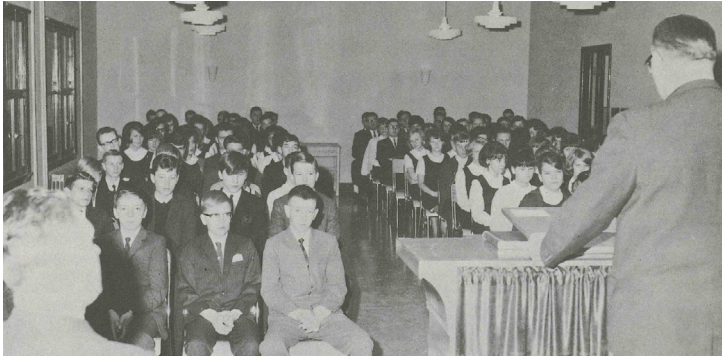


FIGURE 2.1. Students in a chapel service at Westgate.

Concerns about the religious teaching at Westgate were voiced almost from the school’s inception – not surprising, given that the school had been founded as an alternative to the rural and evangelical Mennonite private schools that existed at the time. Paul Schaeffer, principal of MCI in Gretna, apparently had taught that there were only three appropriate occupations for Mennonite graduates: nursing, teaching, and farming.⁴⁸ Many MCI graduates later attended Bible schools; Westgate graduates, by contrast, showed a preference for university, particularly United College (which later became

45 Frank Neufeld interview.

46 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 6, 1965.

47 Principal’s report, annual general meeting, January 17, 1965.

48 Bill Schulz interview.

the University of Winnipeg).⁴⁹ The other Winnipeg Mennonite high school, Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI), placed “too much emphasis on what you should not do,” former teacher Bill Schulz asserted, as opposed to Westgate’s emphasis on the value and beauty of a religious faith.⁵⁰

The churches’ criticism of the inadequacy and liberality of religious education at Westgate resulted in the creation in 1966 of detailed “Aims” for the school,⁵¹ but William Kruger, principal at the time, took a much more liberal approach to religion during the tumultuous 1960s than these “Aims” advised. “We firmly believe that Westgate is an indispensable part of the program of the Mennonite Church,” Kruger asserted in 1968, adding pointedly – “if the Church is really trying to do all that can be done for her young people.”⁵² Kruger believed that the school had a critical function to play, meeting needs that the church was either unable or unwilling to address:

If the Christian Church today, the Mennonite Church included, believes that she has been training its [sic] children and youth in the way they should go, then she needs to take a close look at what she has been teaching. Or perhaps the problem is that she has failed to communicate and interpret the Christian faith to her children and youth.... The home, church and school must shoulder the responsibility of Christian training together.⁵³

This Christian training could not be provided using tradi-

49 Ibid. For many, the University of Winnipeg was chosen over the University of Manitoba for its smaller scale, as it was felt that one might lose one’s Christianity on the larger campus.

50 Ibid.

51 See Chapter 3 for details.

52 Principal’s report, annual general meeting, January 21, 1968.

53 Principal’s report, January 1967.

tional appeals to religious authority:

Motivation and moral sensitivity cannot be legislated. They can be roused by education and passed on from generation to generation by persons who themselves are properly motivated. The Mennonite Church has historically given spiritual perspective through her educational institutions. This task is still part of the Churches' total program.⁵⁴

The challenges of defining Mennonitism for a new generation of students in an urban environment undergoing massive social transformation resulted in debates between administration, faculty, and supporting churches.

These debates were not restricted to Westgate, of course, as the social circumstances prompting them were faced by all Mennonites in the province at the time. The Education Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba in 1967 called a meeting of principals and board chairs of Westgate, Elim Bible School, and MCI to “define the aims and philosophy of private schools.”⁵⁵ At least half the meeting, though, was to be dedicated to “the specific Westgate situation.” The subsequent discussion revealed that the schools not only wanted to move beyond the traditionalist approaches of their past, but that they saw themselves as the religious vanguard for their supporting churches: “the constituency has little vision.” Religion courses had not “kept pace” with improvements in the teaching of the sciences, meeting participants declared. Further, the “academic standard of teachers called for leadership in Christian Education has till recently

54 Letter from William Kruger, principal, to Sunday school superintendents, January 3, 1967.

55 Letter from F.F. Enns, secretary of Education Committee of Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba, to principals and board chairs of Westgate, Elim Bible School, and MCI, September 7, 1967.

not been of the same calibre as that of teachers for ‘secular’ courses.” Out-of-date pedagogy and “the perpetuation of irrelevant imagery of religiousness or churchness” were weaknesses the schools faced. The “rebellious” nature of young people was attributed, at least indirectly, to the churches and the church schools that had resisted change. The Anabaptist heritage of the Mennonite schools was a particular challenge: how did one pass on the faith to the next generation in a way that did not violate the voluntary nature of religious commitment that was exemplified by the Mennonite church’s practice of adult baptism? “How does this [decision making on the part of young people] relate to authoritarian concepts of regulations and discipline (compulsory chapel, residence rules, etc.)?” It was even suggested that students might form their own independent religious communities: students who are Christians could “covenant together” and so “discover what it means to be the church or Christian fellowship.”⁵⁶

At this meeting with Elim, MCI, and the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba, Westgate’s principal explained the effects of urbanization on Mennonites in Winnipeg and on Westgate. As Mennonites moved to the cities, Kruger observed, “tremendous adjustments have to be made in their socio-economic life. The most crucial and difficult adjustment, however, lies within the realm of Church life.”⁵⁷ Winnipeg had more General Conference Mennonites than any other city in North America, he noted. As such, Winnipeg Mennonites had “a responsibility of doing pioneer work and adapting to the city way of life in such a way that our church can grow and that the Christian witness of our people will penetrate all areas of city life.”⁵⁸ Thus Mennonites needed to

56 “Notes on meeting at MCI, Gretna, called by Manitoba Conference Education Committee,” November 18, 1967.

57 Principal’s report, annual general meeting, January 18, 1970.

58 *Ibid.*

take active part

in the business world, in the academic world, in our city council, in our community organizations, in our schools and in our total city environment. We cannot sit around and wait for models and advice as to how we are to do our tasks but must rather explore possibilities, experiment and pioneer even as our forefathers pioneered in various areas making their contribution in the rural areas.⁵⁹

Such pioneering was resisted by most Canadian Mennonites. As Ted Regehr has detailed, for Mennonites, the city was suspect: it was worldly, a place of sin, and migrating there would probably lead to the loss of the German language and, relatedly, of the Mennonite faith.⁶⁰ Thus it was not until after the 1980s that urban Mennonites came to outnumber rural Mennonites in Canada.⁶¹ Decades before this rural-to-urban shift took place, it was Westgate and MBCI that pioneered ways for Mennonites to live – as Mennonites – within the secular city. Westgate’s origins in the “sin church” (First Mennonite Church, the most liberal Mennonite church in Manitoba), however, resulted in conflict between the school and the more traditional members of its constituency.

Mennonite schools across North America faced similar challenges of preserving religious tradition in the face of an increasingly urban and secular society. Staff at MCI, as early as the 1910s, found it difficult to prevent students from “smoking, drinking, dancing, and pool playing” – indeed, one teacher of that era recalled that virtually all the male students

59 Ibid.

60 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 169–70.

61 Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village*, 32, Table 2.2.

“smoke and drank from early youth.”⁶² Mennonites voiced objections to the young people of the United Mennonite Educational Institute (UMEI) in Leamington gathering “for social evenings, roller skating in the newly-built auditorium, literary programmes, Christmas parties,” and other social activities.⁶³ Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Indiana, at one point in the 1970s, created a Task Force on Lifestyle to address such issues as “beards and jeans and sweatshirts” and “overt expressions of independence” by students.⁶⁴ A Mennonite scholar observed in 1925 that some Mennonite church leaders in the midwestern United States “insisted that every Christian doctrine must mean one and the same thing to all men and for all time. And when differences of interpretation or application of certain doctrines arose between groups the first thought was that of starting another school.”⁶⁵ His thoughtful conclusion transcends his own time period: Mennonite students “are of the same human stuff as those who attend any other college. They are not immune to the educational, religious, ethical, and idealistic germs of modern atmosphere.”⁶⁶

Projects were begun at Westgate in the 1960s that provided students a more visibly active role in the spiritual life of the school. Students spent their summers volunteering in disadvantaged communities in Lima, Ohio; Blackfoot, Idaho; Newton, Kansas; and in Manitoba First Nations reserves at Manigotagan and Bloodvein. They discussed how to apply the lessons they learned at these placements to their own congregations and communities: “We tried to analyse the pros and cons of our own church set-up and to criticize

62 Ens, *Die Schule Muss Sein*, 91.

63 Driedger, *United Mennonite Educational Institute*, 38.

64 Pannabecker, *Ventures of Faith*, 98–99.

65 Hartzler, *Education among the Mennonites of America*, 169.

66 *Ibid.*, 168.

constructively.”⁶⁷ A Christian life committee was formed for the first time, “to foster a conscious and responsible way of life in the school and community.”⁶⁸ This student group organized and led a chapel service every third Tuesday; planning and conducting these services was thus no longer the sole preserve of administration and staff. This student committee also planned morally acceptable social activities such as a Halloween social, tobogganing, roller skating, and the screening of the movies *To Sir with Love*, *King of Kings*, and *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*.⁶⁹ Students were exposed to the diversity of religious belief and experience in the city, as grade 9 students visited the Shaarey Zedek synagogue located across the Assiniboine River from Westgate.⁷⁰

Individuality was emphasized over conformity, signifying a shift away from a traditional hierarchical approach to religious education. The world was undergoing significant transformation in the 1960s, and so was Westgate. There were changes in styles (“hairlines down, hemlines up”), tastes (“witness the rise of the guitar”), and school spirit (“there are even male voices in the choir now, an unheard of rumbling during my student days”). Westgate’s goal, an alumnus noted, was to “help [students] to succeed as individuals in our environment of automation and mass media; to help [students] to realize that Christianity, in its deepest sense, is *very*

67 Lois Goertzen, “Summer Servanthood,” Westgate yearbook, 1967–68.

68 Peter Letkemann, “Christian Life (Fellowship) Committee,” Westgate yearbook, 1967–68.

69 “Christian Life Committee,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

70 “Grade 9 Class Report,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69. In 1973, “world religions” was taught at the same time of day as Mennonite history, so that students (particularly foreign students who “find Mennonite History difficult”) could have a choice. Minutes of personnel, curriculum, and staff committees, September 5, 1973. This solution was only temporary, however, as the board in 1992 questioned the “relevance of existing religion curriculum for international students.... There are varying degrees of frustration expressed by the students and the staff in trying to relate the religion curriculum to Oriental [sic] international students.” Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 19, 1992.

applicable to our contemporary situation.”⁷¹ Principal Kruger declared, “It is our sincere hope and prayer that each student has gained through the environment of Westgate the maturity to become more free, to be an individual. An individual who feels singled out to be a Christian brother [*sic*] of the world.”⁷² A grade 11 student recognized, “Although individualism is stressed by the faculty, we readily unite to replenish school spirit.”⁷³

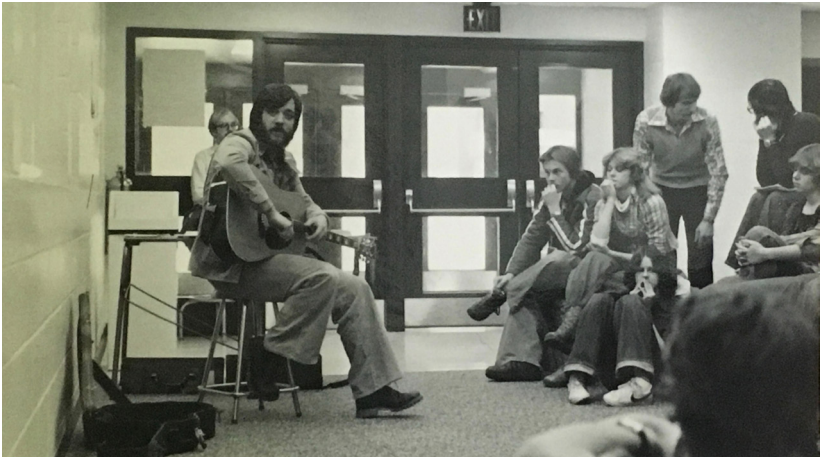


FIGURE 2.2. The “rise of the guitar” – music in the senior lounge

This liberal religiosity and willingness to engage with the secular world also attracted non-Mennonites to Westgate, which presented something of a dilemma for the school. Should non-Mennonites have to study Mennonite history and theology? Should the number of non-Mennonite students admitted be capped? Should parents of non-Mennonite students be permitted to become members of

71 Victor Kliewer, “Alumni Message,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

72 William Kruger, “Principal’s Report,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

73 “Grade 11 Class Report,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

the Mennonite Educational Society? The school decided to “keep the religion and culture centered on the Mennonite interpretation of theology and history” while simultaneously endeavouring to make non-Mennonites “feel part of and benefit from” the school’s religion program.⁷⁴ The school hoped that “the values, morals, and ethics” taught to non-Mennonites would “guide them as they seek direction for their lives.”⁷⁵ The question of how many non-Mennonite students to admit was addressed by the board – interestingly, not from the perspective of a cap but of a minimum: “Should there be a deliberate attempt to enrol a certain proportion of non-Mennonite students? The non-Mennonite students to date have been a definite asset to the school.”⁷⁶ In practice, however, the number of non-Mennonite students was effectively capped, as it was decided that Mennonite applicants and returning non-Mennonites should receive admissions preference.⁷⁷ The school would continue to hire only Mennonite teachers, however.⁷⁸ The board also initiated a study of the pros and cons of changing the school’s constitution to allow non-Mennonites to become educational society members.⁷⁹

Through the 1970s, the school continued to debate how to negotiate a middle ground between the two extremes of religious indoctrination and unquestioning conformity

74 Minutes of planning committee meeting, October 17, 1968.

75 John R. Lohrenz [Westgate board chair], “Dreaming the Dream and Building the Reality,” *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 16.

76 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 8, 1971. This question was revisited in a somewhat different form in 1993: “How much of the student body must be Mennonite in order for the school to maintain its Mennonite identity? In what ways might Westgate ensure that a significant part of its student body is Mennonite?” Memo from Gerald Gerbrandt to staff and board, April 6, 1993.

77 Minutes of semi-annual meeting, Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, November 24, 1975, Mennonite Archives of Ontario (hereafter MAO), Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

78 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 8, 1971.

79 Minutes of semi-annual meeting, May 31, 1971.

to secular society. Teachers asked themselves whether they should expect students to undergo religious conversion or seek baptism and church membership. “What expectations do we have of uncommitted students? How hard do we push for enlightenment? When does the push become indoctrination?”⁸⁰ School principal John Enns advocated having “the courage to incorporate the past into their daily lives in an honest attempt to build a better future.” Students, he believed, should be “tempered in the heat of Christian confrontation.”⁸¹ Mennonite Educational Society president Dave Epp, by contrast, declared that the school needed to “get back to some basics and provide students with more answers rather than more questions.” Those basics should include “faith as it is reflected in a disciplined lifestyle.”⁸² Parents, he claimed, “are looking to the school to *increase the emphasis* on positive Bible centered religious training and positive Family Life training.”⁸³

These conflicting views resulted in the reassessment of the school’s “Aims” in the 1970s. A committee composed of Frank Neufeld, John J. Enns, Waldemar Janzen, and Jake Dyck was tasked in 1976 with rewriting the “Aims” and the constitution.⁸⁴

It is the concern of the Mennonite Educational Society in its program of education to stress the integration of knowledge,

80 Westgate staff in-service discussion questions, October 26, 1972.

81 John Enns, “Principal’s message,” Westgate yearbook, 1972–73.

82 President’s report (Dave Epp), annual general meeting, May 26, 1975; and type-script: “Notice of Meeting: Mennonite Educational Society of Manitoba Annual Meeting” May 26, 1975, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

83 Minutes and reports of annual general meeting, May 31, 1976, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; and annual general meeting minutes, North Kildonan Mennonite Church, May 31, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate funds.

84 Minutes of board of directors meeting, 25 October 1976.

*to interpret the world and the meaning of life from a Christian perspective, to acquaint students with the Mennonite heritage, to stress Christian values and give leadership in education so that the changing needs of the students and the times will be considered.*⁸⁵

A revised “Statement of Aims” was issued later that year. Westgate was to strive “to achieve a Christian perspective and a high standard of instruction in all its course offerings.”⁸⁶ Courses should “lead the student to a knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith interpreted in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.” The necessary attention was to be paid to “areas of study of particular interest to the school’s Mennonite constituency, such as the German language and Church music.” Westgate was to “promote a Christian atmosphere expressing itself in a lifestyle congruent with the beliefs and ideals of the Mennonite brotherhood.” Teachers were to “seek to assist the student to respond with a deep loyalty to Jesus Christ, to become a part of the worship and work of the church, and to order his life according to Holy Scripture.” Staff were to demonstrate an “exemplary Christian life and testimony” and, if teaching religion classes, have “received theological training in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.”⁸⁷

The original 1966 “Aims” had been drafted by a group of church ministers and were not part of the Constitution of the Mennonite Educational Society; the revised 1976 “Aims” were added to the constitution. Board member Irmgard Thiessen had asked that an additional aim be included: “Students shall be encouraged to be leaders in their world of tomorrow. Students, teachers and parents must learn with

85 Constitution of Mennonite Educational Society, n.d.

86 Revised Statement of Aims, October 1976.

87 Ibid.

and from each other. Together they only form a community in vision of the future.”⁸⁸ Her motion was defeated, not least because of “hesitancy to have ‘leadership’ written into the constitution since this would necessitate an exclusive admission policy or curriculum. Some are leaders, some are not.”⁸⁹ The revised “Aims” also raised debate as to whether board members were required to be members of Mennonite churches. It was observed that John Enns had been Westgate’s principal “for several years before he became a baptized member” and that board treasurer Korny Loewen had “only become a member of the Mennonite Church this year.”⁹⁰ Financial support, however, came primarily from Mennonites, and “since we intend to keep the school a Mennonite institution” then perhaps only Mennonites should be board members, some argued. A motion to this effect was defeated.⁹¹

The benefits of the 1976 revised “Aims” were perceived to be immediate. The school’s public relations committee reported that same year “a noticeable increase of interest by the students in religious studies. We praise God for this and affirm you as parents and supporters who have laid the groundwork for this new direction.”⁹² The board’s curriculum committee also reported as the new “Aims” were being issued, declaring the school provided “a broad range of religious studies”⁹³ and they were “well pleased with the work being

88 Minutes of semi-annual meeting, November 29, 1976. Also available at MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Rev. George Neufeld (public relations committee), “Westgate September News,” newsletter, 1976. Also available at MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

93 Grade 7 students studied the Old Testament, grade 8 the life of Christ, grade 9 the Sermon on the Mount, grade 10 ethics (moral responsibility, Canadian Native studies, Bible study, current issues), grade 11 world religions (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha’i), and grade 12 Mennonite history. Grade 10 students used the catechism *This We Believe*, while grade 12 used Cornelius J. Dyck’s *An Introduction to Mennonite History*.

done in this area.”⁹⁴ They noted that Westgate “should not pressure students into becoming church members, but the students should be confronted with this.” In addition, they wanted students to be able to differentiate between “cultural” and “religious” Mennonites.⁹⁵

The school then focused its attention on refining the religion curriculum and crafting a common curricular model with other Mennonite schools throughout Canada. A full-day staff retreat was devoted to the topic of Christian education, addressing such questions as:

*Can we assume that most of the Westgate students are Christian? (In a personal, experiential way). Should the school provide more opportunities where the question “Are you a disciple of Jesus?” is raised? What is Westgate’s view of or obligation to setting up worship experiences in the school? How can we continue to build on this attitude of openness and friendliness regarding religious (Christian) dialogue which we experienced at camp?*⁹⁶

The board considered asking First Mennonite Church pastor John Neufeld or Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC)⁹⁷ professor Helmut Harder to revise Westgate’s religion curriculum, which could be coordinated with the religion curricula used at other members of the Canadian

94 Minutes and reports of semi-annual meeting, November 29, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate funds.

95 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 20, 1976.

96 Rudy Friesen, “Spirit Day,” April 28, 1977.

97 Canadian Mennonite Bible College was a post-secondary school founded by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1947. It merged with the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) and the University of Winnipeg’s Menno Simons College to form Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in 2000. Henry H. Funk, “Canadian Mennonite Bible College (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada),” *GAMEO*, February 2012, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Canadian_Mennonite_Bible_College_\(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada\)&oldid=115903](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Canadian_Mennonite_Bible_College_(Winnipeg,_Manitoba,_Canada)&oldid=115903); Canadian Mennonite University, “About CMU: The Story of CMU,” <http://www.cmu.ca/about.php?s=cmu&p=story>.

Association of Mennonite Schools (CAMS) and at Mennonite Bible colleges.⁹⁸ “A Religion Curriculum could be planned so that students could step into any other Mennonite Institution of learning and continue on from where they left off in their previous year at another school.”⁹⁹ A cross-country Mennonite religious curriculum was not to be the variety of Mennonite schools, like the variety Mennonite church conferences, existed in part because of differences in religious beliefs.

By the 1980s, there were some noticeable changes in the teaching of religion classes at Westgate. A variety of methods and activities were incorporated to actively involve students. Gone was the rote memorization of the questions and answers of the church catechism. Instead, teachers showed slides and films on the geography of Palestine and the cultural milieu of Jesus’s time. Students wrote reflective journals as they read through the Gospels. Activities included “sitting in a circle in some generous parent’s basement experiencing first-hand the ritual of the Passover” and sharing matzoh and Passover cookies with Jewish librarians.¹⁰⁰ Students were taught that it was “difficult to understand today what exactly a Mennonite is.”¹⁰¹ They were exposed to “the diversity of the Mennonite identity ... thereby broadening the students’ understanding of Mennonitism.” They learned that Mennonite history did not begin with Conrad Grebel’s baptism in 1525 but with the rise of the medieval church, and that it did not

98 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 20, 1978; reports of annual general meeting, May 29, 1978; “Religion Curriculum Workshop,” February 19, 1979; minutes of board-church leadership meeting, March 26, 1979; minutes of Westgate-MCI executive meeting, April 2, 1979; George Neufeld, “Public Relations Committee Report,” annual general meeting, May 28, 1979.

99 “Christian Education: A Frill or a Priority?” joint presentation made by John Friesen and Dave Epp to Conference of Mennonites of Manitoba executive, April 10, 1979.

100 “What Does It Mean to Teach Religion?” *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 22.

101 Heimo Bachmeyer, Mennonite History 305 course outline, 1984–85.

end with Mennonite migration to North America but that it continued in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Innovative assignments included interviewing families living in the immediate neighbourhood of a Mennonite church to “ask them how they view the church, its role, its effectiveness” and then comparing their responses to those of the church’s pastor.¹⁰²

Yet despite this attention to religious education at the school, challenges persisted. Some teachers at Westgate complained that having chapel services only twice weekly was insufficient and that student attitudes toward them were poor. Music and prayer were underused in these chapels, which should be “used to train the students to worship. Efforts to be ‘meaningful’ result in the omission of Christian teaching.” MCI, by contrast, held chapel services daily for twenty to thirty minutes, and students sang at all of them. But there was disagreement among Westgate faculty as to how to address the perceived problems of the chapel services. Some complained that disciplining talkative students disrupted their own worship. Others saw discipline problems as the logical result of poorly planned speeches by chapel speakers. Some asserted that chapel behaviour, particularly of the junior high students, was generally good. And board members and parents came in for their share of blame: “Criticism of chapels at board meetings should be squelched, as it does nothing to improve them. Also, the home must take some responsibility for the training of the students.”¹⁰³ Nonetheless, a discipline policy for chapel was eventually (albeit temporarily) instituted, involving a seating plan for students with “consequences for misbehaviour.”¹⁰⁴

Religious education at Westgate, ideally, was to take place in *all* subject areas, not merely in chapels and religion

102 Ibid.

103 Minutes of staff meeting, June 26, 1979.

104 Minutes of staff meeting, November 4, 1980.

classes. An effort was made in 1989 to outline how faith should be integrated into academic subjects. A policy document drafted by board chair Rudy Regehr explained that just as there was “no division between sacred and secular,”¹⁰⁵ so too religious education should not be limited to religion classes. “Just as creation is one creation, so the human being is one person and ought not (except for the purpose of analysis) be subdivided into physical, spiritual, emotional, etc., components which are to be treated individually.”¹⁰⁶ Faculty would both teach and model “Christian discipleship principles.”¹⁰⁷ They would “communicate faith” through their classes, in chapel and extracurricular activities, in “casual interaction” with students, and in their participation in their church congregations.¹⁰⁸ The challenge remained: “Just how does an institution which tends to nurture loyalty to itself also build loyalty to another institution, the Church?”¹⁰⁹

This policy document affirmed the unconventional approach to evangelism at the school. Westgate, unlike many other Canadian Mennonite schools, did not keep numbers on baptisms of students. Former principal Erwin Strempler noted that he was surprised when he learned that other Mennonite schools kept such records; he himself “preferred to leave it to God.”¹¹⁰ The 1989 policy document observed that it was “gratifying” that few of the non-Mennonite students who were Christian had become Mennonite, since

105 Rudy A. Regehr, “Integration of Faith and Academic Subject Matter: Some thoughts on the educational process at Westgate,” February 1989; “Integration of Faith at Westgate,” Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Policy Manual, adopted May 29, 1989.

106 “Integration of Faith at Westgate,” Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Policy Manual, adopted May 29, 1989.

107 Rudy A. Regehr, “Integration of Faith and Academic Subject Matter: Some thoughts on the educational process at Westgate,” February 1989.

108 Ibid.

109 “Integration of Faith at Westgate,” Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Policy Manual, adopted May 29, 1989.

110 Erwin Strempler interview.

the school did not want to “undermin[e] their confidence in some other Christian tradition in which they are active.”¹¹¹

There was

*probably less agreement about whether the school is also the setting in which to make explicit calls to faith. In other words, how evangelistic ought we to be? In the past, we have erred on both sides. At the very least, we expect Westgate to be a setting in which there will be an openness to explore such a possibility with the student.*¹¹²

There existed “a variety of religious expression, just as there is a variety of gifts,” yet all faculty were expected to support

*the church as defined by the Mennonite theological tradition and particularly as expressed by the General Conference Mennonite Church in which most of us have been nurtured. GC, not because it is the only possibility, but because it is the tradition in which our identity is rooted. It must be clearly understood, that this does not preclude denominational variety either among students or in the faculty so long as there is no question about the affirmation of this basic orientation. No one of us can be who we are not, with any credibility. So there will need to be a variety of ways in which we give expression to our own integration of faith and our academic disciplines.*¹¹³

Further clarity on the religious identity of Westgate was provided by the creation of a mission statement in the

111 “Integration of Faith at Westgate,” Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Policy Manual, adopted May 29, 1989.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

mid-1990s.¹¹⁴ The production of such a statement was first discussed at a two-day staff retreat in 1993.¹¹⁵ By 1995, a committee formed of board members, staff members, and pastors had agreed on a final form for the mission statement: “Westgate Mennonite Collegiate is a Christian school grounded in the Anabaptist tradition. It is the mission of the school to provide a well-rounded education which will inspire and empower students to live as people of God.”¹¹⁶ A new school logo (by Circle Design) was also introduced at this time, replacing the roots-and-hands logo of an earlier era.



FIGURE 2.3. Westgate logo, 1995

At the turn of the millennium, many of the debates about the content and quality of spiritual education at Westgate were still being repeated. A new position was created in 2000, that of spiritual life coordinator. This part-time position was a type of chaplaincy, created at the behest of some board members who were worried (once again) “about the apparent lack of emphasis on *spirituality* in the overall school program.”¹¹⁷ The board meeting that resulted in the creation of this position saw a general airing of concerns about reli-

114 See the discussion of the mission statement in Chapter 1.

115 Principal's report to board of directors, September 20, 1993.

116 *Westgate Perspective* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1995).

117 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 20, 2000.

gious education at the school. Some board members believed that world religions should not be taught to students, as such awareness “may cause some of them to reject the Anabaptist faith.”¹¹⁸ Others argued that such “knowledge would ultimately enhance the faith of our students.”¹¹⁹ Principal Reg Klassen put the discussion into historical perspective: “If we are concerned about the level of spirituality in the school we need to define what spirituality means. Previous boards have sometimes echoed opposite concerns, i.e., too much emphasis on ‘religious qualifications’ compared to quality programming.”¹²⁰ The discussion and debate continued, the board secretary noted, “reflecting once again how varied each person’s perspective on [this] specific issue can be.”¹²¹

Personal Perspectives on Faith at Westgate

A number of individuals were interviewed about their connections to Westgate; some were particularly eloquent in their appreciation for the school’s liberal approach to religious education. Charlotte Enns, Helene Riesen, and James Friesen spoke of Westgate’s openness to religious debate and questioning. Henry Dyck, Charlotte Kroeker, and Wilma Johnson spoke of the ways in which Westgate differed from the two other Mennonite high schools in Manitoba: MBCI and MCI. Finally, John Enns reflected on the value of the religious education that Westgate provided and continues to provide.

Charlotte Enns’s grandfather, Johann H. Enns, was minister at First Mennonite Church at the time the church was asked to leave the conference because of his progressive

118 *Ibid.*

119 *Ibid.*

120 *Ibid.*

121 *Ibid.*

views on eternal damnation.¹²² She “think[s] very positively of Grandpa” because of his “belief in ultimate forgiveness” and because “he stood up for his beliefs.”¹²³ By not preaching “hellfire and brimstone,” he shaped her “understanding of God as unconditional love and forgiv[eness].”¹²⁴ Both he and her father always told her, “*Denk wer du bist*” – meaning not just to remember who you are, but to think about what you’re representing. “You’re representing all those who’ve gone before and will have to answer to them.”¹²⁵ Westgate helped her “think about and question and work through” her faith, made her wonder what she believed and what part of her was simply “going through the motions.”¹²⁶ The school gave her “something to fall back on” – it gave her a necessary grounding while requiring her to personally analyze her beliefs.¹²⁷

For former teacher and vice-principal Helene Riesen, working at Westgate gave her opportunity to continue developing the questioning and thoughtful faith with which she was raised. She had been taught to believe that “nothing was written in stone that couldn’t be discussed.”¹²⁸ She recalled telling Rev. Johann H. Enns of First Mennonite Church that she couldn’t be baptized because she had “a problem with *Wehrlosigkeit* [defencelessness or pacifism/non-violence].” He had asked her if she believed that Christ was her example. She had said she did, and he had told her, “When you’re twenty, you don’t have all the answers.” He advised her to focus on being a disciple of Christ, who became the son of God through total obedience to God. “Then you can be baptized, because it is not the end, but the beginning of

122 See the discussion of this issue and its implications for Westgate in Chapter 1.

123 Charlotte Enns interview.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Helene Riesen interview.

the road.”¹²⁹ Among other subjects, Riesen taught religion at Westgate, “not as proselytizing but as history.”¹³⁰

James Friesen teaches religion at Westgate. Half the students in his classes are agnostics, he says, but “they can talk and don’t hide. One of the really powerful things about Westgate is you can talk about what is forbidden elsewhere.”¹³¹ He can take his students to a mosque without concern, he said, because “you can talk about belief, and not be worried that parents are going to phone and ask if you’re convincing students to convert to Islam.”¹³² He recalled that in the 1990s, teachers were evaluated by administration on their Christian spirituality, using a 1–5 grading scale. “But we got rid of it because we made a conscious decision that that’s not what we’re about.”¹³³

Former board member Henry Dyck asserted that the school’s reasons for being had changed over the years. The school had been founded to teach Mennonite values and Mennonite traditions and Christian principles, and to teach German as the mother tongue. The latter “has waned and is not as important today. That’s okay.”¹³⁴ Westgate, he claimed, had done much to define Mennonitism for the students and organizations that supported it. Even as Mennonite churches have changed to some degree, so has Westgate – but they have “changed together,” he observed. For example, school dances are no longer a moral issue, and the percentage of non-Mennonite students has risen significantly.¹³⁵ Westgate has always been distinct from other Mennonite schools, Dyck noted: historically, the Mennonite Brethren “focused

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 James Friesen interview.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid. For more on teacher evaluation, see Chapter 6.

134 Henry Dyck interview.

135 Ibid.

more on evangelism and the way evangelism should be taught and lived and carried out. We probably used a more different approach, stressed less ‘preaching’ and more ‘doing.’ It’s maybe not a fair comparison; both have their place. It shouldn’t be one or the other but both.”¹³⁶

Dyck was not the only one to comment on differences between Westgate and other Mennonite schools. Westgate teacher Charlotte Kroeker had attended MBCI as a student. She found Westgate to be “less constricted theologically than ... MBCI.” MBCI, she commented, had “more altar calls. Public confession of Christianity was important, as were dramatic conversion stories. I was a second class citizen because I didn’t have one.”¹³⁷ Librarian Wilma Johnson, an alumna of Westgate, recalled that some Mennonites disliked Westgate because it was “liberal. We had circle games, though, instead of dances. We were more liberal than MCI.”¹³⁸ Part of the difference, she recognized, might be attributed to Westgate being a city school versus MCI being a rural school. The residential experience of MCI was another significant difference that shaped the culture: MCI had “more rules because you lived there.”¹³⁹

Former teacher and principal John Enns believed that the liberality of the school, while sometimes criticized, was in fact its great strength. He said he suspected “that the definition of Mennonite [at Westgate] has changed radically since the days of Frank Neufeld and Karl Fast.”¹⁴⁰ When he was at the school, he said, it was a liberal – not a conservative – institution: activities like the student Middle East trip and exposure to other cultures and religions were “cherished

136 Ibid.

137 Charlotte Kroeker interview.

138 Wilma Johnson interview.

139 Ibid.

140 John Enns interview.

and given deliberate emphasis.”¹⁴¹ He recalled dissatisfaction expressed by church leadership while he was principal and a subsequent meeting of board and church and students. The concern voiced at this meeting was that “baptismal records did not record so many Westgaters.”¹⁴² He recalled one student at this meeting saying he had not joined the church “but might, and that he had learned at Westgate what joining means and would make his decision with awareness and not blindly because he needed to do so to marry.” Enns said that he thought at the time, “Shut the school, because we’ve done our job!”¹⁴³ He appreciated that Westgate students today can feel comfortable enough to form groups like a gay-straight alliance: “That’s always been my vision of what should be possible at Westgate. If it continues to be, and can address current issues like sexuality and economics and whatever, then it is always going to be relevant. I hope that the Mennonite church sees value in that and in supporting such a school always.”¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Westgate clung to the importance of the German language for the Mennonite religion long after most other Canadian Mennonite schools had abandoned it. The debates about its value began in the 1960s, at the same time as Mennonite churches in Manitoba were reconsidering their own use of German. The German language declined in significance as children and then grandchildren of urban Mennonite immigrants (as well as non-Mennonites) attended the school in greater numbers. The federal government’s adoption of

141 *Ibid.*

142 *Ibid.*

143 *Ibid.*

144 John Enns interview.

French as an official language in 1969 doubtless accelerated Westgate's move to offer German as a language of study rather than a language of daily use in the school.¹⁴⁵ By the 1970s, German was no longer seen as necessary for the transmission of the Mennonite faith.

Westgate was criticized, at times, for its perceived failure to inculcate a sufficient degree of spirituality in its students. The school's liberality with respect to religion was not mere laxity, however. Westgate staff and administrators believed, in the words of principal William Kruger, that "motivation and moral sensitivity" could not be mandated: the voluntaristic nature of the Mennonite faith had to be upheld, even in the education of young people. The school met with representatives from Mennonite churches and other Mennonite schools to discuss these concerns from time to time. But it was clear that Westgate saw itself as a pioneer of sorts. The scope of a faith-based education could not be restricted to religion classes and chapel services, nor could its quality be measured in baptisms

145 Government of Canada, Official Languages Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. 31 (4th Supp.)), <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/O-3.01/>.

— *“Faith remains a gift of God”*

3. Westgate's Supporting Churches

Westgate had been created at the behest of several churches, most particularly First Mennonite. Yet the school was owned not by these churches, but by an educational society composed of individual members. Westgate became increasingly dependent on the Mennonite churches for funding but sought to maintain its liberal tendencies. The school was reminded that not all its supporters shared its freethinking approach when these churches pushed for a narrower redefinition of religious aims for the school. The independence afforded by the educational society model eventually was replaced with a new governance model that tied the school more closely to the churches that were its financial supporters. Westgate faculty and administration, however, continued to believe that Westgate's purpose was to lead, as much as to serve, the broader church.

The Supporting Churches

In Westgate's early years, First Mennonite Church and North Kildonan Mennonite Church were its major financial supporters. The majority of students in 1965 came from

these two congregations: twenty-nine students from First, and thirty-seven from North Kildonan (making up 64 percent of the total student body of 103). The remainder came from the Mennonite congregations of Springfield Heights (eleven), Schoenfelder (nine), Bethel (seven), Sargent Avenue (three), Chortitz (one), and Springstein (two), from the towns of Gruenthal (one) and Winkler (one), from Mexico (one), and from an undefined elsewhere (one).¹

The school floundered financially in these early years and pushed the churches for greater support. In its second year of operation, it was suggested that the churches take full financial responsibility for the school, rather than educational society members. Not only was this suggestion rejected by the churches, but it was made clear to the school's board that "under no circumstances" should a higher fee be imposed on society members.² The board responded over the next years by promoting stronger ties to the supporting churches: a tension emerged between Westgate's need for the churches' financial support and the churches' desire to control the religious identity of the school.³ Thus, for example, "to awaken more interest in the school," the board decided to regularly invite the pastors from the supporting churches to the school's morning chapel services and to send the school's monthly financial statement to the churches.⁴

These tensions persisted throughout the history of the school. A letter from the board to the councils of the supporting churches in 1965 reminded them that the school had been founded by the educational society "with the assumption" that General Conference (GC) Mennonite congrega-

1 Principal's report, annual general meeting, January 17, 1965.

2 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 11, 1960.

3 Minutes of board of directors meetings, August 1, 1963, and December 3, 1963.

4 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 7, 1964.

tions “would in time actively support it.”⁵ The board executive met with church leaders shortly thereafter in an effort to form stronger bonds between the churches and the school.⁶ A month after these meetings, the executive again considered reorganizing as a church school, which would guarantee Westgate’s ongoing financial security.⁷ The board observed that “unless [financial] support is forthcoming, the school cannot exist much longer.”⁸

While Westgate was asking the churches to accept financial responsibility for the school, it also was forming closer ties to other Mennonite schools in hopes of cooperatively solving its financial problems. Westgate’s board and teachers first met together with those from the other Mennonite schools in the province in 1961. They discussed the possible formation of a joint board of directors to collectively manage all Manitoba Mennonite schools.⁹ A year later, Westgate principal Frank Neufeld participated in a national conference of Mennonite private schools, held at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC), which affirmed that “the problems are the same in all the schools.” The schools decided to distribute a pamphlet about themselves the following spring (titled “A Sacred Charge”) and determined that it was “desirable to correlate the German and Religion programs” in all high schools.¹⁰ The “Sacred Charge” pamphlet described the schools’ “common purpose”:

5 Letter from board to supporting church councils, July 15, 1965.

6 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 6, 1965.

7 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 4, 1965.

8 Minutes of meeting of board of directors and Bethel Mennonite Church council, October 19, 1965.

9 Other topics of discussion were methods of financing and advertising the schools, the possibility of introducing pension plans for the Mennonite schools’ teachers, and the likelihood of increasing religious instruction in public schools located in Mennonite enclaves. Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 9, 1961.

10 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 25, 1962.

Our purpose is not to build nine institutions from Leamington to Abbotsford, but much more our purpose is to build the church through the education of its youth. We must continue to emphasize the fact that our concern is not the school but the church. This has far reaching implications. It will mean that we all promote not only "our" school, but also the other schools. It will mean that as conditions and circumstances change our schools will change. It may mean that the time will come when some of our schools will have to be closed because they no longer fill a need. It will certainly mean that each school must be fully aware of the work of the others and that each define and restrict its activity in such a way that we do not compete but work together.¹¹

These noble aims were easily stated, but not so easily lived. Which school would be willing to sacrifice its existence for the sake of the survival of the others? Nonetheless, annual meetings of faculty and administration of all Canadian Mennonite private schools continued, resulting in the formation of the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools.¹²

The tensions between Westgate and its supporting churches came to a head in the mid-1960s. In late 1965, the school's directors concluded that the public perception of Westgate was that the school's religious teaching was "falling apart."¹³ A meeting was held by various church representatives that year to discuss the school and its future.¹⁴ Westgate's board chair Peter Enns explained that the school was

11 Letter from Canadian Mennonite Bible College, August 29, 1963.

12 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 4, 1963; Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools, <http://www.camschools.com/>. CAMS was formed in the summer of 1977. Principal's report, semi-annual meeting, November 28, 1977.

13 Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 7, 1965.

14 "Minutes of the meeting of representatives of various Winnipeg and district churches to discuss the private school," n.d. [ca. 1965], MHA, John P. Dyck Collection XX-6, Vol. 3141 Folder 4.

in financial difficulty and that there was “divergent opinion” about the “spirit” of Westgate. In the discussion that followed, church leaders asked for “clarification of the school’s doctrinal position.”¹⁵ It soon became clear, however, that the churches themselves were not united in their opinion as to the direction the school should take. One participant counselled, “Each church cannot make individual demands of the school.” Some asserted that the churches should cooperate with the educational society that owned the school, while others argued that the provincial church conference should instead operate the school. A cryptic comment was made that Westgate would “have to hire teachers that are acceptable to the public.”¹⁶ Articles on the need for and purpose of the school that had been published in *Der Bote* (the German-language weekly paper of the General Conference Mennonite Church) were discussed. Curiously, board members pointed out that these articles “did not represent the views of the faculty and the board.” Ultimately, a motion was passed that those present review the school’s principles and rules as outlined in the school catalogue, and “that this body interpret these at the next meeting.”¹⁷

A year later, the educational society met with the supporting churches to discuss the future of the school: it would have to be closed if the churches did not increase their contributions.¹⁸ Discussion revealed that the churches “wanted probably to have *a* Mennonite school – this was unanimous – but not necessarily *this* Mennonite school, and this for the reason that the ‘spirit’ of the school is doubted. In other words: some representatives [of the churches] spoke of a mis-

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 By 1967, eight churches (First, Sargent Avenue, North Kildonan, Schoenfelder, Charleswood, Bethel, Springfield Heights, and Springstein) were financial supporters of the school. Letter from William Kruger to “friends” of Westgate, December 5, 1967.

trust of the faculty.”¹⁹ Victor Peters and Karl Fast defended the faculty and the school’s curriculum but were challenged by a parent who declared that his children “were still far from Christians and the school did not sufficiently strive to bring them to accept Christian belief.”²⁰ Others in the meeting reminded this parent that as Mennonites, baptism was only on confession of faith and only in response to a deliberate, informed, adult choice. Irmgard Thiessen, writing a report of this meeting for *Der Bote*, concluded with some frustration:

*So it is now possible that the school will be taken over by all sponsoring churches. But if these churches want to dissolve the school, when the neutral committee that is the present Society no longer can decide the “spirit” of the school, then the churches are likely to argue forever about little things and threaten to retract their financial contribution at every opportunity. But then the future of the school will remain as uncertain as it is now.*²¹

Otto Klassen gave his own assessment in *Der Bote* of the root of the financial problems at Westgate: “One group believes we should not have evangelism, the other group believes that one should have evangelism, but not in the sense that it is desired by the third group, who see evangelism in the school as essential, and even with the use of all shock methods.”²² He agreed with Irmgard Thiessen that if churches each insisted on their own way, then they would always argue over little things and would use any excuse to withdraw financial assistance to the school. The churches

19 Irmgard Thiessen, “Wird unsere mennonitische Schule geschlossen werden?” *Der Bote* 43, no. 5 (January 25, 1966): 5.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Otto Klassen, “Wird unsere Mennonitische Schule geschlossen?” *Der Bote* 43, no. 8 (February 15, 1966): 3.

had to work together or the financial problem of the school would never be solved.²³ Victor Peters offered his own assessment: "As might be expected, now and then there are disagreements, and it's not a bad characteristic of the Mennonites that they give their opinions freely and uninhibitedly. So it has always been, so it will remain."²⁴ Nonetheless, the school would not revert to a conservative traditional approach to education, he asserted. Prior to the First World War, Mennonites in Russia and Canada had lived in closed communities, with little contact with the outside world. "That time is over. We live as neighbours, as citizens, and work as professionals together with a variety of people."²⁵ Westgate teachers were involved in activities in non-Mennonite communities, as "we want to limit ourselves neither as a school nor as teachers."²⁶

Individual supporting churches also met with the Westgate board to discuss their concerns and their visions for the school. At one such meeting, Bethel Mennonite Church council asked Westgate's board chair Victor Peters, "What is the philosophy of the Westgate Mennonite Collegiate? What are the main objectives that you are seeking to obtain?"²⁷ Bethel's church council was told the school existed to "strengthen the churches and provide roots for young people," as well as to provide "controlled conditions for a longer period of time" for Mennonite youth. Westgate also served to deter Mennonite children from "going along with the masses."²⁸ A pastor asked about "the discipline problem"

23 Ibid.

24 Victor Peters, "Westgate plant fuer Zeit und Zukunft," *Der Bote* 43, no. 7 (February 8, 1966): 6.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Minutes of meeting of board and Bethel Mennonite Church council, October 19, 1965.

28 Ibid.

at the school and was told that it was “not as bad as the public system,” and that the students of Mennonite background presented “little or no serious problems.”²⁹ The question was raised, “Should there not be emphasis on evangelism?” The response referenced the Mennonite commitment to adult baptism – that is, that religious commitments are decisions made by adults, rather than children. The diversity of opinions and beliefs among the supporting churches was another issue discussed. Springfield Heights Mennonite Church was “quite favourable” to the school; Sargent Avenue was “hesitant”; First Mennonite was “quite favourable.” Despite this diversity, Bethel’s church council decided that the churches “should agree as a whole on certain religious principles, Christian philosophy” and that the school “should cater to all groups of Mennonite faith. We should be somewhat flexible, but have a common goal in mind.”³⁰

The 1966 “Aims”

The outcome of these discussions with the churches was a new set of “Aims” for the school, created in 1966 by the board together with delegates from the sponsoring churches.³¹ These “Aims” were much more evangelical than the views expressed by the school’s founders a decade earlier.³² The “chief” and “express” aims of the school were now to “provide a situation in which the student may acquire a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith”

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid. Similarly mixed results followed in 1971, when church pastors were asked if and with whom they wanted to meet, what issues they wanted to discuss, and to what extent they wanted to be involved with the school. The board concluded from the varied responses that “every congregation requires a different program.” Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 9, 1971.

31 Letter from Rudy A. Regehr, “secretary for the Committee to Study Private High Schools in Winnipeg,” to Dr. Peter Enns, June 21, 1966.

32 See Chapter 1 for details of the founders’ philosophy.

and specifically to “lead the student to Christ and to enter into a meaningful relationship with the church.”³³

Expectations of the faculty were detailed carefully in the new “Aims.” Teachers were to demonstrate an “exemplary life and Christian testimony.” It was “assumed that the qualifications of 1 Timothy chapter 3 would apply to the teachers” – a reference to a Bible passage that outlines the qualities demanded of deacons in the first-century church.³⁴ Teachers were expected as well to integrate their Christian faith with their subject material. Teachers of religion should “preferably have theological training in one of our [Mennonite Bible] schools.”³⁵

Students, too, were a target of the new “Aims.” They were expected to grow in both “Christian character and discipleship” as a consequence of studying the Bible and church history and through “personal counseling” by teachers. Students were to be reminded constantly of “the need for people who are willing to dedicate their lives to the service of God and man [*sic*].” This service was to be offered in both church and

33 “Aims of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate High School in Winnipeg,” MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

34 1 Timothy 3: 2–13 (NIV): “Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap. In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

35 “Aims of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate High School in Winnipeg,” MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

society, as Christian responsibility included “home, community, church, and world mission.”³⁶

Two aims that originally had been key to the school’s creation now were relegated to the end of a lengthy list. The first was that the school should provide “thorough instruction” in German; the second, that “an appreciation and understanding of our cultural heritage should be cultivated.” Despite the long list of expectations, an element of the original non-sectarian world view of the founders was retained in the final two aims: “The school shall not seek to shelter the student unduly from society but shall rather confront him with our society in a way that will permit him to live meaningfully in it. In short, the school shall endeavour to prepare each student to hear and do the will of God in his life.”³⁷

The questions and concerns about the purpose of Westgate that led to the creation of the 1966 “Aims” were symptoms of the broader questioning of identity that postwar urban Canadian Mennonite life occasioned.³⁸ For example, the debates over the purpose of the school were echoed in debates within First Mennonite Church regarding its own purpose. The church council noted that students from First Mennonite rarely attended classes at CMBC or entered the mission field: “All in all it seems that we have become a church unto ourselves.”³⁹ While many of the church’s pastors had attended Mennonite private schools in Russia, Ukraine, the United States, or Canada, none of the church’s Sunday school teachers had such training. “Is our faith worth hanging on to?” church council members asked rhetorically. Westgate was seen as a possible solution to the problem: “Whatever enrolment we will get at CMBC will come from

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 See Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*.

39 Report of school committee to First Mennonite’s church council, May 6, 1968.

Westgate.”

Our leadership has in the past and will in the future come from our own private institutions. Therefore these institutions are our responsibility irrespective of whether we enrol none, one or all of our children in these schools and here I am referring mainly to Westgate Collegiate.⁴⁰

Despite First Mennonite church council members' enthusiasm for the school, they were aware that some of their congregants were critical of Westgate. They described the “unwarranted criticism and condemnation of this school” as “most shocking” and “depressing,” given their own church's involvement with the founding of Westgate. The criticism centred around two issues: discipline problems and financial challenges. With respect to the first issue, “the whole school cannot be condemned for isolated incidents and these sometimes blown out of proportion by hearsay.” As for the financial challenges, Westgate “is not a sinking boat.” While the school was criticized by some for “double taxation” (the necessity of paying Westgate tuition while also paying taxes for public schools), most congregants at First Mennonite were “still living in abundance” and “not in the poor house.” The future of Westgate was key to the future of the Winnipeg Mennonite community, and thus required First Mennonite's financial support, despite the potential sacrifice: “If the Mennonites in Mexico can drop everything for a principle and move on to the jungles of Bolivia, then surely we can meet our obligations in this area.”⁴¹

By the 1970s, the 1966 “Aims” were no longer the solution to the tension between the school and the churches. At a board meeting, the question was raised, “Is Westgate run

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

by eleven member churches or the Mennonite Educational Society?” Was it the individual members of the educational society or the leaders of the churches who were to determine the direction of the school? Dr. David Schroeder told the board that the challenges that Westgate faced were the same as those faced by the church as a whole. He asserted that the 1966 “Aims” had to be revised. It was impossible to meet the demands of the individual churches, with their varied immigration histories and their differing emphases on evangelism and other faith tenets. Rather, “the reason to keep Westgate alive” was “to keep dialogue within the Mennonite constituency. This should help us become a people. We have three histories, 1874, 1924, and [post–Second World War] and these must be tied together.”⁴² As for the ongoing gossip about the lack of discipline at Westgate, the school “can’t go back to methods of 10 years ago.” There had been changes to both parenting and pedagogical styles, and presumably the unquestioning obedience desired by older generations would have to be foregone.⁴³

Rethinking the “Aims”

Schroeder’s comments and suggestions were taken up at a two-day retreat. Participants included three board members, the principal, eight teachers, two members of the Westgate ladies’ auxiliary, two alumni, two Mennonite General Conference representatives, and the pastors of the Mennonite churches of Sterling, First, North Kildonan, Springfield Heights, Bergthaler, Bethel, Charleswood, and Sargent Avenue. The retreat opened with Westgate board chair Rudy Regehr stating, “We have received no agenda. Is this a ‘save

42 Schroeder was referring to three distinct streams of Mennonite migration to Canada.

43 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 13, 1971.

Westgate meeting?”⁴⁴ Teachers described life at Westgate, papers were read on the philosophy of education, and “congregational moods re: Westgate” were described. The discussion wavered between finances and educational philosophy. Some argued that the former was unduly influencing the latter: the ministers, it was noted, based their support for Westgate on financial considerations. Without sufficient financial support from the churches, the school had raised tuition. The near doubling of tuition rates for the 1970–71 academic year, however, had led to a drop in anticipated enrolment from 157 to only thirty-eight.⁴⁵ Discussing the 1966 “Aims,” the group concluded there could be

*no moving “back” even if we reaffirm all the original aims, because the way we work toward these original or old goals will be in a new way and possibly for new reasons. [A teacher] points out that this year’s program is in some ways really a partial return to a former approach to education and it is frightening how easy it is to move this way for the sake of [financial] support.*⁴⁶

Three discussion groups were formed to reimagine Christian education. The first group suggested a school program “that takes HERITAGE seriously, father transmitting to son, peoplehood,” stressing the concepts of discipleship and servanthood in the school’s curriculum. The second suggested that teachers “take [the] child seriously where he is today” and “deal with heritage creatively.” Tuition should be lowered, the teaching of fine arts should be reintroduced (this had been cancelled to save money), and the school should “circulate teachers among congregations” (presumably

44 Report of Westgate meeting at Camp Arnes, October 29–30, 1971.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

to improve church-school relations). The third group had been asked to envision the aftermath of a possible closing of Westgate. The group suggested that in this eventuality, funds that had been directed to Westgate instead be used to “circulate educators in all our congregations so that we can introduce courses for all our high schoolers.” Further financial support then should be directed to the older Manitoba Mennonite high schools: Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) and Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI).⁴⁷

The retreat participants had been provided with some documents for discussion: a copy of the 1966 “Aims” as well as position papers by principal William Kruger and by CMBC theologians Dr. Helmut Harder and Dr. David Schroeder. Kruger argued that education should be “person-centred” to enable students to integrate faith into daily life. Such an education would lead to disjuncture between the student and society:

*We try to show the student the pitfalls of a materialistic and militaristic way of life. Therefore he will find himself out of step and in disharmony with individuals or institutions that make material success and human prestige positions the primary criterion of measuring the individual's worth. We teach the student that it is his responsibility to help bring about a better society.*⁴⁸

Necessary to this task of education was the Christian character of the teachers. Westgate's school program was a mix of religion and academics, of language (including German), music, drama, and art, so the student could “express

47 Ibid.

48 William Kruger, “A Position Paper on the Purpose and Nature of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,” October 29–30, 1971.

himself” and “communicate what he feels and believes.”⁴⁹ Westgate was essential for students to achieve these ends and essential for urban Mennonites as a whole, in that the school provided “opportunity for young people, parents, church leaders and workers to come together for discussion and exchange of ideas. This is most important for the welfare of our Mennonite people in the city of Winnipeg.”⁵⁰

David Schroeder’s paper argued for a liberal rather than an evangelical approach to education at Westgate. He noted, “We cannot really *teach* a faith.... We can give people knowledge *about* the faith, but not the faith itself.... Faith remains a gift of God.” All that could be done was “to provide a context for the student.” Religious education was more than a list of rules and “more than membership in an institution.” Teaching required sensitivity to the times: “We do not want to simply propagate a tradition but a faith that finds new ways of expressing itself appropriately to each new time and situation.” Cultural values such as materialism, conflict (whether geopolitical, domestic, racial, or religious), scientific proof, and ethical relativism all needed to be addressed. Students were interested in “how a person’s faith can express itself in the flux of everyday living rather than in a neat rational theology.” Thus religious teaching needed to be “related to the burning problems of our day. War, pollution, population explosion, control of DNA, hunger, etc.” While others deplored the falling off from religious belief in the next generation, Schroeder concluded that the older generations also had their faults: “In too many cases the generation gap is there because adults have ceased to be learners. They do not read widely enough. They do not force themselves to study.”⁵¹

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 David Schroeder, “Education,” [1971].

Helmut Harder asked in his position paper, “What is the purpose of the institution which we are promoting?” He declared that only after the school’s purpose was decided could the determination be made as to “whether or not the institution ranks among our top priorities.” Westgate’s purpose, he argued, was to provide a setting in which students could find direction in answering their many questions.

In a pluralistic learning situation where many “religions” or Weltanschauungen [world views] vie for attention, the student faces the task of sorting out for himself the perspective which he finds agreeable. In the [Westgate] setting, the student is not left alone with this task. He is presented particularly with the possibility of placing all knowledge within the framework of “the wisdom of God.” ... Presumably the decision as to whether he will accept that perspective or not is a decision with which he is confronted, and therefore a decision which he must make.

Westgate staff’s dedication and unity of purpose, together with the school’s small size, made this task possible. Westgate gave parents a place for their children to “experience freedom” while simultaneously protecting them “against disregarding the values which were transmitted during childhood.” While the church also served as such a place, its limited time and resources led it to create church schools like Westgate, which function as “a training ground for Christian discipleship.” The implications for Westgate’s curriculum were that the school should not only provide “vigorous academic training” but also “heritage, discipleship, and knowledge.” Heritage teaching was needed to bridge the generation gap, and it needed to be selectively presented.

It would probably be more fitting to give “loving descriptions” of the past than presenting its negative aspects persistently. The student needs to learn to say “yes” to his parents, to his past, to his Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. This should not be a naïve “yes,” but a “yes” to the deeper values of one’s heritage.⁵²

Thus, far from Kruger’s model of Westgate as a light to the urban Mennonite community, Harder advocated heritage instruction as a more traditional transmission of the values of the older generations to the younger ones.

The challenges of Christian education at Westgate discussed at this retreat were revisited by the broader church conference itself the following year. The General Conference (GC) Mennonite Church contacted all its congregations in Winnipeg, asking that they dedicate Christian Education Sunday (March 9, 1972) to discussion of the role of church-supported schools – specifically, Westgate. Draft and final reports of the GC’s Committee on Congregational Contacts reveal the concerns some of the churches continued to have with Westgate.

Most congregations made reference to discipline, “spirit,” administration, public relations, principal and staff, and finances. Discipline seemed permissive, the “spirit” not clearly as the congregations would like it to be, the administration poor, public relations and finances were somehow related and their poor showing attributed, usually in post-meetings, to the principal. We heard little regret that no one in any congregation had succeeded in winning the whole congregation over to the Church School idea.⁵³

52 Helmut Harder, “The Task of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,” [1971].

53 Draft report of the Committee on Congregational Contacts to GC congregations in Winnipeg, March 8, 1972 (filed among Westgate board of directors meeting min-

This negative paragraph was omitted from the final version of the report and replaced with a softer assessment: “For the *most* part those in attendance were supporters of Westgate or of the Church School idea. The meetings aired criticisms freely and in most cases suggested ways of strengthening Westgate. We tried to be sensitive learners.”⁵⁴ Some churches, the final report noted, would continue to support Westgate only “if the improvements initiated this year are continued.”⁵⁵ Some hoped to increase their financial support, while others declared “there are mistakes being made, some are old mistakes (2–17 years old) which we can’t seem to forget and forgive, but there are some real mistakes which continue to create ill-will right now.”⁵⁶ These “mistakes” were described as errors in public relations, declining student enrolment, feelings of distance from faculty, lack of confidence in disciplining students, changes in the school’s educational philosophy, and uncertainty as to whether faith, heritage, culture, and the German language were still valued at the school.⁵⁷

The report included suggestions for resolving the ongoing conflicts between the supporting churches and Westgate. The school was encouraged to communicate with MBCI and MCI about “how insights and resources might be shared, and how undergirding relationships could be designed.”⁵⁸ The church conference suggested the creation of a “consultative council” for Westgate, consisting of “two leading members” from each supporting congregation’s church council.

utes).

54 Report of the Committee on Congregational Contacts to GC congregations in Winnipeg, March 16, 1972 (filed among Westgate board of directors meeting minutes).

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 The draft had noted that MBCI had been consulted about the possibility of amalgamation with Westgate, but that this was “presently not an option.”

This consultative council should meet by itself and meet with Westgate's board three times a year, as well as present a report and suggestions to the school's annual general meeting. The report asked "whether we can resurrect or revitalize the conviction of our grandparents who affirmed that the Church High School serves the entire church even though it reaches only some with its teaching ministry." Accordingly, congregations were encouraged to fund scholarships and bursaries for all those in their churches who wished to attend Westgate.⁵⁹ Finally, the purpose of the school was articulated as providing "a staff and a curriculum that draws together all areas of knowledge, reflects on this accumulated knowledge in the light of the Mennonite heritage, and assists young people to adopt values and a life style from out of the context of the Bible." The church conference also asked "whether we can interpret to society that a Church High School with our proposed basic premise has a justifiable place in the educational system."⁶⁰

A defence of the school was provided in the draft version of this report. Some statements that had been made by church members to the conference committee were dismissed, such as the suggestion that principal William Kruger be fired, either for his responsibility for the problems facing the school or because a scapegoat was needed. "The world tries to correct mistakes that way; we are ashamed that this was suggested as the 'cure' for our ills," the report writers lamented. Readers instead were urged

to ask God and man [sic] for forgiveness for listening to and

59 Such funding "would parallel that of Mission financing where all of us are helping according to all the gifts we have." Report of the Committee on Congregational Contacts to GC congregations in Winnipeg, March 16, 1972 (filed among Westgate board of directors meeting minutes).

60 Ibid.

*perpetuating criticisms based on mistakes made since the day the school was founded. Some criticisms were 2, 4, 8, 10 years old. That is good memory, maybe, but not like Jesus said: Let not the sun set on your anger.*⁶¹

The “real root of the Westgate crisis,” the draft noted, was that some church members believed either that schools like Westgate were unnecessary given the existence of Sunday schools, or that Westgate itself should “be a replica of the Sunday school.”⁶² The church school was necessary, however, because the family, the Sunday school, and the church itself “need help in presenting the Christian Faith, as our fathers understood the Bible since the Reformation, as a way of life.”⁶³ Westgate “trains persons to work meaningfully in society.” It teaches students to use secular knowledge “in a spirit of Christian responsibility.”⁶⁴ It “aims unapologetically to teach the history and values of the Mennonite heritage.” It places its “emphasis upon an ethic of love and non-resistance” and defines “church as in the world but not of the world.” The school “train[s] persons to make their present future decisions in society in the spirit of Christian discipleship.”⁶⁵

The draft version of the 1972 conference report also was more revealing of the criticism and concerns some churches had of Westgate, and more specific in its plans for remediation of the perceived problems at the school. There was good support for Westgate, “provided, the ‘lifestyle’ criticisms are heeded, the administrative weaknesses are reduced, the cur-

61 Draft report of the Committee on Congregational Contacts to GC congregations in Winnipeg, March 8, 1972 (filed among Westgate board of directors meeting minutes).

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

riculum improved, and the staff committed to the Christian Faith.”⁶⁶ The school needed “a new way of providing for ‘Order,’ ‘Discipline.’” The school’s administration needed to be rapidly reorganized so that office work “can be handled efficiently, inexpensively, and not at the expense of being counsellor and teacher to students.” A job description should be created for the principal, and teachers should be “invited to congregations to share of their faith, teaching process, etc.”⁶⁷ The board should meet regularly with the teaching staff throughout the year so that the school program could be shaped by both “a teacher’s individuality” and the desires of the churches represented by the board.⁶⁸ As the churches and parents had diverse desires,

*it will be necessary to appeal to one general aim – namely, the task of training for Christian discipleship – as a guideline. To some extent, however, the specific understanding of Christian discipleship will always be informed by the sentiment of the supporting constituency.*⁶⁹

The German language and culture (including music) should receive greater emphasis to meet the needs of those supporting churches that viewed German “as a distinctive sign of identification with Mennonite heritage.” The Mennonite Educational Society that owned the school needed a membership drive, a new constitution, and revised bylaws. The board executive itself required reorganization, to consist of the principal, a chair to be elected by the society membership, a vice-chair and a secretary elected by the board, and a

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

treasurer appointed by the board.⁷⁰

The final report's suggestion to create a consultative council for Westgate was adopted the next school year, in 1972–73.⁷¹ At the council's first meeting, council members commented: "No reactions pro or con concerning issues at Westgate have really been expressed in churches so far."⁷² Instead, the group had an open discussion of their own concerns about the religion program at Westgate. Religion teacher Rudy Friesen explained his teaching objectives and his students' response: "I'm trying to make kids aware of the city they're in which opens up areas of discussion and feeling. The attitude in school concerning courses in religion is one of hostility. Integration with history and literature creates more interest."⁷³ He was told: "Take opposition and anger at face value and sincerely and then they will have to take your stand sincerely also." Asked whether Westgate's chapel services were "helpful," council members were told that students had mixed responses. In the past, students had booed and cheered, but they were "better this year." There was some debate as to whether religion was being taught as history (a student was quoted as saying, "I can't tell who is the history teacher or religion teacher") and whether religion should be better integrated into other subject areas. If the latter suggestion was to be adopted, council members cautioned, churches would have to be kept informed, but there "could be real merit in working on integration of courses with life of faith."⁷⁴

The consultative council had a short existence and met but rarely. The next report of the use of this group was in

70 Ibid.

71 The school also had a new principal by this time, having promoted teacher John Enns to that role.

72 Minutes of consultative council meeting, December 8, 1972.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

1973, when board member John J. Enns expressed concerns about finances, enrolment, faculty, and “the failure of the school to grow in providing a strong Christian education program.”⁷⁵ Yet shortly thereafter, the council itself noted that they had held only two meetings, “both not well attended.” Given that no crucial issues had been drawn to their attention, council members felt no need to meet.⁷⁶ Six months later, the board revisited the purpose of the consultative council. Its original aims were verified: to “help to establish better relationships between Westgate and the churches,” to “examine some of the religious instruction,” as some “had been unhappy with the ‘product’ of Westgate,” and to address discipline issues such as smoking, “which divided the board.”⁷⁷ Some board members suggested that these issues had been resolved, and that council members should instead serve as “spokesmen for the churches so that all people in Manitoba could be in on the education of the youth” – in short, function as a public relations crew for Westgate “from the other end.”⁷⁸ The board decided that the council (particularly those of its members who were church ministers) should sit in on religion classes at Westgate, and then produce a joint statement with the board “for distribution to the churches.”⁷⁹

Three years later, the need for the consultative council seemingly had evaporated, and it was eliminated. At Westgate’s 1976 annual general meeting, those assembled were told that the council had been “created a number of years ago to provide a forum for the churches to discuss their differences and concerns in regards to Westgate Mennonite Col-

75 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 9, 1973.

76 Minutes of meeting of board of directors and consultative council, April 16, 1973.

77 Minutes of consultative council meeting, October 4, 1973.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid. A letter outlining this plan was distributed to church pastors on October 11, 1973.

legiate and to present recommendations to the board.”⁸⁰ The council had not met, however, for “several years”⁸¹ (though it had been created only three years earlier). In the discussion that followed, some of those present suggested that the board should meet annually with the supporting churches’ ministers, so that the board would “know how they feel.” This suggestion was adopted, despite the reservations of some that the ministers weren’t necessarily representative of “grassroot opinion.”⁸²

The churches made use of what came to be called “church-school liaison meetings” to voice their suggestions and concerns. Over the years, these suggestions included the request that two evenings a week be free of Westgate events to allow for student participation in weekly church programs, and that individual memberships be replaced with church memberships in the Westgate educational society – only the former suggestion was seriously considered.⁸³ Former teacher Bill Schulz recalled that there was some resentment by church pastors that Westgate students had an active school-related social life, and that “this elite” was not interested in church youth events. The suggestion that Westgate students were reluctant participants in church youth activities was a recurring theme of church pastors, who also made the suggestion that students receive partial religion course credit for participating in church activities.⁸⁴

At other times, however, the concerns of pastors regarding Westgate student participation in their church programs were met with the question: “[Whose] problem is this, the

80 Semi-annual meeting minutes, November 29, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Minutes of board-church leadership meeting, March 26, 1979.

84 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 22, 1984; principal’s report to the board of directors, June 21, 1993; Bill Schulz interview.

school's or church's or both? Do we need/want to do anything about this?"⁸⁵ In the late 1990s, the school initiated a policy of refraining from scheduling tests and major assignments on Mondays to "free up the Sabbath."⁸⁶ An evaluation of the policy by the church-school liaison committee a year later, however, revealed that

*the advantages of keeping Monday free of deadlines were not as significant to church programs as had been previously thought. Meanwhile the pressure on students and staff which resulted from having all tests and assignments compressed into four days were considerable.*⁸⁷

It was decided to continue to avoid Monday deadlines, but not at the expense of the academic interests of students. Not all were satisfied, though: "Some ministers raised the question of what the churches are saying about the Sabbath, especially if their extra activities conflict too much with family time."⁸⁸

To Serve or to Lead?

The school did not necessarily see its role as acquiescing to the demands of its supporting churches. At times, it expressed a view that the churches should perhaps follow the school's lead. The staff asked in 1972, for example, "What is our relationship to the churches we seek to serve or lead?"⁸⁹ The board echoed this question in 1990, asking whether Westgate should "move closer to the church or

85 Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 12, 1988.

86 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 20, 1997.

87 Principal's report, annual general meeting, October 26, 1998.

88 Ibid.

89 Westgate staff in-service discussion questions, October 26, 1972.

should the church move closer to Westgate?” The question was an important one by 1990, as student demographics had changed significantly: 52 percent of students came from the supporting churches, an additional 7 percent came from other Mennonite churches, and the remaining 41 percent were not Mennonite.⁹⁰ A few years later, the school’s vice-principal observed, “Church-Community-School Relations need improving. We need to relax those constituents who fret over religious, cultural & heritage concerns by meeting their needs as much as possible without compromising our integrity as teachers & as a school.”⁹¹

Efforts to improve and clarify the connections between the school and the supporting churches were assisted by the formation of the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools (CAMS) and by presentations to the national church conference. The formation of CAMS “has for the first time permitted an exchange of ideas and a feeling of mutual support”⁹² among Canadian Mennonite schools, the organization’s representatives told the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC). Through CAMS, the various Mennonite schools in Canada saw themselves as united in a common task rather than as competitors. The CMC was asked in 1982 if it had interest in providing ongoing professional development to Mennonite teachers on integrating faith with academic curricula, as well offering as pedagogical training specific to religion classes.⁹³ The CMC was also asked to appoint someone from CMBC faculty as a resource person

90 Principal’s report to the board of directors, October 15, 1990. The supporting churches at the time were Bethel, Charleswood, Douglas, First, Fort Garry, Home Street, North Kildonan, Northdale Fellowship, Sargent Avenue, Springfield Heights, and Hope.

91 Helene Riesen, teacher self-evaluation, 1994–95.

92 Brief presented to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada Task Force on Higher Education, September 25, 1982.

93 *Ibid.*

to research and produce a common religious curriculum and supplemental resources for the Mennonite church schools.⁹⁴ CAMS noted that with the growth of Mennonite schools, it was not possible to hire only teachers with theological training – nor was doing so “necessarily desirable.” CAMS recognized nonetheless that its teachers required a stronger background in theology.⁹⁵

Westgate had made similar declarations at earlier dates to both the provincial and the North American church conferences. In 1973, the school’s board of directors and consultative council had asked the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba to form a committee to investigate the spiritual needs of students and then make recommendations to the conference for action.⁹⁶ Four years later, the General Conference noted that “for the first time in history ... the three western Canadian schools (MCI, Westgate, Rosthern) can work together without a feeling of competitiveness or rivalry (eg. for students).”⁹⁷ That same year, Westgate’s board chair Dave Epp declared that

*the Conference priority should be the education of our children. We should look at not only junior and senior high schools where we determine who our children’s peers shall be, but also at Kindergarten to Grade 6. The Conference needs to grow not only in numbers but in spiritual values and concern about heritage, history and faith.*⁹⁸

Perhaps in response to tensions with the supporting churches in the 1960s, Westgate strongly emphasized the

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Minutes of meeting of board of directors and consultative council, June 11, 1973.

97 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 21, 1977.

98 Minutes of the special meeting, September 16, 1977, MHA, Vol. 832, MCI Dormitory Records, Folder 5, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Materials, 1977–1981.

connection of the school to the church in its promotional materials in the late 1970s. “What is the church doing at Westgate?” the 1978–79 school catalogue asked.⁹⁹ The school was “educating our youth to understand the teaching, commitment, and way of life that Christ taught.” It was “helping the students integrate what they believe with the demands and pressures of urban life.” It was providing vocational counselling so that student could choose occupations “best suited to the gifts and talents they have been given by God.” Westgate taught students “by example, instruction and experience what it means to live, work and worship together as God’s people.”

From Society School to Church School

The increasing importance of the supporting churches in the life of the school – together with the declining involvement of the individual educational society members – resulted in a slow shift toward a redefinition of Westgate as a church school rather than a society school. In the late 1970s, 30 to 35 percent of donations came from church congregation budgets.¹⁰⁰ The school’s public relations committee met with supporting churches in 1979 and determined that the churches and the school needed to

look at ways of moving closer together. This we felt was needed because the church is not directly represented in the Society, because the church has no direct input on goals and educational philosophy, and because Westgate could be the common meeting ground for both adults and youth, socially

99 “THE CHURCH teaching the Christian Way of Life at WESTGATE,” 1978–1979 school year, pamphlet, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

100 Minutes of the annual general meeting, May 30, 1977, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate funds.

*and academically and recreationally.*¹⁰¹

Westgate's board asked that Winnipeg's Mennonite churches send delegates (one for every twenty church members) to the school's annual general meetings; they would be considered educational society members and be granted voting rights. The board further suggested that the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba (CMM) appoint one person to their board.¹⁰² In practice, a CMM member was invited to join the board, though CMM rarely sent a representative. And Mennonite church members did attend and vote at Westgate annual general meetings, though not as delegates representing twenty other church members.

By the 1980s, the school was still questioning whether it defined itself as a church rather than a society school. Board chair John Lohrenz had asserted in 1981 that Westgate "should see itself as an extension of the church, but not a church itself."¹⁰³ "The question of whether we are a society school or a church school or half-way between needs to be addressed," members of the board's education committee argued in 1984.¹⁰⁴ The following year, board chair Rudy Regehr declared, "We need to be more explicit about being a church school. Students of Westgate need to be encouraged to attend other church schools."¹⁰⁵ By 1987, the board concluded: "The school has, in a very real sense, become an extension of the church so that it is now quite appropriate for the churches to expect that their wishes and values be owned by

101 George Neufeld, "Public Relations Committee Report," annual general meeting, May 28, 1979.

102 Ibid.

103 Minutes of the annual general meeting, 1981, MHA, Vol. 832, MCI Dormitory Records, Folder 5, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Materials, 1977-1981.

104 Minutes of education committee meeting, January 16, 1984.

105 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 17, 1985.

the school.”¹⁰⁶

The school’s constitution was changed to reflect the new definition of Westgate as a church school. Pastors and chairs of church councils were asked for their advice in revising the constitution.¹⁰⁷ Educational society membership was redefined as all members of supporting churches. Others (such as parents of students not part of a supporting church, or those who had no children at Westgate but who agreed with the school’s aims and objectives) could pay a membership fee to become a voting member of the educational society.¹⁰⁸

Ironically, the increased commitment of the school to the church was met with a declining commitment of the church to the school. Commenting on the absence of pastors at Westgate’s annual general meeting, board chair Gerald Gerbrandt declared, “Churches need to take more ownership of the direction the school is to take.... Perhaps we need to again invite ourselves to church council meetings.”¹⁰⁹ The definition of “supporting church” or congregational member of the educational society was formalized by the board: a church had to be a member of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada or the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba, support the aims and objectives of the school, and include Westgate in its budget.¹¹⁰ The latter requirement was by no means the least important, as congregational giving had plummeted in the late 1980s.¹¹¹ Board members questioned whether churches were fully aware of Westgate’s financial circumstances, and whether they should request a

106 Chair’s report, annual general meeting, April 27, 1987.

107 Minutes of the annual general meeting, May 28, 1990.

108 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 15, 1990.

109 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 18, 1991.

110 This definition was adopted on February 15, 1993, according to a memorandum from Gerald Gerbrandt to the board, dated February 16, 1993. “Congregational Membership in Mennonite Educational Society,” n.d. [ca. 1993].

111 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1994.

specific percentage of church budgets.¹¹²

Conclusion

It appears that a “religious crisis” at Westgate occurred regularly every six to ten years. The perceived problem was always the same: Westgate was not sufficiently “spiritual” or evangelical. The solutions proffered in response were often similar: revision of the school “Aims,” revision of the religion curriculum, conversations with concerned pastors and board members. The repetitive nature of these re-evaluations of Westgate’s religiosity tended to coincide with the passage of a new generation of students through the six years of education the school provided. Each generation of parents and students, it seemed, needed to come to terms with the Westgate’s distinctly different religious culture: faith was a gift of God, not something into which students should be pressured. Never able to rely solely on educational society memberships for financial support, the school moved from a society- to a church-sponsored model of ownership, as Westgate sought out other institutions for its own stability. The survival of the school may have been questioned over the years, but there were always those who appreciated its approach to faith and were willing to invest in its future.

112 Ibid.

*“The school is life, and life means
— to grow and to grow together”*

4. Expansion and Debt

Throughout much of Westgate’s history, the most challenging issue was financing.¹ The school, for many decades, owed its survival to the “energetic, moral, and financial support” of the Westgate ladies’ auxiliary, composed primarily of mothers of students and wives of board members and faculty.² It was this group that paid the school’s million-dollar debt (held at double-digit interest rates) in the 1970s and ’80s, and that helped finance the construction and remodelling of a number of school buildings.

Expansion

Over the years, Westgate underwent a number of physical transformations. The school had opened in two “very small”³ Sunday school classrooms at the Schoenwieser (First Mennonite) Church on Notre Dame Avenue in Winnipeg’s

1 G.H. Peters, “Kurzer Bericht ueber die Entstehung des Mennonitischen Bildungsinstituts – Winnipeg,” *Katalog* (1961–62), 13.

2 *Ibid.*, 15.

3 Frank Neufeld interview.

West End. In the absence of a gymnasium, students played table tennis in the church basement and used a community playground on nearby Bannatyne Avenue. School principal Frank Neufeld had to store equipment and chemicals for science experiments in the basement of his own house and transport them to the church basement as needed.⁴ In 1959, in order that the school could operate out of a facility of its own, it was moved to the former North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church at 343 Edison Street, which was renovated with volunteer labour.⁵ Principal Frank Neufeld, his wife, and teacher Karl Fast's wife transformed the church's balcony into the school library. At this location, the parking lot was used as a playground, where students created an ice rink to play broomball. The facility was "primitive, but we tried to make it work."⁶

The renovated former church building in North Kildonan was limited in its usefulness as a school. The science facilities in particular, while an improvement over the First Mennonite Church Sunday school classrooms, left much to be desired. Student Irene Voth gave a vivid description of the "laboratory" in the 1961–62 school yearbook:

On entering the [basement] lab, we find a fire- and acid-stained table in the middle of the room.... A tiny window admits a little light and sometimes, during a particularly nauseating experiment, life-giving air. The bottles and cardboard containers on the shelves are all neatly labelled. Unfortunately, the bottles do not always contain the chemical they are thought to contain. This results in some confusion.

4 Ibid.

5 "Mennonite Tour of Winnipeg," Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, May 23, 2008, http://www.mmhs.org/mmhs/Mennonite_Tour.doc; Frank Neufeld interview.

6 Frank Neufeld interview.

Some names on the labels are also misspelled, but who can do spelling and chemistry at the same time? A most obnoxious odor greets us as we enter our lab. Generally this happens after the twelfth-graders have performed one of the unsupervised experiments. We all crowd around the scarred table like children around a candy dish. The more energetic students help the teacher perform the experiment while the others take notes and make relevant and sometimes irrelevant (Isn't that a cute color?) comments. Our time in the lab is never dull.... When doing a delicate experiment, the teacher repeatedly warns, "Don't shake the table." Due to the lack of space, however, this can't be helped.⁷

Voth's frustration was shared by principal Frank Neufeld. He pushed the board to address the issue, arguing that improvements were necessary to attract more students to the school: a proper library and science labs, and spaces for music and typing classes were needed.⁸ He also proposed that the school approach Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) about building on its property and sharing a gymnasium and library.⁹

A building committee was formed in 1961 to consider not only facility improvements but also possible relocation.¹⁰ Two land swaps in North Kildonan were entertained and rejected, yet the dream of building did not die.¹¹ A new building committee was appointed.¹² The search for an alternative facility took a new turn in 1963 when a property outside of

7 Irene Voth, "Our Laboratory," Westgate yearbook, 1961–62.

8 Letter from Frank Neufeld to board of directors, November 21, 1963.

9 Bill Schulz interview.

10 The committee consisted of Rev. Isaak Klassen, Abram Vogt, and Harold Dueck. Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 2, 1961.

11 Minutes of board of directors meetings, October 3, 1961, November 7, 1961, and September 25, 1962.

12 Committee members were David Loewen, Siegfried Ediger, and Peter Rempel. Minutes of annual general meeting, February 3, 1963.

North Kildonan was considered: a Catholic school on West Gate was for sale.¹³ Frank Neufeld, E. Enns, and Harold Dueck visited the property and were impressed. The board decided to make an offer of \$90–\$100,000, planning to borrow a down payment of \$5,000.¹⁴

The property at 86 West Gate had been a fifteen-room mansion (complete with call bells and speaking tubes) built in 1901 for W. Rockley Kaye, a grocery wholesale manager.¹⁵ The original exterior had Tudor half-timbering and stucco on its second floor, a gabled roof, a Tyndall stone arch linking the two bays of the home, and a balcony above the main entrance. The interior featured an oak-panelled staircase as well as a dining room with oak half-panels, a carved oak ceiling, and a blue-tiled, wrought-iron fireplace.¹⁶ In 1950, the mansion became a convent for the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who added a contemporary two-storey addition to the back of the house, removed the gabled roof and stone arch to add a third floor, and disposed of the half-timbering.¹⁷ These actions destroyed the character of the original mansion and angered the Armstrong's Point Association (APA), which represented many of the local neighbours. The convent sold the building to the Mennonite Educational Society for \$60,000 with possession in the summer of 1964,¹⁸ and the

13 Minutes of board of directors meeting, July 2, 1963.

14 Minutes of board of directors special meeting, July 18, 1963. The board sold the former school building on Edison for \$32,000. Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 8, 1964. Other parties interested in purchasing 86 West Gate were a Greek Orthodox Church, which also wanted it for a private school, and Misericordia Hospital, which wanted it for a home for unwed mothers. Untitled and undated typescript filed with women's committee report by Irene Enns, annual general meeting reports, May 26, 1975.

15 Rostecki, "Belgrave, W. Rockley Kaye Residence," 50.

16 Lillian Gibbons, "Stories Houses Tell," *Winnipeg Tribune*, October 6, 1949, 10.

17 Rostecki, "Belgrave, W. Rockley Kaye Residence," 52.

18 Minutes of board of directors meetings, September 4, 1963, and November 5, 1963. Misericordia Hospital, located half a block from 86 West Gate, offered to purchase it for \$125,000 weeks after the Mennonite Educational Society purchased it. The offer

Mennonite Educational Institute“ was renamed Westgate Mennonite Collegiate.¹⁹ Westgate’s finance committee was tasked with selling the Edison property and raising funds.²⁰ In the coming years, conflict with the APA would continue over “zoning, automobile traffic, and noise.”²¹

The establishment of the school at this new location received support from the German-language Mennonite church periodical *Der Bote*. George K. Epp argued in its pages that the need for another “good, Christian school” for Winnipeg Mennonites was “evident even to a blind person.”²² Westgate, he stated, should not be considered competition for Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI) but an affordable alternative. The expense of tuition was worth any sacrifice, he declared: “The correct upbringing of our children guarantees the future of our community.”²³ The good reputation of the school would depend “not only on the teachers, but also on the students and the parents’ homes!... If teachers, students, and home together seek the right spirit for this school, this young school will become the largest Mennonite private school in short order.”²⁴

Founder Victor Peters reported in *Der Bote* on the success of the school at its new location, which he described as an ideal setting.²⁵ Westgate’s goal was to double the student body to 200 in the next two years, though Peters hastened to add that it would not “compete with existing [Mennonite]

was rejected. Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 4, 1963.

19 Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, “Mennonite Tour of Winnipeg,” http://www.mmhs.org/mmhs/Mennonite_Tour.doc (May 23, 2008); letter from Arpin, Rich, and Houston, barristers and solicitors, to board of directors, August 6, 1965.

20 Committee members were Harold Dueck, H. Toews, H. Riediger, and Art Rempel. Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 11, 1964.

21 Rostecki, “Belgrave, W. Rockley Kaye Residence,” 52.

22 George Epp, “Soll diese Schule wachsen?” *Der Bote* 41, no. 2 (February 11, 1964): 2.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Victor Peters, “Unsere Schule in Westgate,” *Der Bote* 42, no. 41 (October 12, 1965): 2.

schools.”²⁶ He assured skeptics that Westgate met a critical need of urban Mennonites: more and more students were attending colleges and universities, and the economy had less need for unskilled workers. Westgate would “train our students to perform more highly than those in public schools.”²⁷ The variety of Mennonite denominations represented in the student body would “indirectly but significantly promote inter-Mennonite understanding.”²⁸ In the larger public schools, teaching had “become mechanical” and students were alienated from each other. Westgate’s small size, together with its morning devotions and choir, would promote friendships that would persist long after students graduated. Thus Westgate could “help to protect our children against one of the biggest problems of our time: the inner loneliness of people. This is our goal. The school is life, and life means to grow and to grow together.”²⁹

Board members made plans to accommodate the growing student body that they hoped would be attracted to Westgate. They approached the city about rezoning in 1968 and explored the possibility of purchasing two lots north of the school, which would allow expanding to 250 students.³⁰ But building projects alone were not the solution. The school would also need “to attract and keep teachers who are not only competent educators but also dedicated, informed Christians.”³¹ An alumni association was created to assist in financing and promoting these dreams.³²

But if the expansion of Westgate was necessary, where

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid. Peters noted that it was “not right to be involved in great mission work in Africa, Asia, and South America but we can’t get along with our neighbouring communities.”

29 Ibid.

30 Letter from Dave Epp to Westgate planning committee, October 18, 1968.

31 “Westgate Mennonite Collegiate invites you to be an associate,” n.d. [ca. 1968].

32 Ibid.

should it occur? The location in Armstrong's Point was limited in size; adjacent properties might be purchased, but zoning regulations and the local homeowners' association remained challenges.³³ CMBC had moved to Shaftesbury Boulevard in the suburb of Tuxedo in 1956; building a high school on that land and sharing facilities with the Bible college was an option. There also was the possibility of constructing a joint facility with a Winnipeg Mennonite church that was looking for a new building: Charleswood Mennonite Church, Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship, and Bethel Mennonite Church all expressed interest.³⁴ Another possibility was a merger with either MCI (Mennonite Collegiate Institute) or MBCI or both, relocating to the newly constructed Convent of the Sacred Heart on Assiniboine Park Drive.³⁵ At a minimum, if the school stayed at its location on West Gate, a new gymnasium needed to be built. Teachers argued that the absence of a gym resulted in "restlessness among the students," and the noise of rambunctious students in the hallways carried throughout classrooms in the absence of sound-proofing.³⁶ An entirely new school building elsewhere could cost half a million dollars: could the churches afford this? Could the money be borrowed, or should it be

33 Minutes of semi-annual meeting, November 24, 1975.

34 "A plan for the future of our church school: Westgate," presented to the board of directors, November 12, 1968.

35 Minutes of board of directors executive meetings, February 1, 1973, and February 5, 1973. After the Sisters had moved their convent school from West Gate in 1964, they built a new school at 700 Assiniboine Park Drive. Enrolment dwindled, and the convent school was closed in 1972. Minutes of board of directors executive meetings, April 5, 1973, and April 9, 1973; board chair report, annual general meeting, May 29, 1973; Winnipeg Architecture Foundation, "Places: 700 Assiniboine Park Drive," 2013, <http://www.winnipegarchitecture.ca/700-assiniboine-park-drive/>; Baudoin, "The Religious of the Sacred Heart in Canada," 58.

36 Minutes of the board of directors meeting, December 12, 1968. For a time, the gymnasiums at Mulvey School, Balmoral Hall, and Lutheran Church of the Redeemer were borrowed. Semi-annual meeting reports, November 29, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate funds.

secured before construction? Waiting to save would mean the “loss of a generation”; “It is no more wrong to borrow money to build a school that is necessary than it is to borrow money to buy a new car or home,” board members argued.³⁷

The board pursued many of these options. The Metropolitan Court of Appeal and the Manitoba Court of Appeal rejected applications to expand the school at West Gate.³⁸ The board asked for permission to purchase property from CMBC in Tuxedo in July 1969, but this request was rejected the next year.³⁹ The school’s neighbour, Dr. Terry Ackerman, approached Westgate about leasing his property to the school, but the rezoning issue was still a problem. Instead, the old mansion’s garage was renovated to serve as an art room and music practice rooms, becoming known as the Art Barn.⁴⁰ The addition that the Sisters had made to the back of the mansion was renovated to include three junior high classrooms, new washrooms, a work room, a book storage room, and (in the basement) physics and science lab rooms.⁴¹

37 Minutes of the board of directors meeting, December 12, 1968.

38 “Collegiate Expansion Rejected,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 19, 1969, 62.

39 President’s report by Dr. Jacob Dyck, annual general meeting, January 18, 1970; minutes of Westgate board of directors meeting, February 19, 1970. The minutes do not explain why CMBC did not agree to work with Westgate.

40 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 11, 1970.

41 President’s report by Dr. Jacob Dyck, annual general meeting, January 18, 1970.



FIGURE 4.1. Mansion before renovations by Sisters of the Sacred Heart



FIGURE 4.2. Mansion after renovations by Sisters of the Sacred Heart

With the failure of other options, expansion at the West Gate site was given more attention of necessity.⁴² The application for rezoning that had been granted to the school in 1969 was challenged by the APA and reversed. Rezoning applications no longer involved law courts by 1976 but were submitted to Winnipeg City Council's Community Committee and Environment Committee.⁴³ Board members in 1976 suggested an application might be successful if "we do not propose to increase the student population beyond what the present building would allow in classroom space i.e. up to 250 students. Therefore, the traffic flow would not change substantially."⁴⁴ Board members met with the APA more than once in the spring of 1976 to discuss expansion of the school, but APA support was not forthcoming. The board decided that "although we have the legal right to still apply for rezoning," it would not take further action.⁴⁵ Later that year, however, the board submitted building plans to the City of Winnipeg Community Committee, proposing to share any new facilities with neighbourhood residents.⁴⁶ The APA presented a petition against this, and the Community Committee voted three to one against expansion.⁴⁷

Westgate filed a formal appeal with the city's Environment Committee⁴⁸ and received approval in February 1977 for construction of a new gymnasium.⁴⁹ Board chair Dave Epp observed, "Throughout the presentation we were chal-

42 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 20, 1976.

43 Minutes of special society meeting, November 3, 1976.

44 Minutes of special board of directors meeting, October 6, 1976.

45 Minutes of annual general meeting, May 31, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds; annual general meeting, May 31, 1976, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

46 Semi-annual meeting reports, November 29, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

47 Minutes of staff meeting, December 15, 1976; minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1977.

48 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1977.

49 Letter from Dave Epp to educational society members, March 15, 1977.

lenged to be responsible citizens of the area, respecting the rights and privileges of others. As we respond to this challenge we will heal any wounds that may have been caused and will establish a good relationship with our neighbours.”⁵⁰ APA chair Brian Squair informed the school that the association would sue the city for granting the zoning variance. The Westgate board executive decided, “on the authority granted to us by the City (not on threats of the citizens),” to “move more quickly with fund-raising lest this be affected by uncertainties raised within our constituency when the Homeowners’ intentions and actions become public.”⁵¹ They saw the issue with the APA “as the City’s battle. It does not concern us unless the City reverses its decision. This is seen as most unlikely.”⁵²

The APA withdrew legal action in late 1977, but warned the school that its objections remained.⁵³ The school responded that it wanted “to be good neighbours and ... work with the residents in doing those things that will beautify and enrich the community.”⁵⁴ Architect Rudy P. Friesen accordingly designed the gymnasium so that it was below grade, thus lowering its profile in the neighbourhood, and faced with brick to “improve its appearance.”⁵⁵ The 18,500-square-foot addition was completed in 1978 – the twentieth anniversary of the school – at a cost of almost \$1 million, and included a library, offices, staffroom, a wood

50 Annual general meeting reports, May 30, 1977.

51 Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, June 1, 1977.

52 Ibid.

53 Letter from Dave Epp to educational society members and parents, September 8, 1977; “Minutes of the Special Meeting,” September 16, 1977, MHA, Vol. 832, MCI Dormitory Records, Folder 5, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Materials, 1977–1981; special society meeting, September 16, 1977.

54 Letter from Dave Epp (board chair) to Armstrong’s Point residents, September 22, 1977.

55 Ibid.; “Westgate Collegiate,” *Der Bote* 54, no. 44 (November 9, 1977): 11.

shop, and a student lounge.⁵⁶

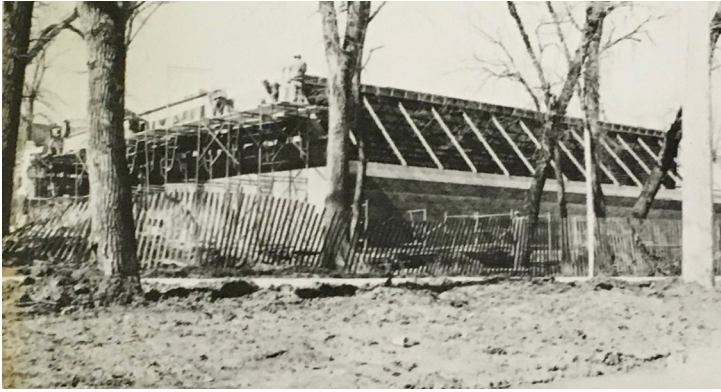


FIGURE 4.3. Construction of the gymnasium, 1977–78

The school's setting in Armstrong's Point was both a strength and a weakness, and the ongoing feasibility of the old mansion became a question by the late 1980s.⁵⁷

One of Westgate's assets must undeniably be the location and the structure. The nostalgic old building enhanced by a modern new addition is situated on a quiet tree-lined street bordering the Assiniboine River with its variety of overhanging foliage and stately oaks, elms, and maples. A mood of serenity is created by lazy water flowing by in summer and the whiteness of undisturbed snow during the winter. It is a setting that would be envied by many of those attempting similar work in an impersonal structure of halls and desks surrounded by the noises of a busy city.⁵⁸

56 The "focal point of informal student activity is the Pit Lounge, located immediately beyond the main entrance. From its tiered seating, there is a view of the gymnasium below and sky above." Pamphlet prepared by Rudy P. Friesen, architect, courtesy of Ozzie Rempel. The new addition was officially opened at a service on October 29, 1978. Bulletin for opening program and dedication service, October 29, 1978, courtesy of Ozzie Rempel.

57 Semi-annual meeting reports, November 24, 1986; education committee minutes, January 12, 1987.

58 John R. Lohrenz [Westgate board chair], "Dreaming the Dream and Building the

Though the setting was scenic and peaceful, the atmosphere inside the school was less picturesque. Mice and decay were ongoing problems in the old mansion, and the school became congested as the student body climbed past 250.⁵⁹

*Halls are crowded, students are forced to eat lunches sitting on the floor while others must get past them to the next class, etc. The public school system would not allow the kind of overcrowding we are presently living with. It is also a well known and researched "psychological fact" that crowding leads to interpersonal and behaviour problems and that these problems are almost automatically reduced when overcrowded conditions are alleviated.*⁶⁰

More classrooms and better science labs were needed, as were a lunchroom, a chapel area, a music room, a computer lab, and space for guidance counsellors.⁶¹ The mansion could be renovated, but demolition was preferable because new construction would offer more options.⁶² The mansion had not been designated a heritage site by Winnipeg's Historical Buildings Committee, as the Sisters' renovations had significantly altered its original design.⁶³ Architect Rudy Friesen was again called upon for his skills in designing a facility that would accommodate 300 students.⁶⁴ The APA expressed its concerns about expansions at a series of meetings with the

Reality," *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 16.

59 "The old mansion had a lot of character and mice." Leona Hiebert interview.

60 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 5, 1987.

61 Chair's report, annual general meeting, April 27, 1987.

62 Letter from Steve Cohlmeier, Cohlmeier Hanson Architects, to Westgate expansion feasibility committee, September 21, 1987; minutes of board of directors meeting, 5 October 5, 1987.

63 Rostecki, "Belgrave, W. Rockley Kaye Residence," 53.

64 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 5, 1987; semi-annual meeting reports, November 23, 1987.

school, including asking for a cap on enrolment.⁶⁵ A building campaign was launched to raise the \$850,000 needed to replace the mansion with a new structure.⁶⁶ The mansion was demolished in April 1989 and the new building dedicated in October 1989.⁶⁷ Irene Peters, the first president of Westgate's ladies' auxiliary, and Roy Vogt, board member, spoke at the dedication.⁶⁸ Vogt recalled that paying off the debt on the gymnasium years ago had been a great feeling, but "soon there seemed to be something missing. We were so used to including the monthly debt payment in our budget."⁶⁹ A correspondent for *Der Bote* reflected that "this was exactly as it needed to be. Without a vision for the future, a people goes under."⁷⁰

Former board member Henry Dyck and former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel later reflected on the removal of the old mansion. The design of the 1978 addition, Rempel said,

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- 65 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 22, 1988; letter from APA to Henry Dyck, Westgate chair, May 5, 1988; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 16, 1988. Though board minutes do not mention it, the board "stated [its] intention to neighbourhood during approval of recent building construction that student population would be limited to 300.... CONSENSUS: Population not to exceed 300 students." "Staff-Board Workshop reporting document," April 19, 1993. This commitment was also noted by board member Reinhard Penner: "In deference to neighbours' concern about the potentially disruptive effect of a school in their midst, Westgate has in past agreed to cap its enrollment. Any plan calling for an increase in enrollment must take into careful consideration the concerns of neighbours, and seek to enlist their support." Reinhard Penner, chair of education committee, "Westgate Mennonite Collegiate – Constituency Discussion Guide," November 12, 1996.
- 66 Memo to supporting churches from Henry Dyck, board chair, November 27, 1987; "Westgate Campus Development," 1988; minutes of board of directors meeting, October 17, 1988.
- 67 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 20, 1989; special notice to board members, April 14, 1989; Henry Dyck, "Campus Development Project: New building ground breaking ceremony," [April 18, 1989]; "Spatenstichfeier auf dem Gelände des Westgate Mennonite Collegiate," *Der Bote* 66, no. 17 (April 26, 1989): 2.
- 68 "Celebrating a Vision of Faith," opening program and dedication ceremony, pamphlet, October 15, 1989.
- 69 "Einweihung der neuen Westgate Schule in Winnipeg," *Der Bote* 66, no. 45 (November 29, 1989): 2.
- 70 Ibid.

had been flawed. The chapel/multipurpose room had a stage and a stippled ceiling. It was “dim and dark and had pot lights – not a good space.”⁷¹ Dyck observed that neighbours “didn’t want a school here, and enlarging complicated the problem.”⁷² The expansion was legal, however, and residential neighbourhoods are typical school locations, he commented. The board had met with area residents and “tried be as up-front as possible.”⁷³ Part of the school that was taken down in the 1980s was “originally a nice mansion but had been drastically altered by the convent school and was no longer an historic site. The historical character was totally gone.”⁷⁴ Rempel appreciated that his new classroom was “a great space with windows. Before, you touched the ceiling.”⁷⁵

In the 1990s, Prairie Research Associates was hired to conduct surveys of the Westgate constituency to facilitate long-range planning.⁷⁶ Workshops were held with Dr. Curtis Nordman, then Dean of Education at the University of Winnipeg, and Dr. Bruce Lockerbie, chair of the consulting firm PAIDEIA.⁷⁷ The student population had risen to 322 students, and more applications were received from non-Mennonite students than could be accepted.⁷⁸

We are at another one of those points in our history where tough questions need answers. How much larger do we want to become? Should we move? Do other Mennonite schools fig-

71 Ozzie Rempel interview.

72 Henry Dyck interview.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid. Former vice-principal Helene Riesen said the fire marshal told her that the old building (heavily changed by the convent) was a fire hazard and had to come down. Helene Riesen interview.

75 Ibid.

76 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 15, 1996.

77 Reg Klassen, “From the Principal’s Desk,” *Westgate Perspective* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1997).

78 Reinhard Penner, education committee chair, “Westgate Mennonite Collegiate – Constituency Discussion Guide,” November 12, 1996.

*ure into this picture? Questions about space, size and location are not new; they have been dealt with before. As we have grown, however, the questions have returned.*⁷⁹

The answers of the past also returned: work harder at getting along with the APA and expand at the existing location; merge with MBCI and Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary Schools (WMES); merge with CMBC; or move to a new location.⁸⁰ A house was purchased north of the school, but city planners and the Westgate board itself expressed doubts that it could be demolished and used as an expansion site, in light of APA objections: "Previous representations limiting enrolment to 225 students have not been honored and traffic attributed to our school continues to be a sore point with area residents. The attitude of the current association executive can best be summarized as uncooperative at this time."⁸¹ Reinhard Penner unsuccessfully mooted a "LARGE VISION ... for a 'Mennonite Center' in a central location" that would incorporate the school, a church (probably First Mennonite Church), and a seniors' home in shared facilities.⁸²

While Penner's "large vision" never got off the ground, Westgate did entertain the possibility of merging with other Winnipeg private schools. Administrators and board members met with representatives of WMES, MBCI, and

79 Reg Klassen, "From the Principal's Desk," *Westgate Perspective* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 3.

80 "Our Future Campus Plans," *Westgate Perspective* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2004); minutes of board of directors meetings, April 19, 1999, March 20, 2000, and August 21, 2000.

81 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 19, 2000. See also minutes of board of directors meetings, May 15, 2000, and June 19, 2000.

82 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 19, 2001.

Calvin Christian School⁸³ in 1998 to discuss this option.⁸⁴ The challenge, however, was that each school had a different governance structure. The blunt question was raised as to whether any of the schools would “be willing to give up part of our program for the sake of cooperation instead of too much duplication. In some cases we might want to consider shared services.”⁸⁵ Winnipeg’s Mennonite post-secondary educational institutes were uniting to form a single institution (Canadian Mennonite University), so the precedent had been established. Ultimately, however, agreement could not be reached, and Westgate returned to expansion plans.

No definitive action was taken until 2008, when a re-development proposal to expand onto the adjacent property north of the school was rejected by the City of Winnipeg.⁸⁶ In response, the board scouted potential relocation sites for the school, but moving was estimated to cost \$14–\$29 million, considered beyond the ability of the supporters of the school to raise.⁸⁷ Instead, the board hired Prairie Architects in 2012 to design a \$10.5 million replacement for the central part of the school – the original two-storey addition that the Sisters had added to the mansion in 1950.⁸⁸ This new construction was to be the first to take advantage of the river

83 Calvin Christian School was founded in 1960 by the Christian Reformed Church. Calvin Christian School, “Our History,” <http://calvinchristian.mb.ca/more-about-us/our-history/>. This school was invited to the meeting as it served as a feeder school for MBCI. Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 16, 1998.

84 Minutes of meeting of administration and boards of Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary School (WMES), Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI), and Calvin Christian School at MBCI, October 28, 1998.

85 Ibid.

86 Principal Bob Hummelt stated that he was “happy the proposal was turned down then, as it would not be affordable to move. Better to live within our means and use our existing assets.” Bob Hummelt interview.

87 Possible sites included the former Manitoba Public Insurance building at 1075 Portage Avenue, the former Silver Heights Collegiate, and the former Sir John Franklin School.

88 “Westgate’s Redevelopment Plans,” *Westgate Retrospective* (2012): 10–11; Bob Hummelt, “The New 86 West Gate,” *Westgate Retrospective* (2013): 8–9.

location of the school, with a riverside deck located off a new cafeteria.⁸⁹

Debt

Paying for these buildings and renovations was not easy; former principal Frank Neufeld stated that the school struggled financially throughout its history. He was “amazed at how Board members dipped into their own pockets” to keep the school open.⁹⁰ Many board members signed loans to the school, uncertain whether the school would be able to repay them. Door-to-door fundraising and canvassing of Mennonite church members were a regular occurrence.⁹¹ In the absence of church conference financial support, and with the support of smaller Winnipeg businesses owned by Mennonites,⁹² the school had to rely on the fundraising efforts of the ladies’ auxiliary.

Former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel echoed Neufeld’s comments on the financial precariousness of the school throughout much of its history. He noted that the creation and resolution of the debt crisis arising from construction of the school’s first gym in 1978 was “really astounding.”⁹³ At

89 Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, “Capital Campaign,” 2013, <http://www.westgatemennonite.ca/giving/capital-campaign/>. In July 2012, the APA filed a motion against the City of Winnipeg regarding the decision made by the board of Adjustment and Appeal Committee to allow Westgate to redevelop the site. The APA appealed unsuccessfully to the Manitoba Court of Queen’s Bench in February 2013 and lost its case before the Manitoba Court of Appeal in December 2013. Chair’s report, annual general meeting, November 25, 2013; Westgate redevelopment committee report, annual general meeting, November 25, 2013; The Armstrong’s Point Association Inc. v. The City of Winnipeg et al., 2013 MBCA 110 (CanLII), <http://canlii.ca/t/g2jsx>.

90 Frank Neufeld interview.

91 Ibid.

92 The larger Mennonite-owned businesses in Winnipeg, such as Palliser Furniture, were owned by Mennonite Brethren who tended to be supporters of MBCI.

93 Ozzie Rempel interview.

the time, the school owed \$1 million (in 1979 dollars) with interest rates at 20 percent. The school made a “herculean effort to retire the debt.”⁹⁴ At the spring concert in the year of the debt retirement, First Mennonite Church minister (and Westgate board member) Roy Vogt addressed those assembled, saying “we cannot afford to be complacent,” and that the school needed to look ahead to the next construction project. Rempel found such confidence “astounding.” After having had serious concerns about the ability to repay the gymnasium debt – accompanied at times by challenges meeting payroll obligations – the board launched another building campaign within a few years. By 1989, a new three-quarter million dollar debt was undertaken to replace the old mansion – an action Rempel described as “really impressive.”⁹⁵

In the first decades of Westgate’s history, society members were invited to make thousands of dollars worth of interest-free loans to the school.⁹⁶ Churches were encouraged to donate more to the school, as many Bible college and seminary students were former Mennonite high school students, and the school was thus “a real missionary work.”⁹⁷ Young people at Winnipeg’s First Mennonite Church offered a loan, noting: “We understand that it may be some weeks before you can send us a cheque; this is quite satisfactory and understandable since we know also that you do not come by your money easily.”⁹⁸ In 1964, with the move to 86 West Gate, the school took out a ten-year mortgage for \$60,000 at 6 percent interest, and borrowed an additional \$45,000 for renovations.⁹⁹ A year later, society members were

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Minutes of annual general meeting, January 21, 1961; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 2, 1961.

97 “Our new Mennonite High School,” pamphlet, n.d.

98 Letter from the Young People’s Association, January 19, 1963.

99 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 30, 1964.

asked to contribute \$50 per year, in addition to their annual dues of \$5, and the members of every General Conference Mennonite church in and around Winnipeg was asked to contribute \$10 annually.¹⁰⁰ Society members were not pleased with these suggestions, however, and asked that the requested \$50 contribution be reduced to \$12.¹⁰¹

Students were recruited as fundraisers for the school, and enrolment of international students (who paid much higher tuition rates) was increased. Many of these students were from Hong Kong, and they played a not unimportant role in keeping the school solvent in the 1970s. Librarian Wilma Johnson states that these Asian students “kept the place afloat” and estimates that for a time, a quarter of Westgate’s student population was from Hong Kong.¹⁰² Student fund-raising events included an annual workday, which was first held in October 1966 and raised \$1,672.¹⁰³

The whole idea of having a “Work Day” came from our principal, Mr. Kruger, while he and the executive of the Student Council sat at a meeting, trying to find ways of raising money for the school. Mr. Kruger told us how to organize the new venture. It sounded challenging to us, so we got down to serious work.¹⁰⁴

The students sent letters to the supporting churches asking for tasks that they could do for them. The church then issued jobs to the students that included “burning stubble in fields,

100 Letter to educational society members from the board of directors, April 6, 1965; minutes of board of directors meeting, September 6, 1965; letter to churches, September 22, 1965.

101 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 4, 1965.

102 Wilma Johnson interview.

103 30th anniversary publication, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

104 Eileen Neufeld, “Work Day,” Westgate yearbook, 1966–67.

digging gardens, washing cars, and babysitting.” Relatives, neighbours, church members, and friends were asked to pledge money in support of this day of volunteer labour. The bulk of the money raised was given to the board (\$1,000), with the remainder to science labs (\$400), the school choir (\$200), and the student council (\$72).¹⁰⁵

International student tuition and activities such as the annual workday were not seen as long-term solutions to the debt crisis; increased provincial government funding was the answer.¹⁰⁶ The Manitoba Association for Equality in Education (MAEE) was formed, which included representatives from Jewish, Reformed, Catholic, Anglican, and Hutterite schools, as well as from Steinbach Christian High School, Balmoral Hall, and Westgate. The MAEE planned to present a brief to government noting that British Columbia and Manitoba were the only provinces that did not fund private schools.¹⁰⁷ The association met with the Progressive Conservative caucus and hoped to have a Private Member’s Bill introduced to push the government for funding. Westgate board members encouraged educational society members to lobby their provincial government representatives for support.¹⁰⁸

While government assistance was pursued, the financial situation at Westgate worsened during the 1970s. No more credit was available from the bank, and the board debated balancing the budget by eliminating the pension plan, releasing the school secretary, limiting school supply purchases, and deferring mortgage payments.¹⁰⁹ Finance chair Harold Neufeld spoke of the “urgent need” to find new

105 Ibid.

106 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 31, 1967.

107 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 29, 1968.

108 Minutes of board of directors meetings, April 16, 1970, and January 21, 1971.

109 Minutes of board of directors meetings, September 14, 1971, September 22, 1971, and October 5, 1971.

loan guarantors to replace those who had been serving as such for over a decade: “These people, who had been good enough to help the school at that time should not still be held responsible.”¹¹⁰ An equally significant concern, related to the financial crisis, was that “dissatisfaction with the Board has been expressed by members by withholding funds and by parents by withholding students.”¹¹¹ In response, the decision was made to restructure the board.¹¹² After some debate, it was decided to continue the school’s operation until at least June 1972.¹¹³

Board member Rudy Regehr described the subsequent “rebirth” of the school in the pages of *Der Bote*.¹¹⁴ With a large mortgage and a small financial support base, the school had invited wider church support in 1966, and with church participation drafted “Aims” for the school.¹¹⁵ Despite a record enrolment of 160 students in 1969–70, the debt by the early 1970s was so great that the teaching staff had to be reduced and art, drama, and music classes were curtailed. Criticism of the teachers and administration increased, and student enrolment dropped to eighty-four.¹¹⁶ A retreat at

110 Minutes of special meeting, October 5, 1971. It was suggested that *all* society members should be guarantors, and a list of those willing to serve as such was collected. Letter from board executive to Mennonite Educational Society members, February 1973.

111 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 21, 1971.

112 Minutes of board of directors meetings, November 18, 1971, and December 2, 1971. Society members would pay an initial fee of \$50 and \$10 annually thereafter. The annual society meeting would see the election of a society president who would serve as board chair. In addition, twelve members of the society were to be elected to the board at this meeting, as well as one member from each sponsoring church not represented on the board. Board members were to represent the society, not their individual church congregations. The ladies’ auxiliary, alumni association, and student council each could appoint a board representative who would have voting rights. Committee on congregational contacts final report, April 23, 1972; minutes of board of directors meeting, April 27, 1972.

113 “Committee on Congregational Contacts Progress Report Nr. 1,” January 10, 1972.

114 Rudy A. Regehr, “Ringem um die Zukunft,” *Der Bote* 49, no. 9 (February 22, 1972): 1.

115 For details of the 1966 “Aims,” see Chapter 3.

116 *Ibid.*

Camp Arnes resulted in the new set of "Aims."¹¹⁷ The result was important not just for Westgate but for urban Mennonites as a whole, Regehr claimed:

*For many of us, the survival of the urban Mennonite church is very closely connected with the fate of our church schools. These schools exist not simply to perpetuate a dogma or system of doctrine, but to create a framework in which young people can come to identify as Mennonite people, a people with a history, a faith, and a future.*¹¹⁸

The ultimate outcome of Westgate's financial crisis, Regehr concluded, "possibly tells us something about the destination of the Mennonite church in the city. The Winnipeg churches struggle not just over the future of an obscure school, but over the future of the Mennonite church."¹¹⁹ And the school's supporters agreed: "It has been affirmed that we want for our modern children a modern school where we can share in a contemporary way what the history of our people as a people of God has taught us."¹²⁰

Financial problems persisted, in part due to the absence of a treasurer. As a consequence, contributions deducted for income tax, Canada Pension Plan, and Unemployment Insurance were not forwarded to Ottawa, and the school found itself owing \$15,000.¹²¹ The debate at the annual meeting in 1973 once again focused on the survival of the school.

117 This retreat and its outcomes are discussed in Chapter 3.

118 Regehr, "Ringens um die Zukunft," *Der Bote* 49, no. 9 (February 22, 1972): 1.

119 Ibid. These views were echoed by a Mrs. Henning, who was the finance chair in 1972: "In my opinion, the survival of our Mennonites congregations, our Mennonite heritage and faith depends on the continued operation of schools like Westgate." Finance chair report, April 23, 1972.

120 Committee on congregational contacts report, titled "A Testimony," by Rev. Henry H. Epp, semi-annual meeting, May 7, 1972.

121 Minutes of board of directors meetings, December 18, 1972, and May 15, 1973; finance committee report, annual general meeting, May 29, 1973.

*There is dissatisfaction re some of the instruction. We have no treasurer. We can not elect a president. There is no fund-raising report. We have an increasing number of passive parents who use the school but do not contribute. We have an abnormally high staff turnover. Is it wise to continue?*¹²²

The decision was made to continue, as without schools like Westgate “we impoverish our Mennonite society.”¹²³ John Dyck was convinced to serve as board chair, and teacher John Enns was appointed school principal.¹²⁴ Money was found to pay the outstanding bill to Ottawa, but the situation was so dire that board minutes noted when the school was able to pay the utilities.¹²⁵ The construction of the gymnasium in 1977–78 only exacerbated the financial problems. With a \$2 million debt on the new construction, a \$2 million debt on operations, and interest rates of 12.5 percent, the school was spending tens of thousands annually on interest alone.¹²⁶ Former board member John Lohrenz recalled that his \$500 donation only covered a day’s interest on such a debt.¹²⁷

Westgate worked together with the Manitoba Federation for Independent Schools (MFIS, formerly the MAEE) to persuade the provincial Department of Education to sign a shared services agreement. Such agreements were created under Premier Duff Roblin in 1965 to allow Manitoba private school students to make use of public school facilities for programs such as home economics and vocational educa-

122 Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, July 5, 1973.

123 Ibid.

124 Minutes of annual general meeting, May 29, 1973.

125 Minutes of board of directors executive meetings, July 5, 1973, and July 26, 1973.

126 Pamphlet: “THE CHURCH teaching the Christian Way of Life at WESTGATE” 1978–1979 school year, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; annual general meeting reports, May 28, 1979.

127 John Lohrenz interview.

tion, as well as resources such as clinicians, transportation, and textbooks. These agreements stemmed from the MacFarlane Royal Commission on Education, which reported in 1959 that private schools, “by providing their own facilities, had reduced the total cost of public schools while at the same time being forced to pay for two systems” and suggested that the provincial government fund private schools at 80 percent of the per capita cost of public schools.¹²⁸ Premier Roblin believed the Shared Services Agreement was “the catalyst by which we put the Manitoba School Question of 1890 finally behind us.”¹²⁹

Westgate principal John Enns and representatives from MFIS met with the Minister of Education in 1976 to address the issue of aid to private schools.¹³⁰ The province’s first shared services agreement had been signed with Norwood School Division in 1967; when Balmoral Hall and Westgate asked Winnipeg School Division No. 1 for such an agreement in February 1973, they were turned down.¹³¹ While the MacFarlane Commission recommended a per capita grant of 80 percent, the MFIS goal was 40 to 50 percent, a goal supported by the Westgate board.¹³² After a series of contacts between Westgate, MFIS, Winnipeg School Division No. 1, and the Minister of Education, Westgate received their first shared services cheque in 1979.¹³³

128 Cousins, “The Education Policy of the Dufferin Roblin Administration,” 56; minutes of executive meeting, November 26, 1977; Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools, “Our History,” <http://www.mfis.ca/about-us/our-history/>.

129 Cousins, “The Education Policy of the Dufferin Roblin Administration,” 58, citing Roblin’s unpublished memoirs, 8.

130 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 16, 1976.

131 “No Grant for Two Schools,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 29, 1973, 80.

132 Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, November 26, 1977; Government of Manitoba, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education*, R.O. MacFarlane, chair (Winnipeg, 1959), Section 11: Private Schools, Recommendation 10.

133 Minutes of board of directors meetings, August 23, 1977, November 28, 1977, January 16, 1978, and March 19, 1979; minutes of semi-annual meeting, November 28, 1977.

When the Progressive Conservatives, under Sterling Lyon, replaced the New Democratic Party and Premier Ed Schreyer in 1977, they began to abandon shared services agreements in favour of limited direct aid to private schools.¹³⁴ The first such aid was offered in 1981. Private schools in British Columbia at the time were 30 percent publicly funded; in Alberta, such funding was 75 percent; in Saskatchewan, 100 percent.¹³⁵ MFIS pushed for an increase in private school funding, demanding the 80 percent that had been suggested in the MacFarlane report. The federation's request to its members for funds for legal research to support this demand raised concerns for the Westgate board: "If we agree with the motion does this mean that we approve court action?... What would our supporting churches say?"¹³⁶ The pacifist beliefs of Mennonites discouraged the use of courts to settle disagreements.¹³⁷ Ultimately, Westgate agreed to commit \$1,000, provided the money was used for historical research and not legal action.¹³⁸ The debate continued as to whether the school could accept government funding if it was known that Manitoba Lotteries provided the money (given Mennonites' objection to gambling): "Funding does get complicated when a school like Westgate is under financial duress."¹³⁹ Parents and church members were encouraged

134 Cousins, "The Education Policy of the Dufferin Roblin Administration," 87.

135 Excerpt from Government of Manitoba, Education Finance Review report, "Enhancing Equity in Manitoba Schools," by Glenn Nicholls, assistant deputy minister, Manitoba Department of Education, October 1983.

136 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 18, 1984.

137 This position was based on Mennonites' interpretation of Matthew 18:15–17 (NIV). "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

138 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 18, 1984.

139 Semi-annual meeting reports, November 26, 1984.

to write to the premier to ask for government funding to private schools, using a form letter designed by MFIS that opened with a reference to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁴⁰

An 80 percent funding formula for Manitoba private schools was negotiated successfully in June 1990, but amended to 50 percent in 1996 when funding to public schools was frozen. In practice, however, this amendment caused no real change in funding levels, as the move to 80 percent funding had been incremental. The Progressive Conservatives, under Gary Filmon, promised in 1986 to increase private school funding to 50 percent and then gradually increase that percentage if elected.¹⁴¹ The New Democratic Party also promised 50 percent funding for private schools, and the Liberals promised 80 percent if elected.¹⁴² The election of Gary Filmon as premier saw the first funding agreement between private schools and the provincial government. The *Winnipeg Free Press* noted that such an arrangement was inevitable: there were 10,000 students in independent schools, and 200,000 in the public system.¹⁴³ This success, however, led to another crisis of conscience for the Westgate board.

How much government money are we willing to accept? Will additional government funding lead to complacency in our churches with respect to financial support, maintaining the uniqueness of the school etc.? We should be proactive in these

140 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 21, 1985; letter from Erwin Strempler, principal, to parents and Winnipeg General Conference Mennonite church members "and other churches who associate with our school," n.d.; minutes of board of directors meetings, January 21, 1985, and February 18, 1985; form letter to Premier Howard Pawley.

141 Letter from Gary Filmon, leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba, to "friends," March 11, 1986.

142 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 22, 1988; principal's report, March 21, 1988.

143 "More for Private Schools," editorial, *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 31, 1989.

*matters, identify our goals, objectives, methods, philosophical and theological foundations etc., so that these things are not compromised and we do not become apathetic.*¹⁴⁴

The board decided to accept government funding as long as doing so did not compromise its own objectives.¹⁴⁵ With the financial difficulties facing the province in the 1990s, the funding agreement was amended to “50 percent of the operating cost of educating students in the public school system plus 100 percent of the cost of materials (textbooks, etc).”¹⁴⁶

The Ladies' Auxiliary

The Westgate ladies' auxiliary, originally known as *das Frauenkomitee des mennonitischen Bildungsverein* and later as the women's committee, was formed in 1958 and was instrumental to the financial survival of the school over the decades.¹⁴⁷ The school treasurer declared in the 1960s, “The Women's Committee is as important to the school Society as a house wife is to a household.”¹⁴⁸ The group ran a thrift store whose proceeds went to Westgate, volunteering their time to staff it.¹⁴⁹ For years, the ladies' auxiliary also orga-

144 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 20, 1989.

145 Ibid.

146 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 29, 1999; Government of Manitoba, Education and Training, “Funded Independent Schools: Funding,” <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/schools/ind/funded/funding.html>.

147 The *Frauenkomitee* was renamed the Ladies' Auxiliary in 1965. In 1987, the organization was renamed the Parents' Committee. Victor Peters, “Westgate plant fuer Zeit und Zukunft,” *Der Bote* 43, no. 7 (February 8, 1966): 6; Irene Peters, “Westgate Women's Auxiliary,” Westgate yearbook, 1983; minutes of board of directors meeting, September 8, 1987. A Westgate men's committee was formed in 1985, but it appears to have been short-lived as there is no mention anywhere of its activities. Minutes of finance committee meeting, October 7, 1985.

148 The women accepted this somewhat paternalist remark “with thanks.” Women's committee report, 1961 or 1962.

149 Frank Neufeld interview.

nized an art and music festival at Polo Park, one of Winnipeg's largest shopping malls, which attracted hundreds of spectators and raised significant funds. "Those ladies really saved the school," former teacher Anna Penner emphasized.¹⁵⁰



FIGURE 4.4. Mennonite Festival of Arts and Music, Polo Park shopping mall, 1974 (centennial of the Mennonites' arrival in Manitoba)

The ladies' auxiliary consisted initially of sixty-eight members (primarily mothers of students and wives of board members and teachers); its first president was Irene Peters.¹⁵¹ Peters's father had been involved with the founding of Winnipeg's Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home and Concordia Hospital, so she came from a tradition of service. The ladies' auxiliary did whatever it could to raise money for the school and displayed considerable creativity in the process. Members brewed and served coffee outdoors in September 1964 for those visiting the school after it moved to 86 West Gate: "Guests had red hands and red noses but smiling

150 Anna Penner interview.

151 Penner, "Birth of a Mennonite School."

faces.”¹⁵² They organized and catered the annual fundraising banquet, serving *borscht* (cabbage soup), *perischke* (fruit-filled pastry), salad, rolls, veal cutlets and gravy, mashed potatoes, kernel corn, red cabbage, tortes, and a non-alcoholic punch that soon became a Westgate tradition.¹⁵³ They assisted with the production of school plays and published a cookbook.¹⁵⁴ They held bake sales at Polo Park shopping mall, hosted Tupperware parties at Mennonite churches, served supper to shoppers at Eaton’s, and worked at Bay Days.¹⁵⁵ Their efforts raised thousands of dollars each year.¹⁵⁶ In 1961, they held two banquets, a tea, and a conversation evening, and raffled a Volkswagen.¹⁵⁷ Later raffles included prizes such as luggage, a piano, and a fruit bowl.¹⁵⁸ Auxiliary president Irene Peters summarized the organization’s extensive involvements:

152 Women’s committee report, annual general meeting, January 11, 1964.

153 The first such banquet was held in 1958–59 at the suggestion of Rev. J.H. Enns. Irene Peters, “Westgate Women’s Auxiliary,” Westgate yearbook, 1983; program for fundraising banquet, April 4, 1984, courtesy of Helene Riesen; “Caring about Their Children’s School,” *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 18.

154 Women’s committee report, annual general meeting, January 11, 1964; Westgate Parents Association, *1988–1989 Westgate Cookbook* (Friesen Printers, 1989). A section of the cookbook dedicated to “Westgate Recipes” included one for “Westgate punch,” a non-alcoholic mix of pineapple, grapefruit, and orange juices with 7-Up and ginger ale, traditionally served at the school’s fundraising banquets.

155 “Bericht vom Frauenkomitee,” annual general meeting, 1967; women’s committee of the Mennonite Educational Society, financial statement, 1970; letter from the women’s committee to mothers of Westgate students, March 9, 1970; letter from Lydia Redekop, women’s committee president, to committee members, April 1, 1971. Bay Days were major shopping events hosted by the Hudson’s Bay Company, where the company paid a nominal donation to groups providing volunteer labour. Letter from B. Cromb, personal assistant, The Bay, Portage Avenue at Memorial, Winnipeg, MB, to Mrs. Kampen, ladies’ auxiliary of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, October 2, 1968.

156 Women’s committee report, 1961 or 1962; minutes of board of directors meeting, January 3, 1962.

157 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 21, 1961.

158 Minutes of board of directors meetings, February 7, 1961, April 4, 1961, and March 6, 1963; Penner, “Birth of a Mennonite School.”

At our garage and rummage sales, and at our thrift shop, we have sold and continue to sell a variety of used articles such as furniture, clothing, jewelry, curios, appliances, etc., you name it, we sell it. We have sold raffle tickets where the prize has been a car, a trip to Europe, an appliance, a curio or some work of art. We have organized citrus fruit sales. We have sold Westgate spoons and pins. We have also sold pledges, services, handicrafts, literary works and other works of art. We have sold tickets to teas, coffee parties, garden parties, smorgasbords, shoppers' suppers, banquets and Folklorama.¹⁵⁹ We have had bake sales and social and cultural events. We have organized travelogues, fashion shows, mini festivals, concerts featuring choirs, orchestras and soloists, and drama evenings which featured English, German or Low German plays as well as readings from well-known German and Mennonite authors.¹⁶⁰

The women of the ladies' auxiliary were not content merely to serve as silent supporters of the school, however. In 1962, Irmgard Friesen asked that those assembled for the school's annual meeting determine whether members of the ladies' auxiliary had a right to serve as voting members of the board of directors; that right was accordingly recognized.¹⁶¹ This was a significant achievement, as the participation of women in decision making was not universally accepted in Mennonite churches at that time. At least one of Westgate's supporting churches at the time, Home Street Mennonite,

159 Folklorama is Winnipeg's annual festival of global cultures, centred around ethnic "pavilions" that showcase each group's food, history, and culture. It began in 1970, and for a few years a Mennonite pavilion existed – though not without some controversy within the Winnipeg Mennonite community. Gerald Gerbrandt, "Who Is a Mennonite?" *The Messenger* (February 22, 2006): 5; "Another Pavilion?" *Mennonite Historian* 6, no. 3 (September 1980): 4.

160 Irene Peters, Westgate yearbook, 25th anniversary edition, 1983.

161 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 3, 1962; minutes of annual general meeting, January 14, 1962.

did not allow women to vote in congregational meetings.¹⁶² Another, Sargent Avenue Mennonite, had recognized women's voting rights since its formation in 1949.¹⁶³

For years, the thrift shop was one of the major operations managed by the ladies' auxiliary.¹⁶⁴ The shop was the idea of Erika Janzen, who explained the business's origins:

*A rummage sale in the basement of the First Mennonite Church gave me the "spark." I had long felt that the source of revenue for the school had to come from people outside the Mennonite constituency. We are draining ourselves of finances and there is no end. The money has to come from somewhere else.*¹⁶⁵

Without wealthy patrons, such as Mennonite owners of major businesses, the members of the Mennonite Educational Society were limited in their ability to fund the school, so the thrift store made an important contribution.¹⁶⁶ Thrift store volunteer Margarete Albrecht observed that management of the store followed a fairly fluid organizational structure; since all workers belonged to the ladies' auxiliary, few

162 M. Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 137.

163 *Ibid.*, 139–40.

164 The shop opened at 891½ Corydon Avenue in October 1965, and moved to 631 Corydon in August 1971, to 571 Selkirk Avenue in October 1972, and to 751 Selkirk in 1992. *Westgate Perspective* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1996); minutes of board of directors meetings, October 5, 1972, and June 15, 1992.

165 Quoted in Anne Loewen, "Westgate Thrift Shop," *Westgate yearbook*, 1983.

166 The rent at 891½ Corydon Avenue was only \$85 per month, and sales averaged \$225 per month. Business was so good, the women considered opening a second store. The challenge of finding additional volunteers convinced the ladies' auxiliary instead to move to a larger location at 631 Corydon, where rent was \$150 per month. When the rent was raised, they moved the thrift store to Selkirk Avenue. Sales skyrocketed to \$1,000 per month at the new location in the city's North End, which was open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., six days a week. After renovations in July 1981, rent increased to \$500 per month, but monthly net income was a remarkable \$3,570. Annual general meeting reports, May 29, 1973; Anne Loewen, "Westgate Thrift Shop," *Westgate yearbook*, 1983.

rules were needed.¹⁶⁷ While the focus was on selling used goods to finance the school, the women soon realized that the thrift store also provided “a social help” for clientele who could not afford to purchase new and expensive goods.¹⁶⁸ It also provided an opportunity “to connect the members of different Mennonite churches with each other” through volunteerism.¹⁶⁹

As the years passed, it became increasingly difficult to find volunteers. In 1976, the ladies’ auxiliary noted “we are relying more and more on our grandmothers for help.”¹⁷⁰ A suggestion was made to close the store in 1993, but the motion was defeated.¹⁷¹ Five years later, volunteers for the store were still hard to find:

Our store is approaching a transition era in its history. Many of the parents who first started the store 30 years ago are beginning to weary of the task of keeping it going through service and donations. Some of them have been clerking since the beginning, a regular day each month. Some are approaching their 80's. It is time for the next generation (that's us!) to step up to the plate.¹⁷²

Parents were encouraged to volunteer with a friend: “It can be a fun monthly outing and a terrific service for the school.” Otherwise, parents were invited to pay a fee of \$35, since “unhappy volunteers are not good for sales. Besides, life is too short to volunteer at something that makes you

167 Margarete Albrecht, “Am Feierabend: Unser Shop,” *Der Bote* 57, no. 29 (August 6, 1980): 9.

168 *Ibid.*

169 *Ibid.*

170 Semi-annual meeting reports, November 29, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

171 Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 13, 1993.

172 Letter from Karen Klassen Bender, thrift shop manager, to parents, June 1998.

uncomfortable.”¹⁷³ The thrift store was finally closed in 1999.¹⁷⁴

The arts and music festival, originally held at the Polo Park shopping mall, was another major fundraiser of the ladies’ auxiliary for many years. The first such festival was held on April 9, 1972. Visitors were admitted for \$1 (half price for children).¹⁷⁵ This first festival was a great success, observed Irene Peters.¹⁷⁶ “It presents a colourful picture.... Here, an artist carries a painting singlehanded; there, someone asks for a larger size table and more favourable lighting, while over there the ‘hotdog’ and ‘doughnut’ stands are already equipped.”¹⁷⁷ There was a considerable variety of art on display, “although some pictures are by those who have recently made acquaintance with the art of painting,” and some “are familiar and strongly reminiscent of calendar landscapes. But that does not matter, because obviously [such art] has given the exhibitors much joy.”¹⁷⁸ Works by more prominent Mennonite artists were also displayed, together with decoupage, macramé, woodwork, vases, needlework, pyrography, photograpy, and heirlooms such as paper cutting, *fraktur* (a type of calligraphy), and a spinning wheel: “Everything speaks of talent and creative ability.”¹⁷⁹

A decade later, the festival continued to provoke interest and debate and promote community among urban Mennonites. Artists and authors, some “new and strange,” “opened

173 Ibid.

174 Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, “History,” 2013, <http://www.westgatemennonite.ca/westgate/history/>.

175 Margarete Fast, “Eine Ausstellung seltener Art,” *Der Bote* 49, no. 15 (April 4, 1972): 8.

176 Frau Victor Peters, “Ein Querschnitt durch die mennoitische Ausstellung in Winnipeg,” *Der Bote* 49, no. 19 (May 2, 1972): 9.

177 Ibid.

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.

windows” for those “accepting and willing to learn.”¹⁸⁰ “And the women, as they had for centuries, baked their *zwieback* [double buns], and *perisches* [*perischke*, fruit-filled pastry] and *paskas* [Easter bread] and *platz* [a type of coffee cake with fruit], that the people might eat and drink together, and take time to fellowship and celebrate their peoplehood.”¹⁸¹ The arts festival had to find a new location in the 1980s and moved to Grant Memorial Baptist Church, then to CMBC.¹⁸² The number of exhibits declined,¹⁸³ both in number and in quality.¹⁸⁴ The festival ended in 1989, as it no longer raised sufficient funds given the amount of work expended to produce it.¹⁸⁵

A special fundraiser by the ladies’ auxiliary was occasioned in 1974 by the hundredth anniversary of the Mennonites’ arrival in Manitoba. The group commissioned Margaret Quiring to design a logo for the centennial, to be applied by Winnipeg’s Independent Jewellers on 6,000 coffee spoons, 1,200 lapel pins, and 700 bracelet charms. The design (a Bible and a sheaf of wheat¹⁸⁶) was described as a “meaningful keepsake of God’s guidance and assistance.” The spoons, a popular collector’s item, were available for \$3.50 plus tax from Mrs. Heidi Schroeder, Krahn’s TV, Westgate students,

180 Susan Froese, “Manitoba Mennonite Festival of Art and Music,” Westgate yearbook, 1983. A description of the artists’ works displayed at the 1984 Festival of Arts and Music included an explanation of surrealism. “Der Botebeobachter besucht das mennonitsche Kunst- und Musikfest,” *Der Bote* 61, no. 17 (April 25, 1984): 8.

181 Susan Froese, “Manitoba Mennonite Festival of Art and Music,” Westgate yearbook, 1983.

182 “Neue Behausung und neuer Zeitpunkt für das Mennonite Festival of Art and Music,” *Der Bote* 62, no. 13 (March 27, 1985): 3; “Das Fest der schönen Künste,” *Der Bote* 63, no. 21 (May 20, 1987): 9.

183 “Das Fest der schönen Künste,” *Der Bote* 62, no. 18 (May 1, 1985): 5.

184 “Das Fest der schönen Künste,” *Der Bote* 63, no. 20 (May 14, 1986): 9; “Das Fest der schönen Künste,” *Der Bote* 63, no. 21 (May 20, 1987): 9.

185 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 20, 1989.

186 Anna Penner, “Centennial Souvenirs,” Westgate yearbook, 1983.

the ladies' auxiliary, or the school itself.¹⁸⁷

These myriad activities allowed the Westgate ladies' auxiliary to raise sufficient funds to take responsibility for large amounts of the school's mortgage and retire that debt. The women volunteered to pay the mortgage interest in February 1972 and then assumed responsibility for the mortgage in its entirety in October of that year.¹⁸⁸ They had it paid off by 1974–75.¹⁸⁹ They then took over the board's \$50,000 bank debt by paying part of it and taking on the remainder as a new \$40,000 mortgage at 11 percent interest.¹⁹⁰ Within a year, they had reduced the principal to \$20,000, and had it paid in full in 1977.¹⁹¹ That year, they pledged \$100,000 to the school's building committee, to be paid over five years.¹⁹² The high interest rates of the late 1970s slowed their progress, but by 1983 they owed only \$11,000 on their \$100,000 pledge, so they assumed another \$150,000 worth of the school's debt.¹⁹³ As a consequence of their (and others') efforts, the million-dollar debt of 1980 (three-quarters of which was due to construction) was cut in half by 1983. The board told the supporting churches: "Recognizing that all this took place at the height of the recession, it can only

187 "Ein sinnvolles Andenken," *Der Bote* 51, no. 4 (January 22, 1974): 8.

188 Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, February 1, 1972; minutes of board of directors meeting, October 5, 1972.

189 Penner, "Birth of a Mennonite School"; letter from Martens, Kripiavech, Dennehy, Parfeniuk & Ernst (barristers and solicitors) to David Epp, Mennonite Educational Society, May 20, 1975; women's committee report by Irene Enns, annual general meeting, May 26, 1975; "Notice of Meeting: Mennonite Educational Society of Manitoba Annual Meeting," May 26, 1975, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

190 Women's committee report by Helene Neustaedter, semi-annual meeting, November 24, 1975; promissory note, Crosstown Credit Union, October 1975.

191 Minutes of annual general meeting, May 31, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 19, 1977.

192 Annual general meeting reports, May 30, 1977.

193 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 10, 1983; April 18, 1983. The ladies' auxiliary commitment of \$150,000 was paid off in 1985, a year earlier than anticipated. Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 13, 1985.

be seen as a miracle – a miracle wrought by the grace of God and the dedication of many people in our supporting congregations.”¹⁹⁴ The new goal was to be debt free by 1986: “If that dream could come true we should never experience the nightmare of 1978–80 again.”¹⁹⁵

Individual women who were not part of the ladies’ auxiliary made meaningful contributions to the school’s financial security as well, and often at significant personal cost. Mrs. J. Pauls donated \$3,600 in 1961, together with a letter stating, “I’m sure you can use the money.”¹⁹⁶ There was a “volunteer army working for the Hudson’s Bay Company” who “sent their pay checks directly” to Westgate.¹⁹⁷ These Bay workers donated \$420 in 1970, for example.¹⁹⁸ Former principal John Enns recalled that “many widows sent \$10 per month faithfully.”¹⁹⁹ A woman identified only as “Heidi” sent \$110 to the school in 1965, accompanied by a note:

*I do hope your Building Fund drive is successful. I am afraid your own philosophy “kommt Zeit, kommt Rat” [with time comes wisdom] is the only one applicable to the situation. No doubt there is a brighter day ahead for the financial dilemma of the school, although I must say my faith is not alway[s] very strong. It seems to me that in our affluent society we should at least be able to cope with our financial problems rather than throw these too on the shoulders of the Lord.*²⁰⁰

Johanna Schroeder, a nurse at Concordia Hospital, agreed that fundraising for a cause like Westgate should not be

194 Report to church councils, November 1983.

195 Ibid.

196 Letter from Irmgard Friesen, November 13, 1961.

197 Penner, “Birth of a Mennonite School.”

198 Women’s committee of the Mennonite Educational Society, financial statement, 1970.

199 John Enns interview.

200 Letter from “Heidi” to “Johnny,” May 3, 1965.

so difficult, given the relative prosperity of younger urban Mennonites.²⁰¹

*But most people perhaps don't care as much, otherwise the generation aged 30–40, who should be sending their children to this school, would contribute more actively. People now earn much, much more money than in the years 1930–1945, but there is no sense to it, or very little, to lose the spirit of our ancestors in the children.*²⁰²

These women, and the Westgate ladies' auxiliary in particular, were critical to paying off the debt that was accrued by the school's various building campaigns. The organization's role evolved over time, as more mothers worked outside the home and as the percentage of non-Mennonite students and parents increased.²⁰³ Thrift store volunteers were “down to a handful” by the late 1980s, and non-Mennonite parents found “the idea of baking ‘buns and *platz*’ for the Art and Music Festival, for example, very foreign.”²⁰⁴ The ladies' auxiliary was thus transformed into a parents' association, and its role as fundraiser diminished.²⁰⁵

Conclusion

Westgate has existed in three locations over the past half century. From its cramped origins in the basement of First Mennonite Church, to a renovated former church in North Kildonan, to a former convent in Armstrong's Point, each move has brought with it improved facilities along with debt

201 Letter from Miss Johanna Schroeder, May 1, 1965.

202 Ibid.

203 Chair's report, annual general meeting, April 27, 1987.

204 Women's committee report, annual general meeting, April 27, 1987.

205 Ibid.

and other struggles. The size limitations of the first two facilities were replaced by the challenges of city regulations and homeowners' associations at the third location. The continued existence of the school was often in doubt, but its supporters were willing to finance it – often at great personal cost. Crushing debt in a time of high interest rates was wiped out by an army of volunteers, most of them women, who did almost anything to raise funds for the school. The importance of the women of the ladies' auxiliary in particular “can hardly be overstated” in Westgate's history, declared former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel. “On many levels, the school, quite likely, could not have survived without them.”²⁰⁶

206 Ozzie Rempel, introduction of guest speakers, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate annual bursary fundraising banquet, March 9, 2009.

┌ “*Life also has another side*”:

5. The Student Experience at Westgate

For students, it is often not the academic classes that are the most significant or most memorable experiences at school. Rather, the extracurricular activities of music, sports, and student council influence their world views long after they have forgotten how to conjugate French verbs or titrate chemical reagents. And the social interaction provided by dorm life, study tours, holiday celebrations, and graduation activities are what shape their memories of and attitudes toward their alma mater. At Westgate, such activities often were organized by teachers, but also sometimes by the students themselves. Support from board members, the churches, and parents for these activities was not always strong or consistent. But for many Westgaters, these were the aspects of student life that truly mattered.

Music and the Arts

The Russian Mennonite tradition, from which Westgate’s founders originated, valued music highly.¹ Drama, however,

1 See Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 273–80.

was more suspect. “Drama, theatrical performances, and motion pictures were frequently and emphatically denounced in Canadian Mennonite communities. They were, in the minds of many, the epitome of worldliness.”² At Westgate, drama was embraced: the founders had been members of First Mennonite Church, the “sin church,” which was known for its acceptance of the arts.

Both music and drama were taught at Westgate in the first year the school opened. Former teacher Anna Penner recalled that she obtained a music course outline from the province’s Department of Education: “To familiarize the class with notes, we used the hymn book and it worked very well.”³ Sports were largely a male domain in those early years, so she began a girls’ choir, as the female students had “little else to do at recess.”⁴ Penner also wrote a Low German play, which her students performed in the basement of First Mennonite Church. In the 1960–61 school year, teacher Irene Penner directed the English play *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*, as well as a German play by Elisabeth Peters. Lacking an auditorium, the school rented facilities at Winnipeg’s Technical Vocational School. Low German plays were popular with Westgate audiences in the early years, though the students themselves did not know the language. They learned it for the plays, however.⁵

The casual, less hierarchical atmosphere of the school in its first decade provided a supportive environment for student and staff interest in the arts. It was his connections with students, declared former principal Frank Neufeld, that was the “wonderful thing” about his experience at Westgate. He lived in the Winnipeg suburb of North Kildonan at the

2 Ibid., 292.

3 Penner, “Birth of a Mennonite School.”

4 Ibid.

5 Elisabeth Peters, “‘Drama’ in My Years at Westgate,” Westgate yearbook, 1983.

time, as did many students – some of whom would carpool with him to the school.⁶ When the school was housed in the First Mennonite Church basement, he ate lunch and shared conversations with the students. Once the move to Edison had been made, he had lunch instead in a small staffroom that seated only four. Students, meanwhile, took their lunch in the former Sunday school rooms and were mostly unsupervised unless they made too much noise. This lunchtime separation of staff and students continued with the move to 86 West Gate, and regular lunchtime supervision of students became the norm, but there were other points of social contact between the two groups. Staff members and spouses planned a social evening every Christmas for students; the night was “festive, and much appreciated,” Neufeld recalled. Victor J. Schroeder, pastor at North Kildonan Mennonite Church, invited staff and students to a lawn party on at least two occasions. Female students came wearing dirndls (traditional German folk costume for women), and male students wore their Sunday best. The group sang German folks songs together at these occasions. Staff and students also bonded over the production of a series of German plays, directed by teacher Karl Fast. All these activities, Neufeld concluded somewhat wistfully, were part of “another life in another era.”⁷

Student involvement in the arts flourished in the 1960s. Teacher Bill Schulz bought tickets for his grade 12 students to see Noël Coward’s play *Private Lives*.⁸ Individual music lessons, such as piano, were offered to students during study periods (spares).⁹ Teacher Karl Fast directed ambitious plays such as Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell*, which required a major time

6 Frank Neufeld interview.

7 Ibid.

8 Myra Friesen, “Grade Twelve Class Report,” Westgate yearbook, 1963–64.

9 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 6, 1965.

commitment outside of the school day. During the last week of rehearsals, students and teachers involved in the play had supper at the school and stayed four hours afterward for practice. Two women teachers, together with girls in the lower grades, sewed the costumes for this production.¹⁰ In 1966, staff planned to hold two drama nights before Easter: the first would be a major production of a German drama by grade 11 students; the second was to be two shorter plays, one in Low German and one in English.¹¹

And yet there was room for improvement, as there was no coordinated or budgeted arts program. The finance committee reported that the “Music Department is really in a state of poverty.... To a majority of members of our national community, ‘Mennonite’ has become synonymous with music.”¹² It was thus both good and necessary that music now was accepted as a credit course for university entrance.¹³ The academic value of the music program was not the only aspect of importance, however. A quality music program could shape a person’s character and religious life. Principal William (Bill) Kruger explained at the time: “We do not want to show what people can do with music. What matters is what the music makes out of a person.”¹⁴ The hiring of teacher Bernie Neufeld in September 1967 was part of a vision to invigorate the arts program at Westgate.

Neufeld came to Westgate with impressive credentials

10 Johanna Schindle, “Wilhelm Tell,” *Der Bote* 43, no. 15 (April 5, 1966): 5.

11 Staff meeting minutes, December 14, 1966. Short plays in English, German, or Low German were popular events at Westgate. On occasion, however, they were not in the best of taste. An article in the 1967–68 Westgate yearbook, for example, describes the production of plays by Arnold Dyck, accompanied by a photo of a female student in blackface. Marlies Fast, “Machte uns Freude...!” Westgate yearbook, 1967–68.

12 Heidi M. Redekop, finance committee report, annual general meeting, January 22, 1967.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Mardy Rempel, “Focus on ... Auditions,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

– both as an academic and as a Mennonite – that he was able to leverage to expand the school’s music program. He had graduated from Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) with a Bachelor of Church Music, and from Bethel College (an American Mennonite college) with a Bachelor of Arts in Music.¹⁵ He worked at Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna for a year before being invited by principal William Kruger to teach at Westgate. When he arrived there in 1967, the school had only the girls’ choir that had been founded by Anna Penner: “There were no music files, and the boys had never sung.”¹⁶ It was therefore “a challenge to get boys convinced that singing was a ‘manly’ thing.” After much cajoling, Neufeld was able to form a soprano-alto-tenor-bass choir. And after five years, he had created a useful choral music library. Neufeld appreciated that “students sensed, with hard work, the reward to singing as a group, and the camaraderie that comes with it. Every year, that grew, and therefore was very rewarding.”¹⁷

Neufeld initiated the school’s first choir tour, in early March of 1968. Westgate alumni were invited to join the tour for half the cost. The tour began with students’ participation in the Manitoba Music Festival before they continued on to Rosthern, Saskatchewan, by bus. At Rosthern, they were billeted in dorm rooms at Rosthern Junior College (RJC): students spent more time socializing than sleeping. There were, however, strict rules on tour: no visitors after 10:30 p.m. and lights out at 11 p.m. While there, Westgate students were able to see Rosthern students perform *The Merry Widow*.¹⁸ Funds for the tour were raised by ticket sales to Westgate students’ production of *Christ in the Concrete*

15 Bernie Neufeld interview.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 Lorie Fast, “Eine Schulreise in neuer Zeit,” *Der Bote* 45, no. 16 (April 16, 1968): 2.

City.¹⁹ Only three years later, the choir tour had expanded considerably. Students on the 1970 Westgate choir tour travelled by bus to Minneapolis, Minnesota; Goshen and Middleberry in Indiana; Bluffton, Ohio; and Leamington, Kitchener-Waterloo, and St. Catharines in Ontario (all centres with significant Mennonite populations). On tour the choir sang a mix of modern and classical numbers “describing the spiritual and physical reaction of people to their neighbour and to their God.”²⁰ Two vinyl recordings of the Westgate choir were produced during Neufeld’s tenure.²¹



FIGURE 5.1. *Westgate Sings*, the first recording of the school choir, 1970

19 Mary Rempel, “Unternehmungen des W.M.C.A.,” *Der Bote* 44, no. 46 (November 21, 1967): 5.

20 “Reiseplan fuer Westgate-Gruppe,” *Der Bote* 47, no. 14 (March 31, 1970): 12.

21 Bernie Neufeld interview.

The choir program was transformative for many students. Former principal Erwin Strempler recalled a student, “not ... enamoured by choir,” who approached him at a music festival at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI) and told him: “This is good stuff! I love this!” He recalled another student who hoped to see mountains while on choir tour and was thrilled when the sky cleared of clouds just as they drove away from Calgary. “For many,” he reflected, “this was a unique experience.”²²

Student artistic performances both conformed to the standards of the day and tested the boundaries of conservative Mennonitism. The operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan were popular productions at Westgate in the 1960s and ’70s, as they were at many public high schools in that era. Productions included *HMS Pinafore* (performed in the auditorium at St. Paul’s Collegiate)²³ and *The Mikado*.²⁴ *Pinafore* was the first operetta ever performed at Westgate: “It was demanding for the soloists, and a challenge to find enough guys, and we had to go to an alum for one soloist,” Bernie Neufeld recalled.²⁵ In 1970, the staff planned to present two major operettas as well as two major dramas – an ambitious undertaking by any measure, but all the more so for a school of fewer than 200 students.²⁶ That year, the students produced both *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and *Brigadoon*.²⁷ But it was the 1970 choir tour production of “ENCOUNTER – a portrayal of Human awareness through the Performing Arts” that simultaneously raised the profile of the school and scandalized some Mennonite supporters of Westgate.²⁸

22 Erwin Strempler interview.

23 Mardy Rempel, “Focus on ... Auditions,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

24 Westgate yearbook, 1970.

25 Bernie Neufeld interview.

26 Staff meeting minutes, June 26, 1970.

27 Westgate yearbook, 1970.

28 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 19, 1970.

The “Encounter” production was well-received on the choir tour, and the students were invited to showcase their talent on the CJAY television program *Sunday Scope*.²⁹ Reporters for the national periodical the *Canadian Mennonite* observed that the broadcast resulted in Westgate “weathering a profusion of bitter criticism” for its students’ appearance on television.³⁰ Some churches and board members had been “appalled by the content of the program.” “Encounter,” Bernie Neufeld recalled, was a collaboration of his Westgate choir with art and drama teacher Gerald Loewen that synchronized creative movement to a piece performed by the choir. Neufeld said that while their performance was “cutting edge,” he and Loewen “did not count on the backlash from the constituency.”³¹ The televised appearance of body-stocking-clad students dancing to hymns and gospel songs was considered scandalous by some Mennonite viewers.³² In retrospect, Neufeld reflected, it would have been better to reconsider the dress of the two students, replacing their black tights with more “flowing apparel.”³³ After the broadcast, three churches cancelled plans to promote the school in protest of the school’s TV appearance.

The *Canadian Mennonite*, a newspaper that was itself often on the liberal if not provocative end of the Mennonite spectrum, supported the school. One of its reporters declared, “The program seems to have been well received by viewers

29 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 16, 1970. A board member raised an unspecified concern about the program prior to its broadcast, and was informed by principal Kruger that “the program was not really a school function but since it would be associated with Westgate it was felt desirable to have some control over the program contents.”

30 G.C.F., “Tough Minds and Tender Hearts,” *Canadian Mennonite* 18, no. 23 (June 12, 1970): 5. This was not the school’s first appearance on *Sunday Scope*; there had been an earlier appearance on May 5, 1968. Letter from principal William Kruger to church pastors, April 30, 1968.

31 Bernie Neufeld interview.

32 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 258.

33 Bernie Neufeld interview.

and particularly the TV station itself. The reaction, however, has been vicious, costing the school thousands of dollars.”³⁴ The newspaper interpreted Westgate’s appearance on *Sunday Scope* as a brave attempt to connect with the contemporary non-Mennonite world.

*Some church fellowships, completely overwhelmed by current trends are beginning to consolidate a stance of solid resistance.... It is difficult for many to understand and appreciate the manner and the mood of our time. There are groups and institutions who, in an attempt to seize the moment, are trying to learn the use of the various new media of expression. And there are always hazards which attend a journey into the unfamiliar.*³⁵

Westgate’s *Sunday Scope* appearance was, according to a Westgate representative quoted by the *Canadian Mennonite*, “an attempt to make the medium of television noticeable – adapting to the medium with the use of multi-images and dissolves (fading techniques).”³⁶ The consequence, the newspaper observed, was that the school “was taken to task not only for the program but also for a catalogue of related incidentals.”³⁷ The *Canadian Mennonite* article concluded with the observation that the school was “somewhat vindicated” in that the appearance prompted the station to seek more Mennonites as guests for five episodes of another TV program, and Westgate’s choir was invited to sing for a Canadian School Trustees Association meeting: “The students circulated freely among the distinguished guests, talking

34 G.C.F., “Tough Minds and Tender Hearts,” *Canadian Mennonite* 18, no. 23 (June 12, 1970): 5.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

about the things on the minds of youth today. They now have a number of invitations to sing in high schools across the Prairies.”³⁸ Such secular affirmation probably did little to assuage the concerns of those who were troubled by the school’s actions, however.

The school’s 1970 fundraising campaign was negatively affected by the *Sunday Scope* broadcast. Supporters at North Kildonan Mennonite Church stated it was “pointless to canvas at this time because of the adverse publicity created by the TV program Sundayscope.”³⁹ A fundraising banquet scheduled by Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church was accompanied by “the fear ... that the adverse publicity created by the TV program would have a dampening effect on the appeal for funds.”⁴⁰ A letter from “concerned members” of Springfield Heights Mennonite Church “was critical of many aspects of the Westgate administration and educational program and alleged that the causes for these complaints were responsible for the lack of greater support for Westgate.”⁴¹ The Westgate board spent considerable time discussing *Sunday Scope* and concluded that “as a public relations program to solicit support for the fund raising campaign, it was badly timed.” The board itself – like the broader Mennonite community – was divided regarding the value of the student performance: “Views regarding the content differed widely from ‘great’ to ‘in bad taste’ and various opinions between these extremes such as ‘nothing wrong with it’ and ‘thought provoking.’”⁴² Staff hastened to explain that declining enrolment in June 1970 was due not to *Sunday Scope* but to tuition increases. Despite the broadcast, anticipated

38 Ibid.

39 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 21, 1970.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

enrolment for the coming school year was 157 students on June 10, 1970. Tuition was doubled on June 15, and within two weeks anticipated enrolment plummeted to thirty-eight. Staff were also adamant that explanations were better than apologies for the broadcast: “re TV program – should not *justify* or *defend*, but *interpret*.... Karl Fast & Bernie Neufeld convinced it will affect school support.”⁴³ The furor died down eventually, though, as the school made plans to appear again on *Sunday Scope* in May 1976.⁴⁴

Assessing these events decades later, historian Ted Regehr described the *Sunday Scope* incident as follows:

*This strong support of the performing arts raised major protests in Mennonite churches. Three of the supporting Winnipeg churches, which had planned a major spring promotion drive for the school, threatened to cancel those plans unless there were changes at Westgate. And changes there were; but it was the churches and supporters who changed.*⁴⁵

Westgate, Regehr concluded, was a school where “pietist and evangelical concerns received less emphasis, and Westgate was more open and tolerant in social issues than other Mennonite high schools.”⁴⁶ Yet others continued to argue argued that Westgate did not sufficiently value tradition. Judge John J. Enns, for example, made a lengthy plea in the late 1990s for greater emphasis at Westgate on traditional German music. Westgate choirs, he commented, sang “in Latin, French, even Swahili ... but the original language of Westgate and its parents was German, and therefore it seems to me to deserve more emphasis than any other language

43 Staff meeting minutes, April 29, 1970. Emphasis in original.

44 Staff meeting minutes, November 5, 1975, and April 13, 1976.

45 Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 258–59.

46 *Ibid.*, 258.

after English.”⁴⁷ While acknowledging “the preference of certain of our Christian brothers to foster rousing gospel tunes, charismatic evangelism and what seems to others to be almost religious fanaticism,”⁴⁸ he requested that students receive greater training in the church choral tradition. “Let our students become familiar with it, and while initially not as appealing perhaps as Gilbert and Sullivan melodies or Louisiana jazz, in time the music of their heritage will also become valued.”⁴⁹ Enns’s concern was initially motivated by the fact that the school band at a recent fundraising banquet had played solely jazz music, but he stated that this was just part of the problem: “I plea[d] that the gems of this, our rich heritage, not be cast aside simply for the whims of a trend or the popular appeal of perhaps immature students.”⁵⁰

In the early 1970s, however, the debate was not only over the content of the school’s arts program but also its expense. The school’s devastating debt in the early 1970s⁵¹ led to discussion of eliminating the school’s arts program in its entirety.⁵² The board determined to cut back the music program and eliminate art, drama, and French, though not without protest from the school’s supporters.⁵³ Students were asked to fundraise to continue art instruction: they paid for art classes for the 1970–71 school year but could not afford to do so the following year.⁵⁴ Instead, they organized a toy repair program. In 1972 student council funded the school operetta and the

47 John J. Enns, “An Opinion Paper, submitted to the Board, the Administration and the Music Teachers at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,” n.d. [ca. 1997].

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 For discussion of the causes and eventual elimination of this debt, see Chapter 4.

52 Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, May 13, 1971.

53 Ibid.; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 27, 1971; minutes of semi-annual meeting, May 31, 1971.

54 Minutes of executive meeting, July 20, 1971; September 4–6, 1973, orientation and inservice; minutes of board of directors meeting, January 11, 1972; semi-annual meeting report, May 7, 1972.

choir tour virtually in their entirety.⁵⁵ Students expressed their frustrations with the cutbacks to their arts program and formed a student committee to address the loss.⁵⁶ The senior high fine arts committee declared that its purpose was “to promote some type of an art program for cultural stimulation and personal enjoyment until our school regains its art and music program in its every day curriculum.”⁵⁷ In 1973, students funded the school’s entire music program.⁵⁸

Perhaps part of the reason the arts program was not easily funded was because of the traditional suspicion of many Mennonites for the arts. The school’s committee on congregational contacts endeavoured to defend the arts program to the school’s constituency by making a comparison with retention of the German language: German was “an enrichment of our lives because it is an open door to the worship services of some of our congregations and a part of our cultural heritage.”⁵⁹ By comparison, the “visual arts and drama are newer to our experience” but could be similarly enriching.⁶⁰

At the same time as these losses to the daily arts curriculum were sustained, an innovative celebration of the arts was initiated. The first art and music festival,⁶¹ which originated “from the concern that Mennonite writers, artists and artisans needed more exposure or recognition,” was organized by the Westgate ladies’ auxiliary at Winnipeg’s Polo Park shop-

55 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 11, 1972; minutes of board of directors executive meeting, February 29, 1972.

56 Harold Henning, “President’s Message,” Westgate yearbook, 1971–72.

57 Chris Enns and Nathan Enns, “Sr. High Fine Arts Committee,” Westgate yearbook, 1971–72. The earliest appearance of this student committee is in 1968. “Fine Arts Committee,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

58 Finance committee report, annual general meeting, May 29, 1973.

59 Committee on congregational contacts final report, April 23, 1972.

60 Ibid.

61 A more complete discussion of Westgate’s arts and music festival is offered in Chapter 4.

ping mall in 1971.⁶² *Mennonite Mirror* reporter Vic Penner observed that this event was

*a great invention. The art and music is an excellent way of bringing Mennonites from the East, West and Winnipeg Reserves together. But the real value of the event lies not in art and music but in people meeting people. It reinforces and propagates our cultural and social values, and hopefully carries over into our religious life as well.*⁶³

A reporter for *Der Bote* agreed that art and religion, often seen as oppositional in Mennonite tradition, need not conflict.

*Traditionally we have always busied ourselves with the practical and useful or with the ecclesiastical. Play and art were "secular" or at least unproductive and useless. Slowly we learned to recognize that life also has another side, that we need to process our overall experience as individuals and as a community in the creative arts, and pass them on to our children in this way. We have more resources and more leisure available than ever before; leisure can and should express itself in the humble arts. Of course, much kitsch will be produced as a result, but time will sift the valuable from the worthless.*⁶⁴

The Westgate arts and music festival was held annually through 1989.⁶⁵

By the 1990s, a formula of sorts had been established for

62 "Caring about Their Children's School," *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 18.

63 Vic Penner, "Mennofest '74: Blood Is Thicker Than Coffee," *Mennonite Mirror* 3, no. 7 (May 1974): 7.

64 "Der Botebeobachter besuch das mennonitsche Festival der schönen Kunste," *Der Bote* 56, no. 23 (June 6, 1979): 9.

65 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 20, 1989.

drama at Westgate: the junior students produced three one-act plays every year,⁶⁶ while the seniors alternated between a musical and a drama. In earlier years, the number of dramatic presentations fluctuated widely. One Low German play and a German play were produced in 1959–60, while five plays (only one in English) were produced the next year. The first musical, *HMS Pinafore*, was presented in 1968–69, with a repeat in 1977–78. *The Mikado* was offered in 1969–70, while the popular *Fiddler on the Roof* was presented in 1974–75 and again in 1982–83.⁶⁷

While choirs were the mainstay of the arts program at Westgate, band and visual arts classes were also offered in due course. Bernie Neufeld began the school's band program, using the non-winterized old barn (the Art Barn) at Westgate as a practice room.⁶⁸ The band program expanded to the senior grades in 1985.⁶⁹ Visual arts instruction was offered haphazardly after the move to West Gate; the basement of the old mansion contained a firing kiln. An art course was envisioned in 1993 by board chair Gerald Gerbrandt: "Too often Mennonites have concentrated all their artistic efforts into music. A course in art would provide some balance here."⁷⁰ Art classes were first offered in 1998 under the instruction of Peter Froese.⁷¹ A strings music program was contemplated that year as well, and introduced in 1999.⁷²

66 The first one-act plays evening was held in 1979–80.

67 "The Performing Arts," *Celebrating a Vision of Faith: Mennonite Educational Institute/Westgate Mennonite Collegiate 25th Anniversary, 1958–1983*, newsletter, 13.

68 One of Elvera Dyck's favourite memories was of "the old Art Barn." 25th anniversary alumni questionnaire.

69 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 13, 1985.

70 Gerald Gerbrandt, "Preparing Westgate for Year 2000," August 27, 1993.

71 Marlene Pauls Laucht, education committee report, annual general meeting, October 26, 1998.

72 Principal's report, annual general meeting, September 21, 1998; annual general meeting reports, October 25, 1999.



FIGURE 5.2. Demolition of the Art Barn

Sports, Outdoor Education, and Travel

Sports activities were limited until the school was relocated to West Gate. In the school's earliest location at First Mennonite Church, the absence of a schoolyard meant that track and field, football, and soccer were played at the West End Memorial Centre two blocks away.⁷³ Table tennis was another popular sport, played in the church basement – one of alumna Helga Klassen Berger's favourite memories was "playing ping pong with plastic saucers" in the basement.⁷⁴ Former teacher Anna Penner recalled:

Sometimes, however, the caretakers took up the space in the basement to run clothes laundering drying lines, criss-crossing the table tennis area. On some other days the Frauenverein's (ladies' auxiliary) meetings took place in the basement and then table tennis was wiped out for the day.⁷⁵

73 Now the Burton Cummings Community Centre.

74 25th anniversary alumni questionnaire.

75 Penner, "Birth of a Mennonite School."

With the move to North Kildonan and a dedicated building for the school (albeit within a renovated church), more sports options became available. Students were able to play badminton, volleyball, and football on the school grounds. Harvey Reimer, a grade 8 student in 1960, was elated that the flag football team finally defeated MCI “on the strength of their front line with 250 lbs. linemen.”⁷⁶ Teacher Bill Schulz introduced curling in 1965, making use of the facilities at Valour Road Curling Rink, and coached the boys in hockey on an ice rink constructed on the school grounds.⁷⁷ For a time, the girls at the school organized a cheerleading team:⁷⁸ “Although our uniforms consisted only of slacks, school sweaters, white blouses and home-made whips [pompons], we organized everything ourselves.”⁷⁹ By the end of the 1960s, students also were playing broomball, tetherball, and soccer, and were bowling. A newly formed sports committee wanted to offer baseball and track meets as well.⁸⁰ Rental of the gymnasium at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer allowed the introduction of volleyball and basketball.⁸¹ Sports were considered useful to “release classroom tensions and mental strain.”⁸² They taught students “good

76 Harvey Reimer, “Grade Eight Class Report,” Westgate yearbook, 1960.

77 Bill Schulz interview; principal’s reports, annual general meetings, January 17, 1965, and January 21, 1968.

78 Bob Barkman, “Football Team,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

79 Linda Schroeder, “Cheerleading,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

80 Hans Leonhardt, “Sport Committee,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

81 President’s report, annual general meeting, January 18, 1970. Students paid the \$2,000 gym rental fee in 1973. No basketball or volleyball teams existed for the school year 1971–72, and fastball was described as “the school’s strong sport.” A female volleyball team was first formed in 1972–73: “We have not won too many games but we have had fun and have set the course for some future provincial champs.” Semi-annual meeting reports, May 7, 1972, and November 30, 1972; Westgate yearbook, 1972–73; minutes of board of directors meeting, December 17, 1973.

82 Heidi M. Redekop, finance committee report, annual general meeting, January 22, 1967.

sportsmanship, to win or to lose graciously.”⁸³ Sports even had the potential to improve academic performance: “Should [a student] perhaps be a little weak in the academic but an athletic hero he will feel accepted and strive to create a balance between these so that neither suffers to the detriment of the other.”⁸⁴ Sports, however, were “secondary to Fine Arts”⁸⁵ at Westgate, and a full physical education program began at the school only in 1972–73.⁸⁶

Despite the limitations of the school’s sports program (and despite not having a gymnasium), in the fall of 1978, Westgate became the smallest school to win the varsity boys’ volleyball provincial tournament. The team was coached by teacher Frank Enns with the assistance of Gerry Grunau from the University of Manitoba.⁸⁷ The school yearbook clarified the significance of the win:

*In defeating Miles Mac[donell Collegiate] in the final they de-throned a dynasty. Miles Mac had been champions the past four years and six of the past seven. In becoming the smallest school to ever win the Provincial “A” championship this team displayed an emotional stability seldom seen in high school teams.*⁸⁸

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Staff meeting minutes, quoting William Kruger, June 26, 1970.

86 Orientation and inservice, September 4–6, 1973.

87 Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

88 Westgate yearbook, 1978–79.



FIGURE 5.3. Victory!

A twenty-fifth-anniversary celebration of the win was held at Westgate, with the former members of the 1978 team (the Westgate Knights) playing the 2003 student team (the Westgate Wings). The Wings won, despite the earnest efforts of Frank Enns, Howard Epp, Harry Toews, Doug Pankratz, Greg Guenther, Howard Wiebe, Art Priess, Walter Murovec, Rick Hildebrand, Gerry Grunau, John Fast, Bernie Krause, Hal Loewen, Erich Enns, and Rob Krahn.⁸⁹

It was not long before it was suggested that the school teams' name – "Knights" – was inconsistent with the values of the school. A sports council was formed to create a "philoso-

⁸⁹ "Volleyballers Hold a Quarter-Century Celebration," *Westgate Perspective* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2004).

phy of sports” for the school, including guidelines for play.⁹⁰ The board suggested that the name be dropped, and that the picture of a knight on horseback on the new gymnasium’s wall be painted over: “We recognize that this may be a sensitive area and we must proceed carefully and involve teachers and students in the discussion.”⁹¹ Finding a new team name and crest took time, and the Knights mural was painted over before an alternative team name was chosen.⁹² At the same time, it was decided that the school logo (two hands positioned to look like roots and a plant)⁹³ be redesigned: “Its symbolic significance is meaningful, but the ‘hands’ look rather aggressive.”⁹⁴ Choosing a team name was difficult, as it was feared that alumni would disapprove of losing the name under which they had played. Knights had been chosen as a team name in 1978, and the controversial gym mural was created in 1982 as “a project initiated and supported at that time by only one staff member.”⁹⁵ The mural, board members believed, was “generally more offensive than the

90 Memo to board members from Rudy Regehr, August 23, 1982; minutes of board of directors meeting, October 19, 1982; semi-annual meeting minutes, November 15, 1982.

91 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 17, 1988.

92 Minutes of board of directors executive and personnel committee, December 5, 1988.

93 This logo was designed by Gerry Loewen for the centennial of Mennonites in Manitoba. A full-page advertisement for Westgate in the *Mennonite Mirror* in 1974 used this logo, together with a poem by Menno Wiebe:

with

one hand in the soil
 the other in the sky
 my people
 committed to the maker
 of earth and air
 maintain the balance
 of bread and belief

Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, advertisement, *Mennonite Mirror* 3, no. 7 (May 1974): 8.

94 Minutes of education committee meeting, February 20, 1989.

95 Letter from staff to Marj Sawatzky, board representative on sports committee, January 19, 1989.

‘Knights’ name” and they discussed choosing a team name “more in keeping with our Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage and theology.”⁹⁶ The school’s teams were finally renamed the Wings in 1995.

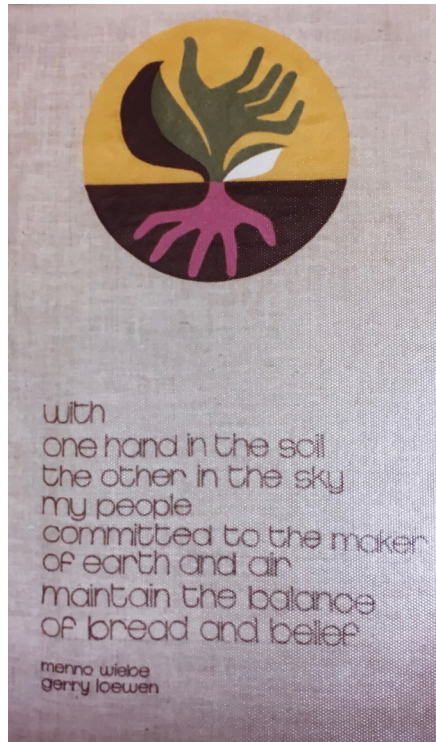


FIGURE 5.4. Westgate logo, 1974

Some physical activities became Westgate traditions. The school’s annual cyclathon began in 1973, a popular social event for students as well as a fundraiser for the school.⁹⁷ It

96 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 20, 1989.

97 The first cyclathon raised \$9,000. Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, April 26, 1973; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 15, 1973.

was John Enns's first year as principal, and he recalled that the circuit began at the corner of Lagimodière Boulevard and Highway 59, near the Revenue Canada building, and continued down gravel roads to Birds Hill Park: "Many rode their one hundred miles with trucks going by."⁹⁸ Participants then returned to Westgate for a barbecue. "I'm thankful nobody got killed!" Enns declared. A student described their experience at the second annual cyclathon:

*It was good to compare the condition of legs and posteriors with fellow students, teachers, board members, and friends. It was good to share ice-cold water from the communal garbage can. It was good to lie back and say that we had given it our best.*⁹⁹

Another annual outdoor activity existed only during the tenure of teacher Karl Fast: grade 11 students made a one-day pilgrimage to Kenora. There they visited the local paper mill, stopped at the "barbecue pits" for food and swimming, and cruised the Lake of the Woods aboard the *Argyle*.¹⁰⁰ In what later became a tradition, junior students in the 1970s celebrated a Mennonite heritage day. At one such event, Mennonite church elder David D. Klassen gave a speech and showed slides. Students participated in nail-driving and log-sawing contests, as well as folk games and dances such as *Grünes Gras* (Green Grass), Miller Boy, B-I-N-G-O, Flying Dutchman, and Snatch the Bean. They viewed the film *Menno's Reins* and had a lunch of *borscht* (cabbage soup), watermelon, and *rollkuchen* (fritters).¹⁰¹ While the pursuits of such activity days changed over the years, the popularity

98 John Enns interview.

99 Westgate yearbook, 1974–75.

100 Renate Kampen, "Kenora Trip," Westgate yearbook, 1967–68.

101 Westgate yearbook, 1975–76.

of ethnic Russian Mennonite foods did not – though *borscht* was supplanted by the much more easily prepared “Menno burger” (a barbecued farmer sausage patty in a hamburger bun).

Westgate’s outdoor education program began in the early 1970s, the initiative of teacher Bob Hummelt, with the support of fellow teachers Ozzie Rempel, Will Barmeier, Rob Warkentin, Karl Wiebe, and others.¹⁰² The first winter camping trip, with students and teachers sleeping in quinzees (snow huts) they built themselves, was in 1973.¹⁰³ In 1979 Rob Warkentin presented five hour-long sessions on outdoor education to students; he and Will Barmeier then led “an outing to Riding Mountain [National Park] with a ‘hard core’ group” to cross-country ski.¹⁰⁴ Bob Hummelt presented a slide show to the board in 1991 on what became known as the school’s “Marsh and Mountain” club. The board was impressed: “No doubt Bob’s sense of humor (and dedication) is what holds this program together and prompted a request he organize a similar program for Westgate parents!!”¹⁰⁵ The Marsh and Mountain club for senior high students built on skills taught in the junior high camping program: the week after final examinations in June was dedicated to short camping trips for junior students to such locales as Falcon Lake and White Lake. The Marsh and Mountain club offered brief fall and winter camping trips, and week-long adventures of cycling, canoeing, or hiking at Mantario Lake, Mount Robson (British Columbia), and Kananaskis Country (Alberta).

Such camping experiences created both fond and humorous memories for students. Alumna Sunnie Friesen

102 Bob Hummelt interview.

103 Westgate yearbook, 1975–76.

104 Staff meeting minutes, January 24, 1979.

105 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 18, 1991.

recalled a Westgate trip to Falcon Lake: a bear jumped over her tent in the night and demolished another pup tent. She and other students “banged pots all night and the teachers slept through it. I couldn’t believe it.”¹⁰⁶ She remembers the students took turns inviting teachers to join them for meals that they cooked themselves. A group of boys brought farmer sausage and *vereneki* (perogies) prepared by their mothers, and the teachers voted that meal the best – “we girls were so upset!” Friesen recalled.¹⁰⁷ Alumna Karina Friesen remembered that teacher Willa Reddig celebrated her twenty-fifth wedding anniversary during a Westgate camping trip. Reddig’s husband visited the campsite on their anniversary and shared a watermelon fruit boat with the junior high students. Karina Friesen reflected happily on travelling as a senior student in fellow student Loriann Sawatzky’s panelled station wagon to Mount Robson, listening to Bob Marley and Tom Petty on the way, then lying in sleeping bags and looking at clouds.¹⁰⁸

Westgate students travelled further afield as study tour opportunities began to be offered in the late 1970s. A trip to Ottawa in 1977–78 had students tour Parliament and meet with Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and opposition leader Joe Clark.¹⁰⁹ The first overseas study tour was organized by teachers Heimo Bachmeyer and Will Barmeier in 1976–77. The trip’s aims were to “help students improve their German, to learn something about the German way of life, and to explore the Mennonite history and the present activity of Mennonite churches in Germany.”¹¹⁰ Costs were kept low by boarding with Mennonite families in Germany, and students

106 Sunnie Friesen interview.

107 Ibid.

108 Karina Fast interview.

109 Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

110 Semi-annual meeting reports, November 29, 1976, MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

paid for the two-week tour through a variety of fundraising activities such as a variety night, raffles, and food sales. The tour began at Bachmeyer's hometown of Neustadt and ended at Witmarsum, the Netherlands (birthplace of Menno Simons, a leader in the Dutch branch of sixteenth-century Anabaptism).¹¹¹

In 1985, Westgate offered its fourth study tour of Germany. Over a three-week period, students met with the city council and mayor of Hanover, and visited sites of importance in Mennonite history, such as Bad Oldesloe, Enkenbach, Zurich, and Geisskirchlein. They also made a stop at the Rheinhessen Castle in Alzey, where Anabaptists "lost their lives in the second largest mass execution of their history." The owners of the castle (and its vineyards and wine cellars) "invited the group to taste some of their better vintages aged in these infamous walls."¹¹²

Alumna Charlotte Enns says her most outstanding Westgate memory comes from such a European study tour. She and her fellow students had learned the Bach "Easter" cantata from memory. Sitting on the banks of the Rhine, waiting for other students, she (together with students Ingrid Loepp, Vic Pankratz, and Karl Krahn) sang the cantata in four-part harmony. "It was amazing to be in the birthplace of the composer, singing his work," she reflected. "What brought us there? How did that connect? It was a powerful thing. You wouldn't get that anywhere but Westgate."¹¹³

As the number of study tours rose, the need to better administer them became apparent. To give French "comparable status" to German, a 1986 student trip to France was

111 Westgate yearbook, 1976–77; minutes of board of directors meeting, November 16, 1976; Helen[e] Riesen, "Reinforcing Mennonite Values in a Private School Setting," *Mennonite Mirror* 10, no. 7 (March 1981): 17.

112 Will Barmeier, "Student Tour Follows Anabaptist Historical Path," *Mennonite Mirror* 15, no. 4 (December 1985): 21–22.

113 Charlotte Enns interview.

organized by teachers without first seeking board approval.¹¹⁴ Board members decided to allow the French tour to continue but warned that doing so should not be considered a precedent, and that future trips had to be cleared with the board prior to their being planned. They suggested creating a three-to-five-year plan of all trips and tours and developing guidelines for fundraising.¹¹⁵ The wine tasting in Germany on the 1985 tour also caused some concern for the board: “The stated rational[e] for the program emphasizes language, culture and Anabaptism. Participants’ reports, however, highlight that part of the culture which is usually questioned by the supporting constituency.”¹¹⁶ Another concern was the teachers’ decision that year not to accompany the students back from Germany:¹¹⁷ “How are financial arrangements viewed when a tour is organized in conjunction with personal holidays and visits to relatives?”¹¹⁸ Finally, tour planning appeared to have become “an exclusive club. Is it difficult for any other staff member to be part of the sponsor group? If one becomes part of it, what are the criteria?”¹¹⁹ The board met with tour-leading teachers in 1986 to discuss financial reporting, tour objectives, “lifestyle questions while on tour” (i.e., smoking and alcohol consumption), and the need to “include major input from parents” of those on tour. “With the recent surge of terrorism, a method of dealing with the question of going on tours or not” was also mooted.¹²⁰

114 “The E. Strempler Report,” March 18, 1985.

115 Minutes of board of directors meetings, March 18, 1985, and April 15, 1985.

116 Letter from Erwin Strempler to Germany tour organizers and board chair, January 21, 1986.

117 The three teachers remained in Germany, one on an exchange program and two on holiday. A teacher’s daughter flew home with the students. The flight had no stopovers, and the teachers accompanied the students to the airport. Letter from Heimo Bachmeyer, Will Barmeier, Ozzie Rempel, to Westgate parents, September 28, 1984.

118 Letter from Erwin Strempler to Germany tour organizers and board chair, January 21, 1986.

119 Ibid.

120 Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, April 25, 1986.

Subsequent study tours included participation in the Mennonite World Conference (together with students and teachers from MBCI and MCI) in India in 1996,¹²¹ and the school's first Middle East trip in 1994. Both trips originated with teacher James Friesen,¹²² who recognized that they went "against the flow of the traditional trips to Europe."¹²³ Former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel observed that Westgate's small size meant that the school could be "more nimble and flexible. We can take worthwhile risks like Marsh and Mountain [club] or German Exchange. There's little red tape. A Middle East tour is hard to run for a public school."¹²⁴ But such exotic destinations resulted in the expression of some concern by board and staff alike over the frequency and expense of school trips. The board, however, decided that it was the school's "duty to offer educational opportunities to its students and the parents' job to regulate students' requests."¹²⁵ Teachers earlier had argued to the board that such trips were a necessary part of students' education, contributing to broader perspectives and personal growth.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, the question persisted: "Should we promote trips that are not affordable to all?"¹²⁷

Dancing, the Dormitory, and Dress Codes

Rules governing students were outlined before the school opened in 1958. Only children willing to follow the school rules would be admitted as students; disregard for the rules would lead to expulsion. Students were expected to com-

121 *Westgate Perspective* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1996).

122 Bob Hummelt interview.

123 James Friesen interview.

124 Ozzie Rempel interview.

125 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 17, 1994.

126 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 16, 1989.

127 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 21, 1996.

plete their homework on time. Any indecent behaviour in word or in action was strictly forbidden. Neither makeup nor smoking was permitted. Lunch was to be eaten either in the church basement or at the child's home, and during the lunch break, students were to remain in the school playground or in the church that housed the school.¹²⁸

The school in the 1960s transitioned from rule-based education to a more empathetic approach to students. Teachers informed the board in 1965 that while students needed to respect their heritage and each other, the operation of the school needed to be in accordance with modern principles. The authoritarian approach that had been typical of Mennonite schools in Russia had no place in contemporary Canada, they argued.¹²⁹ Yet despite these views, the reality was sometimes more challenging. Staff assessed the student-teacher relationship in 1969, expressed concerns that some students believed the teachers did not like them, and determined to speak less negatively of students.¹³⁰ Heidi Redekop, reporting for the finance committee at the school's annual meeting in 1967, warned against protecting students unduly from the outside world:

We cannot shelter and shield them in the loving and comfortable arms of a church school and then push them into University and the world beyond too ill-equipped to cope with their new challenges.... Canada, as a middle-power nation, has great potential to offer in the mediation for world peace and we, the Mennonites, have great potential to offer Canada in its struggle toward this goal. In a Christian college such as Westgate we have all the required criteria to enable our students when their time comes to take their rightful place in

128 Minutes of board of directors meetings, June 5, 1958, and September 29, 1958.

129 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 4, 1965.

130 Staff meeting minutes, November 12, 1969.

*society and perpetuate all that is good in man.*¹³¹

Professor of historical theology Cornelius J. Dyck, invited to address students at the school's opening program in 1970, spoke in favour of both tradition and rebellion. He decried the hippie movement's ideals and depicted Christ as a revolutionary figure worthy of emulation:

*You hear much about "freedom" and "love" and this is often expressed as "free love." What is "free love"? You say to love everyone as you please – but how? Hippie style? Communal living? Freedom! Free from parental and society restraint? What is freedom? Even in nature you observe freedom but only by following certain rigid rules and regulations. Throughout history there has always been change and revolution – tradition today is being thrown overboard and you want freedom and love! and even truth!*¹³²

Freedom, love, and truth would not be found with the hippies, Dyck cautioned, but "in the freedom to love as a revolutionary did 1940 years ago. He upbraided the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the traditionalists of his time."¹³³

Change and revolution came over the years to Mennonite parents' and church members' expectations regarding student behaviour, particularly with regard to dancing. Though members of First Mennonite Church had long participated in dancing, they were the exception in the Manitoba Mennonite community.¹³⁴ Until 1991, Westgate did not organize or sanction school dances. The reputation

131 Finance committee report, annual general meeting, by H[eidi] M. Redekop, January 22, 1967.

132 Dr. Dyck's address at Westgate opening program, 1970–71, unpublished typescript.

133 Ibid.

134 See Chapter 1 for discussion of this church's attitudes toward "worldly" activities.

of the school as a more socially liberal environment than other Mennonite schools in Manitoba, however, led to a church complaint in 1967 that “dance evenings organized by the school should be terminated” – this despite the fact that such events had never been held.¹³⁵ In fact, teachers actively discouraged class parties: “Do not suggest sponsoring class parties – students should participate in church young people’s activities.”¹³⁶ Nor was dancing the only potential problem at house parties: “The perennial problem of student parties is still evident. The principal asked board members to help explain that the school does not condone parties involving liquor. Parents must assume more responsibility in controlling partying.”¹³⁷

Students, however, wanted to dance. Junior students asked to have a dance at their Christmas party in 1980, but teachers worried about the potential public relations fall-out.¹³⁸ Board members decided that the school’s ladies’ auxiliary should discuss whether the constituency would support dancing and meanwhile endorsed a “gym social” for the junior students “with music and circle games (no dancing).”¹³⁹ Dances continued to be prohibited until senior students requested a sock hop in 1991. The board agreed to permit the dance as a one-off event and consulted the school’s supporting churches for their opinions.¹⁴⁰ The following year, in light of little to no protest from school supporters regarding the previous year’s sock hop, students were permitted to organize a dance – provided that it was during the day and attended

135 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 31, 1967.

136 Staff meeting minutes, October 29, 1969.

137 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 25, 1971.

138 Staff meeting minutes, October 22, 1980.

139 Staff meeting minutes, November 10, 1980; AGM 1981, MHA, Vol. 832, MCI Dormitory Records, Folder 5, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate Materials, 1977–1981.

140 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 21, 1991; principal’s report, December 14, 1992; “Gym Riot, Soc Hop [sic], Rollerskating,” Westgate yearbook, 1991–92; principal’s report, annual general meeting, January 18, 1993.

only by Westgate students, with music screened in advance by administration.¹⁴¹ “Sock hops organized by the School under supervised conditions were considered a better alternative experience than dancing at unsupervised house parties.”¹⁴² Students themselves enjoyed the sock hop, though some said it “wasn’t long enough” and others were upset that the cassette tape, with all the approved music on it, broke.¹⁴³

For a brief period in Westgate’s history, a major part of some students’ social life was centred around the girls’ dormitory. The top two floors of the former mansion at West Gate were used as a dormitory, housing seven to ten girls from 1964 to 1968.¹⁴⁴ Students paid \$40 per month and were responsible to provide their own bedding and do their own laundry off site.¹⁴⁵ Dorm rules were created in September 1964. The first house parent, Heinrick Peters, resigned after only a month and a half; a married couple subsequently took over the position.¹⁴⁶ Alumna Charlotte Enns recalled “the various house parents had quite a job keeping [the students] in line.”¹⁴⁷ Dorm resident Elaine Schmidt recalled at the time that “not all the time is spent in studying. Often show-ers are given without the victim’s consent or empty coke bottles are found under the sheets when you crawl into bed.”¹⁴⁸ One of alumnus Claus Janzen’s most memorable experiences at Westgate was “rooftop rendezvous’s [*sic*] with 2

141 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 21, 1992; annual general meeting minutes, October 28, 1991.

142 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 16, 1992.

143 Principal’s report, annual general meeting, January 18, 1993.

144 Marlene Warkentin Buffie was “one of the first of seven girls to experience life in the residence at Westgate.” 25th anniversary alumni questionnaire.

145 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 14, 1964; 1965–1966 Catalogue, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

146 Minutes of board of directors meetings, September 25, 1964, October 13, 1964, October 20, 1964.

147 Charlotte Enns, tribute to history of school, Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

148 Elaine Schmidt, “Dormitory Life,” Westgate yearbook, 1966–67.

favourite dorm residents.”¹⁴⁹ These unauthorized dorm activities were a concern for board members, who met frequently with the house parents to discuss rules and their enforcement – whether about telephone usage, visitors in the dorm room, or running in the halls.¹⁵⁰ Girls were “expected to appear at breakfast with their hair combed, their faces washed and properly attired” by 8 a.m. There were strict hours for study and quiet times. No visitors were permitted after 7 p.m., and males, with the exception of fathers, were not permitted to visit at any time.¹⁵¹

Despite the clarification of rules, problems with dorm student behaviour persisted. The board blamed the house parents: “We unanimously conclude that they are totally lacking in responsibility and understanding of their positions and find them inadequate as caretakers of our physical premises and as houseparents for our residence.”¹⁵² Perhaps more problematic, the dorm was not economically viable: the house parents were paid \$520 per month, while the ten resident girls paid a combined total of \$400 per month.¹⁵³ The board recommended closing the dorm in January 1967, but parents suggested instead that the Rev. Henry and Helen Becker be appointed the new house parents.¹⁵⁴ Their daughter, Ruth Dyck, later became a teacher at the school. She recalled that her mother cooked for the residents, her father did the grocery shopping, and both parents spent their evenings cleaning. The family lived on the second floor of the mansion, which they made comfortable by providing their

149 25th anniversary alumni questionnaire.

150 Minutes of the board of directors meetings, February 24, 1965, March 6, 1965, December 7, 1965, July 7, 1966, and September 20, 1966; staff meeting minutes, February 17, 1969.

151 Westgate girls' residence regulations, November 1, 1966.

152 Report to the board of directors, November 1, 1966.

153 *Ibid.*

154 Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 6, 1966.

own furniture.¹⁵⁵ The Beckers' hiring was viewed by the board as a success, and they seemed to appreciate the needs and interests of the girls under their care (for example, requesting the purchase of a projector to show films).¹⁵⁶ Despite these improvements, the dorm was closed in 1968.

Until 1971, Westgate students were required to wear uniforms (as chosen by the ladies' auxiliary). Girls wore grey jumpers (Butterick sewing pattern number 9147), made from crease-resistant rayon purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company, together with a white sport blouse. Boys were forbidden to wear blue jeans and instead wore dark grey pants, white shirts, and dark blue blazers. Sweaters in school colours were available for purchase from the school, and girls were permitted to wear pants for sports activities.¹⁵⁷ By the mid-1960s, the dress restrictions were relaxed – but only for the boys. After describing the specific material and dress design required for girls, the school catalogue noted that boys were required to be “suitably dressed. Dark gray trousers are recommended.”¹⁵⁸ By 1969, teachers were debating the necessity of these uniforms. While they agreed that the grey jumpers were practical for girls and so should be required, the boys' dark blue pants were merely a recommendation (though they continued to forbid jeans). Staff decided to send a questionnaire to parents, asking them whether they wanted to continue with uniforms.¹⁵⁹ The school contin-

155 Ruth Dyck interview.

156 Minutes of board of directors meetings, December 6, 1966, January 4, 1967, January 22, 1967; president's report, annual general meeting, January 21, 1968.

157 Charlotte Enns, tribute to history of school, Westgate yearbook, 1977–78; minutes of board of directors meeting, January 24, 1960; 1961–62 catalogue; 1962–63 catalogue, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986. The mother of a girl who came to school in 1964 without the proper uniform received a letter from the board asking her to write an apology to the principal. The ladies' auxiliary would provide the proper uniform if the reason for this violation of the rules was due to financial difficulties. Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 25, 1964.

158 1965–66 catalogue, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

159 Staff meeting minutes, February 17, 1969.

ued to resist the intrusion of popular fashion in the 1970s: “Excessive make-up and hair styling’s are discouraged. Girls shall wear the school uniform daily. Boys shall wear dress or semi-dress clothing for classes. Blue jeans and tight-fitting pants are not acceptable.”¹⁶⁰ Enforcement was an ongoing challenge for teachers, though.¹⁶¹ Parents and the constituency, however, expected a conservative appearance from the students. At the spring 1971 general meeting, “concern was expressed regarding the apparent lack of discipline in behaviour and appearance. It was feared that lack of discipline in little things could also apply in important things.”¹⁶²

By the fall of 1971, the battle was over. Parents recommended that the uniforms be retained for choir appearances but not required for daily use. Instead, students could “wear casual clothes; slacks, pantsuits, jumpsuits (no shorts or cut-offs), provided they be clean and tidy.”¹⁶³ Concerns over dress did not vanish with the end of the uniform, of course. Teacher Vic Reimer recalled, “This was also the Beatles’ generation, and staff reactions to this and mini[skirt]s were a lively topic.”¹⁶⁴ The mid-1970s fashion of halter tops and shorts led to parent protests to the principal, and the board decided that teachers should use their own discretion in regulating the mid-1990s fashion of trucker hats.¹⁶⁵ A dress code was created in 2000 to regulate spaghetti straps, sleeveless undershirts worn as outerwear, and too-short shorts, and board members flirted with the idea of reviving school uniforms before rejecting it.¹⁶⁶

160 1970–71 catalogue, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

161 Staff meeting minutes, January 21, 1970.

162 Minutes of semi-annual meeting, May 31, 1971.

163 Minutes of board of directors meeting, October 21, 1971.

164 25th anniversary alumni questionnaire.

165 Minutes of board of directors meetings, May 19, 1977, and October 16, 1995.

166 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 15, 2000. A uniform committee was formed (with student representation) to consider the idea and to consult other North American private schools about their dress codes. Board member Dennis Schel-

Student Council, Interterm, and Graduation

It is not known when the first student council was formed at the school, but by 1968 it was an active body. It was made up of representatives from grades 9 through 12, together with the student chairs of the school's committees for fine arts, Christian fellowship, and sports, in addition to the yearbook editor and a treasurer. Each committee had a teacher advisor, and the council as a whole was advised by the principal. Council received a significant portion of the money students raised at the school's annual workday and cyclathon, which was used to fund its activities and to purchase equipment for the school (including audiovisual equipment, lockers, band instruments, and supplies for science and physical education). A bank account at Crosstown Credit Union was opened for the student council in 1968, which the principal believed would "help train young people to handle their money more responsibly."¹⁶⁷ The students were indeed responsible – they established a student credit union at the school, with the help of Crosstown manager Harry Peters, "to give the students practice in managing their own business affairs so that they will have an idea on how to do it in later years. Thus, our credit union serves two purposes: it helps the students financially and it better equips them for their business years ahead."¹⁶⁸ Student council also provided significant financial assistance to the school during the debt-ridden 1970s. It paid for the school's promotional catalogue in its entirety in 1973 and created a promotional film and

lenberg "asked that the committee be sensitive to the students opinions *first*; that they consider the matter in the context of both a Christian church and a Mennonite school and that they review current research concerning the pros and cons of school uniforms." Minutes of board of directors meetings, August 21, 2000, September 25, 2000. Emphasis in original.

167 Principal's report, annual general meeting, January 21, 1968.

168 Kenny Riediger, "Credit Union," Westgate yearbook, 1967–68.

slide set for use in area churches.¹⁶⁹

Students took the initiative to offer their own suggestions for additions and improvements to activities and programs at the school, often through the student council. A home economics class was offered briefly at Westgate: boys took shop class (primarily woodworking); girls took crafts and cooking.¹⁷⁰ Kitchen facilities were installed at the school in 1975 this purpose.¹⁷¹ Such gendered division of education was not well-received by all students – nor by all school supporters. Ladies' auxiliary president Susan Froese, for example,

was a strong advocate for student voice. She was always interested in what young people had to say, and it was important to her that they had the chance to be heard. The students' protest, for example, that boys were given the opportunity to learn photography while the girls were expected to hone their skills in macramé, was one that Mrs. Froese wholeheartedly supported. A self-professed feminist and proud of it, Mrs. Froese is a gregarious person with an adventurous spirit.¹⁷²

Macramé was dropped, and both boys and girls were permitted to study photography.

Students objected as well to a decision to replace soft drink sales at the school with milk only. They sent letters to parents asking their opinion of soft drink sales and sent student representatives to the board to present their concerns. Ultimately, the board “agreed that the responsible approach taken by the students in this decision making process was

169 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 8, 1973; finance committee report, annual general meeting, May 29, 1973; minutes of meeting of board of directors and consultative council, June 11, 1973.

170 1975–76 catalogue, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

171 Henry Sudermann, maintenance report, annual general meeting, May 26, 1975.

172 Ozzie Rempel, introduction of guest speakers, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate annual bursary fundraising banquet, March 9, 2009.

commendable.”¹⁷³ They decided to “resume selling drinks on a trial basis” with a volunteer student responsible for sales.¹⁷⁴ When the ladies’ auxiliary “again voted to petition that milk only be sold at the school,” the board chair asked that they “meet with members from the Senior Student Council to work this out.”¹⁷⁵ Other student efforts met with less success. When student council asked to evaluate teachers in writing, the board declined: “There are other channels through which concerns can be communicated. Only if arrangements are made with individual teachers could this be acceptable.”¹⁷⁶

Activities organized by student council included the junior-senior banquet, for which grade 11 students prepared food and entertainment (in the form of music and “prophecies”) for the graduating grade 12 students. At the 1967–68 banquet,

*Carl Enns and his assistants, posing as beatniks, sat on the dimly-lit and appropriately-scened stage. The petals from a large flower growing near him were plucked off and from these Carl mysteriously saw the futures of our “beloved” Grade Twelves. Since these prophecies had been conjured up by our intelligent class, some of the Grade Twelves saw themselves in the future digging ditches, or the like. To our surprise the Grade Twelves launched a counter-attack and read their wills. Many of us were left with a Grade Twelve Chemistry book, an old eraser, a small lump of old chewing gum, or other such useful items.*¹⁷⁷

The evening was to conclude with a speech by Rev. H. Epp,

173 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1977.

174 Ibid.

175 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 21, 1977.

176 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 19, 1977.

177 Erika Dyck, “Junior-Senior Banquet,” Westgate yearbook, 1967–68.

but “to our astonishment, [he] graciously declined to talk because it was late and he knew we were anxious to leave.”¹⁷⁸ A year later, students decorated the chapel for a “psychedelic send-off” for the graduates: “Strobe lights, streamers, twanging background music, posters and intimate little round tables added to the psychedelic atmosphere.”¹⁷⁹ The reading of wills and fortunes was a popular entertainment at events such as these.

Halloween and Christmas were other popular occasions for student celebrations. The student fine arts committee and Christian life committee planned a Halloween party in the late 1960s that was “appropriately opened by a skit portraying the origin of Halloween.”¹⁸⁰ Apple bobbing, more skits, a game of musical chairs, a costume parade, and a singalong led by a student playing guitar rounded out the festivity. Teachers wore costumes as well, and as in later years, cross-dressing male teachers were particular highlights: “Mr. Pauls and Mr. Suderman were dressed as attractive nurses!”¹⁸¹ Christmas dinner was eaten together by students and staff at hotel banquet rooms and community centres. Gift exchanges “between girl and boyfriend” were discouraged in favour of donations to the Christmas Cheer Board,¹⁸² but in later years, a Kris Kringle (Secret Santa) option was provided in addition to participation in Winnipeg’s Christmas LITE (Local Investment Toward Employment) program.¹⁸³

Many fond student memories are connected to the school’s interterm program (later known as DNTT or Defi-

178 Ibid.

179 Marlene Pauls, “Psychedelic Send Off,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

180 B.J. Loewen, “Halloween,” Westgate yearbook, 1968–69.

181 Ibid.

182 Staff meeting minutes, November 26, 1969.

183 LITE encourages the purchasing of food hamper items from inner-city businesses. Local Investment Toward Employment, “A Better Hamper,” <http://www.abetterhamper.com/>.

nately Not The Tour). Introduced by principal John Enns, the program originally lasted three weeks and included such activities as Mennonite cooking, swimming, Native studies, production of an operetta, snow-shoeing, and skiing.¹⁸⁴ Enns was inspired by university interterms and saw interterm as a break from “the winter doldrums.”¹⁸⁵ Regular academic classes were suspended in favour of highlights such as basketball and volleyball clinics run by university acquaintances, Jack Thiessen’s Low German language classes, and Mennonite cooking classes offered by the school’s ladies’ auxiliary (held at the kitchens of First Mennonite Church and North Kildonan Mennonite Church). In his interview, Enns noted that members of the ladies’ auxiliary were initially intimidated by the idea of teaching the students to cook, and so insisted that he attend. He recalled they all had “a wonderful time. Many former students still make *rouladen* [bacon, onion, and pickles wrapped in beef]. There was no problem after that. The students made *holupschi* [cabbage rolls] and *vereneki* [perogies] and had a great time.”¹⁸⁶ Other offerings included hunter safety training, photography, art, and other activities by “whoever would volunteer time and had skills.”¹⁸⁷

Graduation celebrations underwent significant changes during the history of Westgate, as Safe Grad activities became common.¹⁸⁸ The process was slow, as it was at many schools (and in broader society), as drinking and driving was

184 Rudy Loepp, “President’s ‘Mess’age,” Westgate yearbook, 1973–74.

185 John Enns interview.

186 *Ibid.*

187 *Ibid.*

188 One tradition that did not change for many years was the class photo. When the first class graduated, there was not enough money for a professional photo of the class. Paul Neustaedter used his Leica camera and printed the class photo in his own darkroom. He built a frame for the photo himself and glazed it so it could hang in the school. His graduation class photos from these early years still decorate the walls of the school. Paul Neustaedter interview.

an accepted behaviour for many years.¹⁸⁹ In the 1970s, Westgate graduates held an unsupervised barbecue and bonfire before their graduation ceremony; after the ceremony, they went on a boat cruise.¹⁹⁰ Wilma Johnson recalled her graduation from Westgate: the ceremony (without either cap or gown) was held at Home Street Mennonite Church, preceded by a supper (prepared by grade 11 students with adult supervision) in the church basement. Students went on a boat cruise afterward, without either parents or staff members. The school had wanted to move the graduate ceremony date to Monday, as no boat cruises were offered that day; student protest prevented them from doing so.¹⁹¹

The school regularly cautioned students and their parents against alcoholic consumption following the graduation ceremony,¹⁹² but it was the first Safe Grad meeting in 1983 that reshaped graduation activities at the school.¹⁹³ That year, graduation events included a banquet, the graduation ceremony, a river cruise (with alcohol available for those of age), a house party, and a camping trip. Parental involvement at the all-night house party and camping trip was encouraged. Parents were reminded that it was illegal for them to serve alcohol at house parties involving underage students.¹⁹⁴ Alumna Sunnie Friesen, who was on the grad committee at the time, recalled parents' concern over alcohol. The graduating class had voted to allow alcohol at a private house party

189 Sobriety checkpoints and license suspensions for high blood alcohol concentrations only began in the 1970s in Canada. Canadian Public Health Association, "Fighting the Good Fight: Impaired Driving in Canada," <http://www.cpha.ca/en/programs/history/achievements/07-mvs/impaired.aspx>.

190 Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

191 Wilma Johnson interview.

192 "Post-Graduation activities: The school does not condone the drinking of alcoholic beverages. This position will again be clarified to parents by mail." Minutes of board of directors meeting, August 29, 1983.

193 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 21, 1983.

194 Safe Grad meeting minutes, February 20, 1984.

after the ceremony, however, and so she

*wrestled with [principal] Strempler how we would resolve the issue. I thought, why we – because teachers and parents should be responsible. But I was the student representative, and parents phoned me at home to discuss the issue. And I was responsible to ensure that students were not drunk.*¹⁹⁵

Graduating students went on a boat ride and then attended a party supervised by parents in a private home, where both an alcoholic and non-alcoholic punch was served. Some students opted out of this party and went drinking elsewhere instead.¹⁹⁶ The following year, two students attended a Safe Grad conference to assist in graduation planning at Westgate.¹⁹⁷ In 1985, graduation ceremonies still involved a boat cruise, but the boat's bar was closed.¹⁹⁸

Some parents were concerned that Safe Grad was in effect an endorsement of alcohol consumption. The graduation committee (composed of students and parents) explained the philosophy of Safe Grad, adding, "This has not been an easy decision and we hope our desire to be open and honest does not compromise individual relationships or the relationship between Westgate Mennonite Collegiate and its community."¹⁹⁹ Such explanations were still required in the late 1980s:

Staff and Board representatives on the Graduation Committee, however, continue to emphasize that although some activities [i.e., alcohol consumption] may be less acceptable, it

195 Sunnie Friesen interview.

196 Ibid.

197 "The E. Strempler Report," February 20, 1984.

198 Safe Grad meeting minutes, May 13, 1985.

199 Memo to parents and supporters of Westgate from graduation committee, June 13, 1986.

*is better to recognize that they may be part of the plans and to provide some form of guidance rather than avoid the issue by trying to keep them out.*²⁰⁰

The board was also concerned about the message of Safe Grad and asked that all graduation activities be alcohol free, citing legal, health, and moral issues.²⁰¹ The board sanctioned a dinner and dance at the Sheraton Hotel (replacing the Mennonite Brethren Bible College cafeteria) for the first time in 1989.²⁰² Administrative assistants Eleanor Isaak and Leona Hiebert took over organizing the graduation party that year; their elaborate decorations were memorable for all present.²⁰³ The growing acceptance of responsible alcoholic consumption by urban Mennonites meant that Safe Grad activities were embraced rather than challenged thereafter.

Conclusion

The student experience at Westgate was characterized by a variety of opportunities to participate in sports, explore nature and the arts, and engage in other forms of self-expression outside of the classroom. Teachers initiated some of these opportunities, such as the Marsh and Mountain club and the study tours. Some activities were introduced at the behest of the school board, such as expanded programs in music and art. Others, such as school dances and photography, were the initiative of the students themselves. Not all of these activities were immediately embraced by Westgate supporters. Dancing and Safe Grad activities, for example,

200 Annual general meeting reports, May 30, 1988.

201 Letter from Henry Dyck, board chair, to graduation committee, parents of graduates, graduates, and hosting parents, June 1, 1988.

202 Letter from graduation committee to parents and graduates, October 19, 1989; semi-annual meeting reports, November 27, 1989.

203 Leona Hiebert interview.

took some time to be fully accepted. The music program wavered in popularity at times, as Westgate staff and students pushed the boundaries of what was considered acceptable by some of the more conservative Mennonites in Manitoba. The dormitory was a short-lived experiment in Westgate history that was nonetheless a meaningful social experience for the students involved. The student experience at Westgate was a varied one, but for many, these extracurricular activities were as important as academics, and often more memorable.

— *“No room for dull moments, nor very
much free time”*

6. Working at Westgate

Those employed at Westgate often used the metaphor of family to describe their work experience. The metaphor is an apt one: staff experienced difficulties, disappointments, and frustration – but they also shared a commitment to a common purpose and a sense of joy in their collective task. Curricular choices were shaped by the liberal Mennonite faith that had founded the school. The school’s facilities were limited, but they improved over time along with salaries, benefits, and methods of staff evaluation (though not without struggle). Professionalization was a slow process, as it was at both public and private schools throughout the province. The workload was heavy, but the job was thought to be worth doing.

Working at Westgate

In the early years, teachers at Westgate were hired as much for their religious qualifications as for their academic ones – though there were notable exceptions. Frank Neufeld was a graduate of Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) and

held Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degrees, had seven years' teaching experience in southern Manitoba, and had been a vice-principal in North Kildonan for four years. Karl Fast was a graduate of the teacher institute in Orenburg, Russia, and continued his education in Canada while working at Westgate. Irene Penner was a graduate of MCI with a year's teaching experience in Winkler, and Victor Reimer was a Bethel College (Kansas) graduate with a year's experience teaching in Medicine Hat, Alberta.¹ Alumni volunteered at the school as teaching assistants, in exchange for room and board and \$100 per month.² Mennonite Central Committee volunteers worked at the school in the 1970s, doing office work and teaching Spanish.³ Di Brandt, who later became a celebrated poet (and a controversial one, in Mennonite circles), taught English and religion briefly at Westgate. She had no prior teaching experience, but as a graduate of MCI and Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC), and possessing a Master of Arts degree from the University of Toronto, she was judged to have "the makings of a good teacher. She relates well ordinarily and is concerned not to hurt people. She does not express her faith in the traditional way which is also reflected in her simple lifestyle."⁴ Alumna Wilma Johnson noted that in the 1970s, teachers were not required to have a Bachelor of Education degree, and the teaching suffered. Later employed as Westgate's librarian, Johnson was pleased that "teachers now are more professional."⁵ Alumna Charlotte Enns stated that parents sent their children to Westgate at the time, not because

1 "Our New Mennonite High School," pamphlet, n.d.

2 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 11, 1970.

3 Westgate Building Committee, "Information and Response Program," 1974, courtesy of Ozzie Rempel; John Enns, principal's report, annual general meeting reports, May 26, 1975.

4 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 19, 1977.

5 Wilma Johnson interview.

it was a better education (“because it wasn’t”),⁶ but because the teachers were “outstanding as people” even though not all were certified teachers. Parents believed in the value of Mennonite education and gave that priority over academics, she claimed.⁷

Westgate was not unusual in this respect.⁸ Historians describe the province’s educational system until the 1970s as unmodern,⁹ unchanged since 1916,¹⁰ and stagnant.¹¹ Low wages and a lack of benefits resulted in teacher shortages from the 1940s through the 1960s. The province compensated through wide-scale use of untrained permit teachers, many of whom had not completed grade 12. Teachers who had received training in the province had spent either six weeks at United College (predecessor to the University of Winnipeg) or one year at Normal School.¹² Even the best trained teachers, those who had completed the one year at Normal School, were not necessarily well-educated, however. The MacFarlane Royal Commission on Education reported that in the late 1950s, just over a quarter of these teachers had successfully completed grade 12 and all their teacher training courses, yet all but 0.5 percent received a teaching certificate.¹³ It was not until the 1970s that provincial requirements for teaching certification rose from one year of

6 Charlotte Enns interview.

7 Ibid.

8 MCI faced challenges attracting teachers in the 1960s, for example: “It was difficult to lure experienced teachers away from schools where salaries were higher and good retirement plans were provided. As a result, the MCI was often forced to hire teachers right out of teachers college.” Enns, *Die Schule Muss Sein*, 212.

9 Levin, “The Struggle over Modernization in Manitoba Education,” 73.

10 Schellenberg, *Schools – Our Heritage*, 247.

11 Gregor and Wilson, *The Development of Education in Manitoba*, 134.

12 Ibid., 114, 134; Schellenberg, *Schools – Our Heritage*, 257; Enns, *Die Schule Muss Sein*, 207–8; Gregor, “Teacher Education in Manitoba,” 227–28, 230, 242.

13 Until 1963, one could attend Manitoba Teachers’ College (formerly known as the Normal School) without having completed grade 12. Gregor, “Teacher Education in Manitoba,” 244.

post-secondary education to a minimum requirement of a completed university undergraduate degree.¹⁴ A new four-year Bachelor of Education degree was introduced at the University of Manitoba in the 1970s, replacing the Normal School. Longer and better teacher training resulted in increasing professionalism across the province by the 1980s, including at Westgate.¹⁵

Prior to the school's opening in 1958, Westgate principal Frank Neufeld briefly outlined his plans regarding the curriculum. The school, he suggested, should offer an enhanced academic program. Religion, doctrinal theology (*Glaubenslehre*), Mennonite history, church history, and German should be taught as well. Sufficient teachers should be hired to allow them each to specialize in a subject area (an unaffordable luxury, unfortunately). Daily classes were to begin with a devotional reading and end with prayer.¹⁶ Neufeld later recalled,

*In the early years, teachers faced some special challenges because they were to be experts in all subject areas, good counsellors and resource persons, imaginative and innovative, because of so many deficiencies in space and equipment. The churches had specific expectations of the school staff, as did the board of directors which wanted the school to take a particular direction. These challenges were exciting. There was no room for dull moments nor very much free time.*¹⁷

Former teacher Anna Penner noted that in those early years, the feeling was that you had to be careful that you “did

14 Only 63.8 percent of Manitoba teachers had a university degree in 1975. *Ibid.*, 256.

15 *Ibid.*, 234, 253; Gregor and Wilson, *The Development of Education in Manitoba*, 141–46, 149.

16 Minutes of board of directors meetings, May 5, 1958, and February 17, 1959.

17 Frank Neufeld, “Reflections on Westgate – The Early Years,” Westgate yearbook, 1983.

it right, or the school would not continue the next year.”¹⁸ The school’s limitations were also, in some ways, its strengths, Neufeld observed.

*Students learned early to debate all issues with a great intensity – you see they were certain that the one staff member could not be fully knowledgeable in all areas. And so students and staff searched together. Out of such an environment, out of such sometimes meagre resource situations, grew a reliance on one’s own resourcefulness and on the need to search out learning experiences together. And in a multi-graded situation, students were also frequently free from a teacher’s guiding hand since he/she had to give his/her time to students in other groups.*¹⁹

Former student Charlotte Enns agreed: “The lack of facilities and opportunities were made up with a special love and caring, a *Komeraderie* [camaraderie] if you like, between students and teachers.”²⁰

Nonetheless, the limitations of the school facilities made teaching a challenge in the early years at Westgate. The school library possessed only four or five hundred books in the early 1960s, one-third of them in German.²¹ Science was a particular struggle, requiring much preparation with little equipment. Students in the early 1960s described their science classes:

After observing the reactions which hardly ever prove satisfactory, we converse as to the possible explanation of the

18 Anna Penner interview.

19 Frank Neufeld, “Reflections on Westgate – The Early Years,” Westgate yearbook, 1983.

20 Charlotte Enns, tribute to history of school, Westgate yearbook, 1977–78.

21 Irene Klassen, “The Library,” Westgate yearbooks, 1962–63 and 1963–64.

*failure of the experiment. By this time the bell has run and it is too late to make another attempt. With test tubes falling and water spilling, the apparatus is dissembled and put back in its former position in our "spacious" lab. All experiments, however, were not complete failures. The physicists seemed to make out alright. Several experiments actually worked out quite nicely.*²²

Science lab equipment, a teacher noted at the time, was not satisfactory for modern instruction.²³

The high demands on teacher time made working at Westgate more difficult than in the public school system, some teachers asserted. Hermann Rempel had taught two to three subjects for thirty-three to thirty-six hours in a six-day cycle when employed in a public school. At Westgate, he observed, he taught seven subjects for forty-one to forty-five hours.²⁴ Principal Frank Neufeld similarly found the workload at Westgate to be somewhat excessive; he resigned after his request for administrative assistance was denied.²⁵ Board chairs acknowledged the demanding workload: "I believe we have an excellent teaching staff and should never forget how much extra time and energy a teacher at Westgate has to put in compared to his counterpart in the public schools."²⁶ Another board chair emphasized that "our present teachers are the very life-blood of Westgate.... [They] are always at the mercy of public scrutiny as to teaching methods and

22 Katy Penner and Betty Fast, "Our Laboratory!" Westgate yearbook, 1962–63.

23 Letter to the board of directors from H[ermann] Rempel, ca. 1966–67.

24 Former teacher Bill Schulz recalled that he had to prepare fourteen to eighteen lessons every evening. On his seventh day in the classroom, the school inspector came in to observe his grade 7 mathematics class, a subject that was, unfortunately, not his specialty. Bill Schulz interview.

25 Minutes of board of directors meetings, February 6, 1962, March 6, 1962, April 3, 1962, January 15, 1963, February 12, 1963, January 7, 1964, and December 1, 1964.

26 Dr. Peter Enns, board of directors report, annual general meeting, January 22, 1967.

deportment and at the same time are constantly requested to make financial and personal sacrifices in the interests of Westgate.”²⁷ The workload increased in the late 1970s, as full-time teachers were required to teach seven classes rather than six – a “gesture of good will” initiated by teachers while the school’s construction debt was paid off. This one-time gesture became permanent practice.²⁸ There was, however, recognition that increased workloads had potential negative consequences for students:

*As we expend more energy on quantity (larger classes, increased marking loads, etc.) and therefore, less on quality (assisting individual students, creating new teaching aids and methods, finding resources, organizing special events, etc.) we sense a gradual cooling of the warm, encouraging atmosphere that nurtured so many students in their growth towards Christian Maturity. This cooling trend must be arrested before it is too late.*²⁹

Education in the province of Manitoba had undergone some major transformations in the 1960s as larger schools were built, curricular offerings were expanded, and teacher qualifications were increased.³⁰ Public schools introduced new university entrance and general education courses, as well as specialized classes in home economics, business, and languages. Westgate had some difficult choices to make: “It is understandable that we cannot offer all the courses that the

27 President’s report, annual general meeting, January 21, 1968.

28 Staff meeting minutes, April 22, 1976, and May 2, 1978; “Policy Statement,” November 1980; Minutes of board of directors meeting, December 5, 1977.

29 “Policy Statement,” November 1980.

30 Government of Manitoba, *Report of the Manitoba Royal Commission on Education*, R.O. MacFarlane, chair (Winnipeg, 1959); Kinneer, *In Subordination*, 128–29; Hayday, *Bilingual Today, United Tomorrow*, 21; Osborne, “One Hundred Years of History Teaching in Manitoba Schools, Part 1.”

public schools do, as we are not as strong as they. We must choose.”³¹ Principal Victor Peters suggested that the school admit at the senior high level “only such students who are strong enough later to master successfully a formal academic program in university.”³² Such students would later have the most impact in Mennonite churches, he added.

Indigenous history became a more significant part of the Westgate curriculum in the late 1980s; at times, the approach to the subject was somewhat paternalistic. Board member Gerhard Neufeld argued that it was “important subject matter and should not be left to individual teacher interest or concerns.”³³ The school’s education committee “agreed that Native Studies is an important [subject] and that prejudices and misunderstandings must be rooted out as effectively as possible.”³⁴ Neufeld encouraged teachers to promote positive aspects of Indigenous peoples’ “history, culture and value systems,” as well as “what it means to be a minority” and the historic mistreatment of Indigenous peoples by government and the legal system. “Very many Native People seem to have lost their self confidence and will. They surely could use our help if we would start to affirm what is good and positive in them. How can we do that if we don’t know them? What can we at Westgate do to work more towards these goals?”³⁵ Grade 7 social studies students, in a unit on “Different People of the Earth,” studied Indigenous Canadians; grade 9 social studies students unit learned about racism; grade 10 geography students learned about Inuit life, Indigenous people on reserves and in cities, and provincial Aboriginal organizations; grade 11 history students studied the

31 Principal’s report, annual general meeting, January 17, 1965.

32 Ibid.

33 Education committee meeting minutes, April 18, 1988.

34 Ibid.

35 Gerhard Neufeld, “Rational[e] for increasing emphasis on Native Canadian History & Culture,” n.d. [ca. 1987].

fur trade, missionary influences, and land claims; grade 10 religion classes invited guest speakers such as the Rev. Stan McKay, musician Charlie Hart, and Ojibwe elder Clarence Nepinak.³⁶ The board pushed for more such education, noting “native leaders are becoming more vocal, organized and political” and that Westgate students needed to “explore and foster a Christian response (from an Anabaptist tradition) to a visible minority group in our province/country.”³⁷

Sexuality was taught with an emphasis on the Mennonite Church conference’s teachings, with some important exceptions. The Mennonite Church had passed a “Resolution on Human Sexuality” in 1986 that declared “sexual intercourse is reserved for a man and a woman united in marriage and that violation of this teaching is a sin.”³⁸ The AIDS crisis of the late 1980s prompted Westgate’s board to request that teachers “integrate this concern as naturally as possible” in appropriate classes while teaching “from an unapologetic, traditional Christian position and understanding of human sexuality.” At the same time, the board resolved to “prepare ourselves to ‘handle our first case.’”³⁹ As debates over sexuality intensified at Mennonite churches and institutions in the twenty-first century, the school took a potentially controversial stance. Student Rebekah Enns formed the first Gay-Straight Alliance at the school in 2010. Guidance counsellor Donna Peters-Small observed, “The topic of homosexuality is a controversial one in our community ... Rebekah knew she was opening herself up to possible criticism and judgment.”⁴⁰

36 “Native Studies: Program of Studies Notes,” n.d. [ca. 1988].

37 Minutes of the board of directors meeting, September 19, 1988.

38 Mennonite Church Canada, “Resolution on Human Sexuality,” 1986, <http://home.mennonitechurch.ca/1986-resolutiononhumansexuality>.

39 Minutes of the board of directors meeting, January 16, 1989.

40 Rachel Bergen, “Westgate Student Wins Human Rights Award,” *Canadian Mennonite*, <http://youngvoices.canadianmennonite.org/articles/westgatestudentwinshumanrightsaward>.

Enns subsequently was awarded the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award for her initiative.⁴¹

Staff Evaluation

Teachers in Manitoba became increasingly professionalized in the 1970s, as teacher training was expanded and the requirements for certification increased.⁴² Indeed, one of the recommendations of the 1957 MacFarlane Commission had been that the provincial government, together with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, should "make plans for the establishment in the near future of teaching as a major profession."⁴³ Increasing professionalization was evident at Westgate in the 1970s and 1980s as policies were written and clarified, and as tensions between professional practices and religious expectations were worked out. Efforts to hire a principal externally in 1972 fell through, and teacher John Enns was promoted instead – though not without board members expressing reservations. The hiring of Enns as principal, board members declared, "suggests a greater concern for administration than for Christian Education and a Christian 'acceptable' life style."⁴⁴ (At the time, the board incorrectly assumed that John Enns was not a member of

41 Simon Fuller, "Gay-Straight Alliance Leads to Human Rights Award," *The Lance* (January 4, 2012), <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/our-communities/lance/Gay-Straight-Alliance-leads-to-human-rights-award-136613348.html>; "Diversity and Courage Key Components to This Year's Human Rights Awards," *MHR Connections* 11, no. 12 (December 2011): 1, http://www.manitobahumanrights.ca/publications/bulletin/2011_dec.pdf; Rachel Bergen, "Students Advocate for the Sexually Marginalized," *Canadian Mennonite*, <http://youngvoices.canadian-mennonite.org/articles/studentsadvocatensexuallymarginalized>.

42 Levin, "The Struggle over Modernization in Manitoba Education," 73–96; Gregor and Wilson, *The Development of Education in Manitoba*, 114–49; Gregor, "Teacher Education in Manitoba," 227–92; "Our History: 92 Years of Service," The Manitoba Teachers' Society, <http://www.mbteach.org/inside-mts/ourhistory.html>.

43 Vidal, "The History of the Manitoba Teachers' Society," 150.

44 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 28, 1972.

a Mennonite church.) Enns's promotion to principal, the board worried, "does not provide assurance" to churches that the school "is seriously considering the concerns they voiced in the last 8 months" regarding the spiritual direction of the school.⁴⁵ John Enns nonetheless became principal, and fellow teacher Rudy Friesen was appointed vice-principal responsible for spiritual development. Staff members were reminded that

*the school exists for the sake of the Christian education program and for the Christian life style that the school exemplifies. The Board wants to assure the constituency that this is where the emphasis rests, and want to indicate to the staff that this emphasis shall not be secondary in the school.*⁴⁶

Teacher evaluation began to be formalized in 1978, as the board decided to evaluate in writing all teachers employed fewer than two years.⁴⁷ The immediate result was the decision to ask one particular teacher to resign. The teacher wrote the board, however, "questioning the procedure of teacher evaluation (which he saw as based on parental concerns, Principal to Committee reports, and survey of Westgate parent enquiry) and pleading fairness."⁴⁸ The board conceded that "the evaluation procedure left something to be desired" and decided to write detailed guidelines for both hiring and evaluation. Nonetheless, the teacher in question was requested to resign.

In the months that followed, a more comprehensive evaluation policy was proposed. Teachers were asked to set

45 Ibid. See Chapter 2 for discussion of the Westgate retreat at Camp Arnes, October 29–30, 1971.

46 Memo from John Dyck, board secretary, to Westgate staff, June 29, 1972.

47 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 20, 1978.

48 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 17, 1978.

personal goals in writing (together with the principal) for each subject that would “reflect the teacher’s realistic expectations of his or her students and the parents.”⁴⁹ The principal would then meet with the board’s education committee to discuss and approve the goals, after which teachers were to communicate their goals to parents. A minimum of four classroom visits by the principal would be followed by a formal written evaluation of the teacher, to be shared with the board.⁵⁰ Principal John Enns expressed his concerns about the suggested new process: it was time-consuming, it did not sufficiently emphasize the teachers’ classroom competence, and the board’s request to evaluate teachers’ “support of the general aim of the [Mennonite Educational] Society” was too vague.⁵¹ A new policy was drafted for consideration: only two classroom visits by the principal would be required, and a form would be created to evaluate teachers (as outstanding, above average, average, below average, or unsatisfactory) with respect to “rapport with pupils, grasp of subject matter, teaching techniques, classroom management.” Parents would be asked yearly for a written appraisal of the school, and the chair of the education committee would meet with teachers twice yearly to discuss the school, the evaluation process, and the parent responses.⁵²

As a result of the uncertainty surrounding evaluation methods, staff members asked for clarification.⁵³ Teacher Jake Pankratz observed that “in the past few years several teachers had been released on short notice and arbitrarily. The procedure followed is questionable.”⁵⁴ Teachers requested

49 “Student-Teacher Objectives & Performance Program,” n.d. [ca. 1978].

50 Ibid.

51 Education committee meeting minutes, October 10, 1978.

52 “Preliminary Report from the Education Committee to the Board on Student-Teacher Objectives and Performance Program,” October 16, 1978.

53 They had done so earlier as well. Staff meeting minutes, December 20, 1978.

54 Staff meeting minutes, June 26, 1979.

that evaluations, along with opportunity to correct specific shortcomings, precede any terminations. Other teachers were concerned that “students hold a great deal of power over public opinion and board opinion.”⁵⁵ Rudy Friesen noted “the children of Board and Ladies’ Auxiliary members know what is happening in the school long before the teachers do.”⁵⁶ Despite staff communicating their concerns to the board, evaluation continued to be a vague process. The board remained undecided about what means of evaluation should be used for teachers: “Should the principal come with evaluative feedback on teachers, especially new teachers? How is tenure handled? Last year letters of commendation were written to the new teachers.”⁵⁷

A staff evaluation committee was formed to resolve the problem in 1984. The committee was composed of two board members, two staff members, and the principal.⁵⁸ Tenure, it was suggested, should follow two full years of service at Westgate. Teacher evaluation could include interviews by the board chair and written reports by the principal. Former principal Frank Neufeld, who subsequently became a school inspector with the provincial Department of Education, could be asked to assist in evaluating Westgate teachers.⁵⁹ Students could be given questionnaires, the principal could conduct classroom visits, teachers could engage in self-evaluation, and the teachers could meet individually with the principal to discuss their progress.⁶⁰

One reason for the interest in formalizing the method of teacher evaluation was to address what the board perceived

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 19, 1983.

58 Memo from Erwin Strempler to Henry Fast, Walter Kampen, John Enns, and Heimo Bachmeyer (staff evaluation committee), January 3, 1984.

59 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 19, 1984.

60 “The E. Strempler Report,” May 7, 1984.

to be some teachers' spiritual inadequacy. "At present there *appears* to be a lack in evaluating a teacher's commitment to promoting the Mennonite faith; this could possibly be corrected in the Evaluation Instruments."⁶¹ For example, one teacher was "reminded of his commitment of transferring his church membership to a local, preferably General Conference Church."⁶² Hiring policies were also re-examined. It was not enough for prospective teachers to be skilled pedagogues, as Westgate was "also a place of spiritual nurture for the students."⁶³ In the mid-1980s, preference was to be given to hiring staff who had been educated at a Mennonite Bible college.⁶⁴

A formal evaluation process was in place by the end of the decade. Staff members were evaluated in their first and second years of employment at Westgate, and then every five years thereafter. (By the 1990s, evaluation was every three years.)⁶⁵ Evaluation was conducted by the principal, by students (through questionnaires), by colleagues (peer evaluation), and by the teachers themselves (self-evaluation). Evaluation by students was changed to voluntary participation, however.⁶⁶

The evaluation process was imperfectly followed, however, when some parents and board members sought the resignations of two teachers in 1990.⁶⁷ John Enns had initially been hired as a teacher and from 1972 to 1979 served

61 Education committee minutes, September 15, 1986. Emphasis in original.

62 Personnel committee minutes, April 9, 1987.

63 Chair's report, annual general meeting, April 27, 1987.

64 Ibid.

65 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 16, 1989.

66 Education committee meeting minutes, January 23, 1989.

67 Minutes of board of directors meetings, June 21, 1990, September 17, 1990, October 15, 1990, and October 19, 1990; letter from Peter J. Priess, chair, to congregational chairs of supporting churches, July 16, 1990; principal's report, September 17, 1990; minutes of annual general meeting, May 28, 1990; letter from Judge John J. Enns to Heimo Bachmeyer, May 30, 1990; Heimo Bachmeyer personnel file; letter from Judge John J. Enns to Peter Priess, board chair, June 11, 1990.

as principal; Heimo Bachmeyer had been hired by Enns to teach German in 1976. Bachmeyer's employment reference had been the principal of Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI); when contacted, he had laughed and said that Bachmeyer was perfect for Westgate, but MBCI could never hire him.⁶⁸ Reflecting on the situation decades later, Enns commented that Bachmeyer "had a strong sense of the academic and was a little crazy ... I still believe firmly he was wonderful and was treated badly."⁶⁹ Both Bachmeyer and Enns were asked to resign at the end of the 1989–90 school year. Parent Eleanor Andres, speaking "on behalf of a group of parents," asked at the school's annual general meeting that these two men's resignation be withdrawn, and a motion was passed in support. Those at the meeting also requested that "the board look carefully at the process of hiring and terminating teachers so that there will be no misunderstanding in the future."⁷⁰ The board subsequently withdrew their request for the two resignations and planned to meet with Enns and Bachmeyer "to discuss and resolve these outstanding issues."⁷¹

Enns recalled that months before the formal request to resign, principal Erwin Strempler asked to meet with him. It was shortly after Enns's father died, and he had low energy which was eventually diagnosed as pernicious anemia. He distinctly remembers Strempler saying, "The only reason you're still here is because of me."⁷² Strempler's departure at the end of the 1990–91 school year, then, made Enns's

68 John Enns interview.

69 Ibid.

70 Minutes of annual general meeting, May 28, 1990.

71 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 18, 1990. Westgate was not the only Mennonite school to experience personnel issues. See, for example, the discussion of the firing of a teacher at RJC in F. Epp, *Education with a Plus*, 182–86, and the firing of a principal at MBCI in Thiessen, *Not Talking Union*, 130.

72 John Enns interview.

situation awkward. He himself did not understand why he was asked to resign but speculated it had to do with his church membership. He and his wife Sharon had joined Bethel Mennonite Church, but Sharon (who was not an ethnic Mennonite) felt like an outsider, so they withdrew their membership. He attended First Mennonite Church infrequently while also worshipping with Sharon at a United church. Enns was called in for a meeting with the principal, board chair, and personnel committee chair. The personnel committee chair had a list almost two pages long. Enns reflected in his interview, “I wish I had insisted they give me a copy... One of first things that was said was that I was not a Mennonite church member.”⁷³ Enns explained to those at the meeting that he attended First Mennonite Church, and when challenged that he was disinterested in his work at Westgate, explained his diagnosis and treatment with vitamin B12. Enns was humbled by the parent and student turnout to the annual general meeting that resulted in the withdrawal of the request for his resignation. The situation, however, “put a nail in the coffin for Sharon regarding the Mennonite church,” he observed.⁷⁴ Ultimately, the board took no disciplinary action against Enns – though they spent some time deliberating doing so.⁷⁵

While Enns returned to work until his retirement, Bachmeyer experienced further challenges. He was frequently absent from school due to stress and tension headaches.⁷⁶ Board chair Peter Priess wrote to Bachmeyer in the fall of 1990, noting the “decrease in energy or enthusiasm in teaching” evidenced, in part, by these absences: “There may

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 18, 1991; Peter J. Priess, board chair report, annual general meeting, May 27, 1991; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 13, 1991.

76 Heimo Bachmeyer personnel file.

be various explanations for such behaviour but that does not necessarily excuse it. It is also not the responsibility nor within the capabilities of the evaluation committee to identify causes or solutions.”⁷⁷ He informed Bachmeyer that the school planned to track his absences and tardies. Bachmeyer resigned later that year to teach and study at Pennsylvania State University.⁷⁸

Bachmeyer was, in some ways, a divisive personality. The student yearbook’s tribute to Bachmeyer reflected this:

*Trying to imagine Westgate without Heimo is like taking a sedative.... Imagine that no Westgate student had ever experienced Germany, and the rich European Mennonite heritage, on an expertly guided study tour.... Imagine learning all about non-resistance without the aid of an automatic water pistol. Imagine trying to sneak out of chapel without being cut down by the stare, behind which lurked the friendliest lion on campus. One thing that is not hard to imagine is that we will miss our Mr. Bachmeyer very much. He has made a lasting contribution to our community, even if one is tempted to reach for four aspirins when reflecting on the past sixteen years.*⁷⁹

At the time of his resignation, curriculum committee chair Rosmarin Heidenreich noted that her children enjoyed his classes, and that his teaching “provides the kind of academic challenge, practical relevance and classroom variety that one would like to see in all the humanities subjects.”⁸⁰ His death in 2013 prompted more memories from former Westgate

77 Letter from Peter Priess, board chair, to Heimo Bachmeyer, October 18, 1990.

78 Letter from Heimo Bachmeyer to Erwin Strempler, March 6, 1991.

79 “Farewell to Heimo Bachmeyer,” Westgate yearbook, 1990–91.

80 Letter from curriculum committee chair Rosmarin Heidenreich to Heimo Bachmeyer, June 4, 1991.

students:

Mr. Bachmeyer as my homeroom, German and Mennonite History teacher was feared, respected and above all loved.⁸¹

He was a good man and teacher and a lasting memory was the way he would rouse snoozing students by smacking his pointer on the lectern and yelling in his special way.⁸²

He taught me German and History, but most importantly he taught me to do things well and to understand why I was doing them. He also taught me to make a difference in people's lives and to have fun while doing a good job.⁸³

Of all my high school classes, the one I have the clearest recollection of was Mennonite History, and it wasn't because it was my favorite topic, but Mr. Bachmeyer made the class memorable. Even through his "growling" during homeroom time, the twinkle in his eyes meant we never doubted that he cared.⁸⁴

Two policy revisions occurred in the aftermath of the Bachmeyer-Enns incident: improvements to staff evaluation were made, and guidelines for dealing with parent complaints were created.⁸⁵ Board members were to evaluate

81 Caroline (Kroeker) Brandt, former student, July 13, 2013, http://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-204142/name-Heimo_Bachmeyer/.

82 Jason Hiebert, former student, July 12, 2013, http://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-204142/name-Heimo_Bachmeyer/.

83 Anne-Marie, former student, July 18, 2013, http://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-204142/name-Heimo_Bachmeyer/.

84 Rhonda (Martens) Epp, former student, July 17, 2013, http://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-204142/name-Heimo_Bachmeyer/.

85 The latter was prompted as well by complaints made by a parent regarding alleged New Age influences (such as yoga) at the school. Principal's reports, December 17, 1990, and January 17, 1991; minutes of board of directors meetings, December 17, 1990, January 21, 1991, and February 18, 1991; minutes of meeting of concerned

parent complaints and inform administration if safety was at issue; otherwise, they were to determine if the complaint was a personnel or a policy issue and direct it to the appropriate quarter. Personnel issues required parents to first approach the teachers with whom they had an issue; if the issue remained unaddressed, they were to approach administration, then a board member together with administration, and finally the board chair. Policy issues were to be addressed first by administration; failing that, a board committee would become involved, and finally the board chair. Complaints were to be responded to within three days.⁸⁶ Board members noted, however, the need to distinguish between the two extremes of “actually complaining” and “filling in a conversation because there is nothing else to say to a Board member.”⁸⁷ Further, board members recognized the need to determine if complaints were made to them merely to vent or because action was desired.⁸⁸

Staff evaluation was changed: instead of evaluation for the first two years and every five thereafter, teachers were to be evaluated for the first three years and every three thereafter.⁸⁹ An evaluation committee composed of the principal, board chair, personnel committee chair, and one staff member (chosen by the staff) was created. Emphasis was placed on both formative and summative evaluation, giving teachers opportunity to improve, which “helped to bring about a stronger working relationship between Board and Staff.”⁹⁰ Connections to supporting churches and commitment to

parents with board executive, January 23, 1991.

86 “Proposal to Board Members: Guidelines for Dealing with Complaints,” n.d. [ca. 1992].

87 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 16, 1992.

88 Ibid.

89 Minutes of board of directors meeting, August 19, 1991; evaluation model, March 1992.

90 Annual general meeting reports, October 26, 1992.

Christian faith also were evaluated, though not easily.⁹¹ The board considered, but chose not to introduce, “formalized, written parent evaluation of staff on an annual basis.”⁹² Parent-teacher meetings were moved from classrooms to the gymnasium: meeting in public rather than in private was thought to encourage more decorum.⁹³

The hiring policy at Westgate was formalized as well in the mid-1990s. Earlier, as at many Mennonite-run businesses, hiring was done on an informal recruitment basis: Mennonite networks of church and kin were tapped for promising applicants.⁹⁴ After 1993, jobs at Westgate were publicly advertised, and the principal reviewed applications together with the personnel committee to create a shortlist. The principal, personnel committee chair or board chair, and at least one teacher conducted the interviews, which focused on the position requirements but also sought “information on involvement/experience in related professional activities and the degree of exposure to the Mennonite Community.”⁹⁵ The hiring policy stated that job applicants had to

have an active Christian faith and be able to represent the Christian values of Westgate. It is recognized that due to the nature of Westgate, it is expected that a majority of teachers will be active in the Mennonite Church. It is desirable that the applicant has a knowledge of the Mennonite spiritual heritage and has a commitment to (as well as is able to) support the goals of the school and represent Westgate to the

91 One teacher wrote, in response to her evaluation: “I think I am a competent teacher but I am not sure at what point one ‘exceeds position requirements.’ For example when does one model more Christian faith than is necessary to teach at Westgate? It would be good to know exactly what the position requirements are.” Westgate personnel files. Emphasis in original.

92 Minutes of board of directors meeting, November 16, 1992.

93 Ibid.

94 See, for example, Thiessen, *Manufacturing Mennonites*.

95 “Hiring policy for teaching staff,” 1993.

*constituents.*⁹⁶

Interviews were summarized and the personnel committee then made hiring recommendations to the board.⁹⁷

Further revisions to the evaluation system were made in the late 1990s, as traditional evaluation was replaced by a professional growth model.⁹⁸ Teachers were encouraged to identify specific and personal goals and outcomes for professional growth, choosing from a variety of evaluation models in conversation with administration. These models could incorporate such methods as action research,⁹⁹ cognitive coaching,¹⁰⁰ professional portfolios, study groups, and mentoring. Conversation regarding the integration of faith and teaching was still expected, but a more sensitive approach to its evaluation was introduced: “Given the personal and often sensitive nature of these discussions, it is understood that they will not appear on any formal review unless mutually agreed upon by administration and teacher.”¹⁰¹ In granting teachers greater control over the evaluation process, this new professional growth model allowed staff to “feel free to risk and try new approaches and methods” so as to become “more experienced and more confident teachers.”¹⁰²

96 Ibid.

97 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 19, 1993; “Hiring policy for teaching staff,” 1993.

98 Teacher Performance Review Package, n.d. [ca. 1995].

99 Defined in the document as “a systematic means of collecting and analyzing data with the intent of effecting improvement in instruction.”

100 Defined in the document as a “confidential partnership between two educational professionals whose goals include: deepening collegiality, increasing professional dialogue, the examination and reflection of teaching practices to effect change and refinement.”

101 Teacher Performance Review Package, n.d. [ca. 1995].

102 Ibid.

Salaries and Benefits

A pension plan for teachers at Westgate was first offered in 1961, but it did not last long.¹⁰³ Teachers at MCI had had a pension plan since 1956, and a Mutual Life Insurance representative presented a possible plan to the Westgate board that was subsequently accepted.¹⁰⁴ In 1965, the school's financial challenges led the board to terminate the pension plan, affecting five staff members.¹⁰⁵ The board hastened to explain that the decision was at the behest of teacher Karl Fast but did not state what other alternatives had been considered, if any.¹⁰⁶ A pension plan was reconsidered in the early 1970s, but the financial challenges of that era once again led the board to decide against providing this benefit.¹⁰⁷ It was not until April 1979 that pensions were again offered to teachers, through a plan managed by the Conference of Mennonites of Manitoba.¹⁰⁸ The pension plan was improved in the 1980s, as Westgate teacher benefits were compared with public school teachers in Winnipeg School Division No. 1. Teachers' pension contributions were increased to 5 percent of salary, matched by the school.¹⁰⁹

103 Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 3, 1960.

104 Minutes of board of directors meetings, August 16, 1960, June 6, 1961, August 1, 1961, September 5, 1961, and October 3, 1961.

105 Minutes of board of directors meeting, September 6, 1965; letter from Miss T. Sommer, Mutual Life Assurance Company of Canada, to John Schroeder, Westgate treasurer, February 8, 1966.

106 Letter from John Schroeder, Westgate treasurer, to Mutual Life Assurance Co., October 20, 1965.

107 Minutes of board of directors meetings, May 27, 1971, June 28, 1972, and February 20, 1978; staff meeting minutes, September 19, 1975, October 7, 1975, October 17, 1975, and March 19, 1976.

108 Staff meeting minutes, May 29, 1978. The plan was offered on a voluntary basis to teachers after one year of employment, and teachers and the board each paid 4 percent of salary into the pension plan. Minutes of board of directors meeting, May 15, 1978.

109 Minutes of board-staff relations committee, October 1, 1987; memo to staff from Gerhard Epp, finance committee chair, September 13, 1990; minutes of board of

Two of the school's longest-serving teachers, Jake Pankratz and John Enns, were given lump sums on their retirement as compensation for their years of service without a pension plan.¹¹⁰

Insurance for staff members was provided in 1961, and leave policies were created in 1982.¹¹¹ While the board was willing to pay two-thirds of the cost of a plan with Prudential Life Insurance, Westgate teachers were uninterested in purchasing insurance.¹¹² The board decided that group insurance (health, life, and disability) was mandatory for teachers, however, with costs to be shared equally by the teachers and their employer.¹¹³ Dental and extended health benefits through Blue Cross were offered to staff for the first time in 1976.¹¹⁴ In the absence of a policy regarding leaves, there were “no criteria for refusing,” and so three teachers were on leave in 1980–81.¹¹⁵ A leave policy was desirable, as it would encourage teachers to take leaves that would “prepare them to return as better Westgate teachers.”¹¹⁶ A deferred salary leave plan was implemented, to allow teachers to accept voluntary service positions with organizations like Mennonite Central Committee.¹¹⁷

Wages were negotiated with teachers and other staff members on an individual basis in the early 1960s. When the school's custodian declined to continue without a raise in 1961, someone willing to work at the previous year's wage of

directors meeting, April 18, 1995.

110 Jake Pankratz was hired in 1974; John Enns was hired in 1969.

111 Professional Staff Leave policy, October 19, 1982.

112 Minutes of board of directors meetings, December 6, 1960, January 4, 1961, and January 21, 1961.

113 Ibid.

114 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 17, 1977.

115 Memo to board members from Rudy Regehr, August 23, 1982.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

\$750 replaced him (albeit only for one year).¹¹⁸ Teacher Anna Penner's absence due to childbirth required Frank Neufeld, Vic Reimer, and Karl Fast to work overtime. An additional \$200 each was to be paid to Neufeld and Reimer, and \$100 to Fast, but as the teachers were "not entirely happy" with this amount, they instead received \$275, \$250, and \$100 respectively.¹¹⁹ There is no mention of what benefits, if any, Penner received in the interim. Annual salaries of the teachers ranged from \$7,700 (Frank Neufeld, principal) to \$4,200 (Bill Schulz).¹²⁰ When Winnipeg public school teachers negotiated new salaries in 1963, there was some discussion by the board that these wage increases should also come into effect at Westgate, but no record exists of any decision.¹²¹ Two years later, board members met with Bethel Mennonite Church council, and the topic of teacher pay was raised. The board argued that Westgate teachers should be paid the same as if they were working at public schools. Rev. D.F. Neufeld asked, "How do you justify this, when our other private schools with a Ph.D. [i.e., professors at CMBC] receive less?" "The reply was very strong that this was wrong," the minutes note, "why should we expect our teachers and preachers to sacrifice when we ourselves would not be willing to do likewise." The board suggested that Winnipeg's General Conference Mennonite church members contribute \$10 each to ensure Westgate teachers were paid appropriately.¹²²

The school's financial problems in the 1970s led to some changes in the way salaries were negotiated. Teachers were asked to take voluntary wage freezes. In 1971,

118 Minutes of board of directors meetings, June 6, 1961, September 5, 1961, and July 3, 1962.

119 Minutes of board of directors meetings, June 5, 1962, and August 21, 1962.

120 Salary statements of current teachers, October 2, 1962.

121 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 15, 1963.

122 Minutes of meeting of board of directors and Bethel Mennonite Church council, October 19, 1965.

six teachers agreed not to take salary increases, saving the school \$6,000.¹²³ The following year, the board had to find \$8,000 to pay salaries while being overdrawn by \$3,000.¹²⁴ Board members met with the teachers to discuss their salary concerns.¹²⁵ One result of such circumstances was greater formalization of the salary system at the school. Teacher contracts were merely verbal at this time, and raises were implemented whenever Winnipeg School Division No. 1 negotiated raises. The board recommended that “future contracts be in writing.”¹²⁶ Teachers had questions about the board’s 1973 salary proposal, which treated years of teaching experience at Westgate differently from teaching experience outside the school. They also questioned why individual teachers could be considered worthy of continued employment but not worthy of a raise in pay. The pay scale the board proposed, teachers declared, resulted in “encouragement of less experienced teachers and discouragement of experienced teachers.”¹²⁷ Nonetheless, they agreed to waive salary increases for another year.¹²⁸ Three years later, teachers asked that their wages be equal to those of public school teachers working in Winnipeg School Division No. 1.¹²⁹ The board instead opted to pay 90 percent of the 1976 Division No. 1 salary to Westgate teachers: “This is 15–20 thousand dollars higher than the Board’s absolute maximum. \$170 000 salary budget

123 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 21, 1971.

124 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 24, 1972.

125 Minutes of board of directors executive meeting, October 19, 1972.

126 Minutes of board of directors meetings, March 5, 1973, April 5, 1973, and May 23, 1973.

127 Staff meeting minutes, April 25, 1973.

128 Annual general meeting minutes, May 29, 1973.

129 The specifics of this request were that of Westgate teachers with fewer than five years’ experience be paid 100 percent of Division No. 1 teacher salaries and that other Westgate teachers be paid 90 percent for 1976, with all Westgate teachers receiving wages equal to those of these public school teachers in 1977. Staff meeting minutes, February 16, 1975, and March 11, 1977.

compared to \$140 000 this year.”¹³⁰ The board later decided that teachers should be paid 95 percent of Division No. 1 salaries in 1977–78, and 100 percent in 1978–79, but the latter decision was never put into practice.¹³¹ Instead, teacher salaries remained at 95 percent of Division No. 1 salaries.

Teacher salaries were examined again in the 1980s. Board chair Rudy Regehr commented on the practice of Westgate salaries increasing every time Winnipeg School Division No. 1 negotiated a new contract: “Do we really want that to continue? Do we want our salaries set by the Winnipeg School Board?”¹³² Board members suggested that salaries instead be negotiated by a committee composed of representatives from the board’s finance and education committees and from staff.¹³³ Board members criticized rising teacher salaries: “Every day in class costs \$4,000. Teachers’ salaries cost are \$2,500 per day. 22% of the time is not spent in class teaching. Are we getting our money’s worth?”¹³⁴ Good salaries attracted good teachers, some board members argued. Others asserted that Westgate teachers earned considerably more than professors teaching at Winnipeg’s Mennonite Bible colleges.¹³⁵ Some suggested that teachers be asked to voluntarily donate a portion of their salaries to cover budget deficiencies.¹³⁶

The teachers themselves argued that the advantage of tying Westgate salaries to the salary increases negotiated by public school teachers at Division No. 1 was that it allowed

130 Staff meeting minutes, April 5, 1976.

131 Staff meeting minutes, March 22, 1977; minutes of board of directors executive meetings, March 13, 1977, and March 21, 1977; minutes of board of directors meeting, March 21, 1977.

132 Memo to board members from Rudy Regehr, August 23, 1982.

133 Minutes of board of directors meeting, January 10, 1983.

134 Minutes of board of directors meeting, February 8, 1983.

135 This debate was revived yet again in 1986. Annual general meeting minutes, April 28, 1986; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 12, 1986.

136 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 21, 1983.

teachers and board members to avoid the stress of negotiations and “unnecessary conflict.”¹³⁷ Salary comparison with other teachers was easier (and more relevant) than with “non-teaching professions like church workers, MCC personnel, or Conference workers.”¹³⁸ And Westgate staff, having donated \$12,000 from their salaries, argued that such sacrifice on their part spoke “for a commonality of purpose and a sincere appreciation by the staff for the dilemma the Board finds itself in with a large operating deficit.”¹³⁹ The board subsequently agreed, passing a motion that Westgate salaries “never rise above 95% of Winnipeg #1.”¹⁴⁰

At the same time, formal contracts were introduced for new hires.¹⁴¹ Written contracts had been in use in the mid-1970s, specifying salary and sick leave (two days per month, cumulative to a total of sixty days) and requiring one month’s notice by either party for termination.¹⁴² The 1982 contracts added a section outlining the duties and expectations of teachers, including reference to the Manitoba Teachers’ Society code of professional practice and Westgate’s “Aims and Objectives.”¹⁴³ Three years later, the board was divided regarding the question of the difference between contracts and collective agreements.¹⁴⁴ Board chair Rudy Regehr noted:

I have always assumed that a simple contract was in order, but I was perplexed about the talk of a collective agreement

137 Salary discussions by staff, April 15, 1983.

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

140 Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 18, 1983. A year later, the board chair stated that they were considering asking staff to drop to 92 percent of Division No. 1 salaries. Semi-annual meeting reports, November 26, 1984.

141 Board meeting, “The E. Strempler Report,” June 21, 1982; minutes of board of directors meeting, June 21, 1982.

142 Westgate personnel files.

143 Copy of teacher contract, 1982. For further discussion of these “Aims and Objectives,” see Chapter 3.

144 Minutes of board of directors meeting, March 18, 1985.

at last meeting. Later, when some other Board members also questioned this, I thought we had best look at that issue before we go much further. We have had a very good staff/Board relationship for 25 years, with nothing more than a friendly handshake and a lot of communication. I frankly worry about complex and detailed agreements. I was also surprised when, in our conversation with faculty about the [new] benefit package, one teacher raised questions about whether this was in keeping with the collective agreement. And this when we had just agreed to an enhancement of the plan at faculty request. I think both our Board, our society and the congregations would be surprised and perplexed by this development. Let's do a round of discussion in principle before going too much further on this issue.¹⁴⁵

The union-inflected nature of the term “collective agreement” was avoided by using the terminology “memorandum of understanding” and “terms of employment” instead.¹⁴⁶ Drafting these terms of employment also offered the board an opportunity to include an article on the religious expectations of staff members.¹⁴⁷ The document was written over a three-year period with the assistance of staff members (including Heimo Bachmeyer, John Enns, and Erwin Strempler), “so that decisions affecting them do not appear arbitrary in nature and that all staff members are treated

145 Memo to Westgate board executive from Rudy A. Regehr, April 4, 1985.

146 Education committee minutes, May 13, 1985. For more on North American Mennonites' historical suspicion of unions, see Thiessen, *Not Talking Union*.

147 Minutes of board of directors meetings, September 16, 1985, and April 14, 1986; memo to Westgate board from Rudy A. Regehr, November 7, 1985; annual general meeting reports, April 28, 1986. The contract stated: “The teacher further agrees to model the Christian way and agrees to support the basic beliefs of the Mennonite faith.” The board stated that this phrase was “to be seen as an attempt to covenant with the staff and not as a measuring stick for judgment.” Minutes of board of directors meeting, April 28, 1986.

consistently.”¹⁴⁸

While the creation of the terms of employment clarified aspects of work at Westgate, conversations between the board and staff in 1986 led to some friction. Principal Erwin Strempler was asked to deal with some staff changes in June 1985, and he took the opportunity to explain his understanding of job security at Westgate. Continued employment, he believed, was dependent on “Execution of professional duties in a dedicated manner; Rapport with other staff, students, parents and constituents; and Involvement in the church related activities of the sponsoring constituency.” While Westgate was technically owned and operated by an educational society, the “functional character of the school forces us to conclude that Westgate is a church school.” Board members represented their churches; staff members were answerable to the board (and thus to the churches). Strempler was directed by the board’s personnel committee to talk to staff “where feedback from the constituency indicates a concern” with respect to professionalism, rapport, or church involvement. Strempler informed staff that the board’s personnel committee would be meeting with some individual staff members, and that they all could expect more frequent board-staff social gatherings. He asked the board to clarify the situation

*so that precise understandings can be developed and appropriate documentations can be made. The resulting policy must be consistent with present documents (Constitution, Terms of Agreement and Contract), and become part of the implementation process of The Terms of Agreement and Contract.*¹⁴⁹

Staff members responded to this initiative with a seven-page letter to the board. At meetings with the board in

148 Annual general meeting reports, April 28, 1986.

149 Memo to staff and board personnel committee from Erwin Strempler, April 28, 1986.

March and May 1986, staff had been shocked by the board's suggestion that none of them should plan to retire from Westgate.¹⁵⁰ They formally expressed their continued support for the school's "Aims and Objectives,"¹⁵¹ and for open communication and the cultivation of "mutual respect, trust, cooperation, and support."¹⁵² Trust had been broken, however, via the "mixed messages" received from board members Rudy Regehr and Bernie Thiessen about terms of employment, job security, the comparison to church workers, and their salary. "It is a puzzlement to the staff, why the document which resulted from many, many hours of meetings between Board and Staff members, should now clearly seem to be viewed as a threat by the Board."¹⁵³ Staff were troubled by the board chair's insistence at their May meeting that teachers provide students with "a superior education," yet "he could not define a superior education, he could not know if or when it was being received, but the Board had its 'hunches' about when it is not."¹⁵⁴ Staff were concerned as well that confidential board matters were being discussed in the classroom by board members' children: "Teachers have been informed of 'hit lists' and of the order of priority in which teachers are to be dismissed."¹⁵⁵ Such incidents suggested a "lack of professional confidentiality," they noted; "students of Board members might wield an undue amount of influence over the same."¹⁵⁶ Staff observed that from 1976 through 1984, they received 100 percent of the salary of comparable teachers in Winnipeg School Division No. 1, albeit raises were received eight months later and without back pay. To help retire the

150 Memo from staff to board re "Board-staff relations," June 2, 1986.

151 See Chapter 3 for further details of the "Aims and Objectives."

152 Memo from staff to board re "Board-staff relations," June 2, 1986.

153 *Ibid.*

154 *Ibid.*

155 *Ibid.*

156 *Ibid.*

construction debt, staff had agreed to drop their salaries temporarily to 95 percent and were “astonished to receive a report in the fall of 1985 that this agreement was now Board policy.”¹⁵⁷ They accordingly had “misgivings about the Board’s intentions to adhere to an agreed upon plan or any other salary plan.”¹⁵⁸

In their letter, the staff asked the board to answer a series of specific questions “to confirm the fact that we are working together at a common task.”¹⁵⁹ One of these appeared to be somewhat sarcastic: “In light of the comment that Staff members should not look to retire at the school, is it the Board’s intention to provide opportunities, and to designate funds, for the professional development and renewal of Staff members?”¹⁶⁰ Staff asked whether the board still accepted the terms of employment to which they had committed, and whether Westgate teachers were considered professionals worthy of a salary comparable to that of teachers working in Winnipeg School Division No. 1. The board’s religious expectations of staff were questioned:

*Is it the Board’s intention to build a Staff of individuals whose spiritual, personal, and academic lives adhere to a set pattern and code, or does the Board see a place for a mosaic of compatible Christian staff members who may be able to offer students a challenging, well-rounded education within the contexts of the Anabaptist faith?*¹⁶¹

The board was asked whether staff representation on the board was seen as “functional and positive, or as threaten-

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

ing and disruptive?”¹⁶² Finally, staff members asked, “Does the Board view Staff evaluations as a means of improving the teaching process, or as a means of terminating employment?”¹⁶³ The letter concluded:

*This staff is very aware that the undertaking of this communication could be seen as bold and antagonistic. We simply ask that you believe us when we say that such is not the intent. It is our fervent prayer that this presentation be accepted as a sincere attempt to re-open lines of communication and to re-establish an environment of mutual trust and cooperation.*¹⁶⁴

The board met with staff members the next day to discuss their concerns. Though there are no minutes of that meeting, the board reported that they were “encouraged by the atmosphere of openness and honesty and by the genuine sharing of ideas and feelings which took place.”¹⁶⁵ The staff pressed for a formal response to their questions, however. Though a draft was prepared by board chair Rudy Regehr and edited by Henry Fast, no record of final response or

162 Ibid. Staff representation on the board of directors had been considered as early as 1973. Principal John Enns suggested that such a representative have voting privileges. Though the structure of the board was altered in 1976, no provision was made for staff representation. Concerns about communication between the board and the teachers had led to a renewal of the request in 1978, particularly since both students and the ladies’ auxiliary had board representation. A staff representative then was appointed. Minutes of board of directors meetings, May 15, 1973, November 18, 1974, April 17, 1978, and May 15, 1978; staff meeting minutes, April 14, 1978; annual general meeting minutes, May 29, 1973; semi-annual meeting minutes, November 25, 1974. See also Annual general meeting minutes, May 26, 1975; draft constitution of Westgate, 1976; and semi-annual meeting minutes, November 29, 1976 – all MAO, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate fonds.

163 Memo from staff to board re “Board-staff relations,” June 2, 1986.

164 Ibid.

165 “We are convinced that it is precisely through this kind of frank discussion that an environment of mutual trust and support will be maintained. By planning continued opportunities for the Board and the Staff to ‘speak the truth in love,’ we can work most effectively for the benefit of our students and our school.” Memo to board from staff, June 5, 1986.

its delivery exists.¹⁶⁶ A board-staff relations committee was formed shortly thereafter, however, “to ensure that there is an open and congenial line of communication between the Board and Staff.”¹⁶⁷

Staff Reflections

A number of staff members, past and present, were interviewed for this history. Their comments offer some detailed insights into the history of the school. Reflecting years (and in some cases, decades) later on past events, these individuals provide a valuable perspective on “what people did, what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.”¹⁶⁸ Former vice-principal Ozzie Rempel, former teacher and principal John Enns, former student records manager Leona Hiebert, and principal Bob Hummelt are only four of the more than two dozen interviewed for this project, but their tenures at the school are long and their stories are particularly evocative.

Ozzie Rempel was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina,

166 Minutes of board of directors meeting, June 16, 1986.

167 Minutes of board-staff relations committee meeting, October 1, 1987; semi-annual meeting reports, November 23, 1987. As for the staff representative to the board, it was unclear in the early 1990s whether or not that person had voting rights. Further concerns arose a decade later when board member David Hogue introduced in-camera sessions of the board from which staff and administrative representatives were excluded. Board members worried: “‘In-camera’ discussions jeopardize the current openness we enjoy in board/staff relationships.” Others believed that in-camera sessions were an end-run around the existing staff evaluation policy: “There seems to us to be no obvious purpose for in-camera meetings except a discussion of staff/administration.” Some disliked the message such sessions sent: “We have been entrusted with the education of our children ... we try to maintain an atmosphere of trust and openness with them and want the same for our board/staff relationship.” Notwithstanding such concerns, in-camera sessions continued until at least 2004. Education committee minutes, March 16, 1992; minutes of the board of directors meetings, August 31, 1992, April 19, 2000, January 20, 2003, and September 20, 2004; staff representative report by Evelyn Peterson, January 17, 2003.

168 Stille, “Prospecting for Truth.”

and came to Canada as a child with his family. A graduate of Manitoba's public school system, he took a science degree and trained to be a teacher after having spent time traveling and working in Europe. He began his teaching career at MCI. Though he loved working there, he did not want to "stay there forever" and so quit his job and worked as a substitute teacher in Winnipeg. In 1979, he was invited to apply for a teaching position at Westgate. He retired in 2016.¹⁶⁹

Rempel's first years at Westgate differed from his experience at MCI, and were, he says, "traumatic, to a degree."¹⁷⁰ He "felt a different connection to administration." Part of the problem was that the school was in the midst of a challenging building project – the conversion of the former Convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. These early years felt adversarial rather than collegial, Rempel noted. Staff members met in each others' homes to discuss problems with the administration of the school. In short order, the principal, Len Wiebe, resigned – whether at the invitation of the board or of his own volition was unclear – and the situation improved, from Rempel's perspective.

Rempel's next principal, Erwin Strempler, was a lay minister with a very different administrative style, growing out of his commitment to collaboration and background in counselling.¹⁷¹ While Rempel appreciated Strempler's strengths, he observed that staff eventually wanted stronger leadership that was not so conflict-averse. Strempler was succeeded by the school's guidance counsellor, Reg Klassen, who made some significant contributions to the school, in Rempel's eyes: increasing funding for professional development, and restructuring tuition to incorporate all school fees (replacing many small fundraising initiatives for school programs that

169 Ozzie Rempel interview.

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

absorbed too much teacher and student time and energy). When Klassen left for a position as an assistant superintendent in the public system, the board hired its first female principal, Gail Schellenberg. Rempel observed that she was “really good at recognition,” acknowledging individual staff members’ efforts with cards and supportive comments.¹⁷²

Rempel described how the school facilities affected working conditions for teachers and students.¹⁷³ He recalled the old mansion that had been converted into a school by the Convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart before Westgate purchased it and built additions: typing classes were held on the third floor of the mansion, and the stone basement was a dungeon where, he said cryptically, “you didn’t want to find students but you did.” The design of the 1978 addition to this mansion was flawed, he noted. What was to have been the cafeteria became a classroom. Without a lunchroom, students ate in the halls, leaving them messy. As a consequence, “if you came early to school, you saw mice all the time.” What later was renovated into a bright and airy cafeteria was, in the 1970s and ’80s, the school’s chapel: a dark space with a stage, a stippled ceiling, and dim pot lights. With the construction of the 1989 addition to replace the mansion, Rempel felt he had “won the lottery.” The biology lab where he taught is, he claimed, the “nicest classroom in the school.” Rempel himself had had a hand in its design, having board approval to visit other Winnipeg schools to observe their lab facilities. More than twenty years later, he asserted, these labs were still more than functional.¹⁷⁴

Former teacher and principal John Enns recalled that he had to “earn his place” as a teacher at Westgate, working beside skilled teachers like Karl Fast, Bernie Neufeld, and

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

174 Ibid.

Ruth Vogt.¹⁷⁵ By his second and third year of teaching senior high English, he was able to form strong connections with students. At that time, Enns and his wife were living in an apartment close to the school. CBC television was broadcasting a production of Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* on Tuesday or Wednesday nights. While his wife attended a church bowling league, he and his one-year-old son were joined by Westgate students to watch the TV series. These evenings formed some of his fondest memories of working at the school.

Enns recalled that the early 1970s were difficult years to work at Westgate: principal William Kruger resigned, tuition was “unreasonably low,” and Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church’s elder Gerhard Lohrenz “preached from the pulpit against the school.”¹⁷⁶ Part of the problem, Enns observed, was that the church that founded the school, First Mennonite, was considered too liberal by many Winnipeg Mennonites.¹⁷⁷ Another problem, in his view, was lax admission standards: “If a student was kicked out of the public school, then they came to Westgate. That was part of the reason for discipline problems.” At that time, he noted, there was “an atmosphere that students could control teachers.” And Karl Fast, “the kingpin of the staff,” was about to retire. In Principal Kruger’s last year, the board had doubled tuition without consulting parents. Enrolment subsequently plummeted.¹⁷⁸ All these circumstances combined to make the working environment difficult.

In his interview, Enns described his approach to hiring decisions at the school while he was principal. (He had been responsible for hiring Di Brandt and Heimo Bachmeyer,

175 John Enns interview.

176 *Ibid.*

177 *Ibid.*

178 *Ibid.*

among others.) He said sometimes teachers were pushed on him because of their church background or their experience teaching in developing countries. Though he was often convinced they were “positive role models” in those contexts, Westgate was a different environment: “It’s a different story entirely.”¹⁷⁹ Enns stated he believed that good teachers were those who provided “a basic, good solid education that encourages students to think and be creative.” If he hired people who could do that, he said, and who had

*a good sense of how to enjoy life, then the culture is automatically there, and the spiritual will come. But if you hire people because they supposedly have a grasp of the spiritual, but don't have those other elements, you're doomed. And I dare say that goes for the ministerial, as well.*¹⁸⁰

Former student records manager Leona Hiebert first came to Westgate when Len Wiebe was principal. That first year was “not a great time” for her, she recalled.¹⁸¹ Wiebe, she said, had been “brought in for clean-up duty”; he “felt he had to prove something” and “tromped on” former principal John Enns. In addition, office staff were socially distanced from teaching staff: she recalls being asked to leave when a staff photo was to be taken. With Wiebe’s departure from the school, and with the separation of finance and reception in the front office, her work life improved. Administrative tasks became computerized and handwritten report cards were replaced by offsite printing. She soon learned Trevlac, a student management software program. It was a steep learning curve, she said, because she had no computer experience and received little training. Westgate computer teacher

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid.

181 Leona Hiebert interview.

David Schroeder offered her some assistance at first: “He was a sweet chauvinist,” she noted, in that he “wouldn’t let me do stuff because it was too scary.”¹⁸² But when he left the school, Hiebert joked, then it became “really scary!” She received some further training and “felt my way through.... It’s amazing how well you can teach yourself, yet still feel as if you know nothing.” She expressed regret that Ed Neufeld was principal at Westgate for only for one year: “He didn’t know what he was getting into. Once you’re at Westgate, then it envelops you and takes your soul.” She recalled that when he left, he told Westgate staff that they should remember to keep the Sabbath: “That made an impact. We let Westgate consume us.”¹⁸³

Principal Bob Hummelt came to Westgate from the public school system. His pension, salary, and job security (due to the financial instability of the school at the time) all suffered in the immediate term as a result. He said he had been interested in how to teach from a Christian perspective: “I was more wide-eyed and fundamental then.”¹⁸⁴ His salary improved with time and, as he had expected, he made “terrific friends on staff and among parents and kids. It was a good move.” In his first years at Westgate, he was frustrated because there were “some disrespectful and manipulative and threatening staff.”¹⁸⁵ He clashed with a few of them because he thought their actions in the classroom were wrong. There were “some young Turks [on staff] who joined” him in this and thought they “could do better” as teachers.¹⁸⁶ Students at the time, he said, were “frustrated by programming and unimaginative assessment.” The situation slowly improved.

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid.

184 Bob Hummelt interview.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

In the early 1990s, the school hired CMBC graduates and Westgate alumni, with the result that the school became “more diverse and agile academically” and a “less platitude-filled idea of faith and what it means” developed. As principal, Hummelt’s description of his approach to hiring was similar to that of John Enns. Hummelt expressed a preference for strong academic teachers open to being nurtured into Anabaptism who “are active learners themselves” and who “can point to an interest in finding out more about faith themselves. To be honest, I think that they would be a better choice than a [weak albeit religious] teacher.” Westgate staff, he concluded, “feel like family.” Staff are on a continuum regarding such topics as homosexuality, divorce, capital punishment, and prosperity theology, but “we all discuss these issues freely.”¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

The freedom to discuss and debate that Hummelt described was key to the founding of the school in 1958 and was demonstrated in the willingness of Westgate employees to discuss their workplace critically and openly in their interviews. It is not typical for institutions to commission an anniversary history and give free rein to their staff (and the book’s author) to delve into all aspects of their organization’s past. All institutions have their moments in the past that their members look back upon with some disappointment if not distress; Westgate is no different. What sets Westgate apart from most, however, is its openness to critique. The affection for their institution that is felt by Westgate staff reveals itself in their desire to confront their history in its entirety, with honesty and courage.

187 Ibid.

Conclusion

I had my doubts when I was first asked to research and write a history of Westgate. Who needs another coffee table photo book, accompanied by a boring institutional chronology? And if a serious academic history was to be produced, could it survive potential pressures to write a hagiographic “puff piece” instead? What few skeletons exist in the closet of Westgate are ones that are well known to the school’s supporters, and ones that are not particularly unique to Westgate. The school’s willingness to confront the entirety of its past – both positive and negative – is unusual for many institutions. Most organizations prefer to avoid potentially contentious topics, even though confronting one’s history is the only way one can learn from it. Westgate’s refusal to exercise editorial control of my research, however, is entirely consistent with the school’s history. Established as a counter to the more conservative Mennonite educational institutions in the province, and founded by a group of Mennonites from a church congregation known for its liberality, Westgate has resisted impulses (whether from without or within) to rein in its nonconformity. As seen in these pages, that resistance has met with varying degrees of success over the years. Nonetheless, the impulse first demonstrated by the school’s founders remains.

It is curious that there is, as yet, no national history of private schools into which the history of Westgate can be

placed. McDonough, Memon, and Mintz come the closest with their recent history of Jewish, Catholic, and Islamic schooling in Canada. They note that fundamentalist, evangelical Protestant schools have “been reluctant to allow scholars to enter them, study them, and criticize them. As a result there is not nearly enough scholarship available on these schools.”¹ Faith-based schools (like Westgate), they observe, are “incarnations of the hopes that religious groups have for their futures.”² Private schools have a reputation as institutions of the elite, but there exists a wide diversity of such schools – particularly from province to province. The Manitoba government funded sixty-four independent schools in 2014, which included Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, Mennonite, Hutterite, and non-religious schools; an additional forty-six independent schools in the province went unfunded that year.³ Westgate is thus one of many such educational institutions. Its origins are perhaps unique, however: the school was founded from a conservative desire to pass on a particular language, culture, and religion, but it was formed in liberal reaction against the existing Manitoba Mennonite schools at the time (Mennonite Collegiate Institute and Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute).

Westgate, initially known as Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI), was founded in 1958 in a very different location from its present site. Its mission was revised over the years, as tensions between the liberal religious origins of the school and the demands of church congregations and parents

1 McDonough, Memon, and Mintz, eds., *Discipline, Devotion, and Dissent*, 7.

2 *Ibid.*, 17.

3 Government of Manitoba, Education and Training, “Schools in Manitoba: Non-Funded Independent Schools,” www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/schools/ind/non_fund_ind.html, and “Schools in Manitoba: Funded Independent Schools,” http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/schools/ind/funded_ind.html. An additional 689 schools are part of the public school system in the province. Government of Manitoba, Education and Advanced Learning, *Schools in Manitoba – Écoles du Manitoba 2013/14* (Winnipeg: Government of Manitoba, 2013), 11.

who were financial supporters of the institution were worked out. The significance of the German language waned, and the role of the supporting churches was strengthened. The school expanded in the 1970s and '80s, and its debt mushroomed under the high interest rates of the time. The Westgate ladies' auxiliary was largely responsible for eliminating this enormous debt. Whatever the facilities or financial situation, students at the school explored music and the arts; they participated in sports, outdoor education, and study tours; they studied and socialized. As at other schools in the province at the time, staff at Westgate experienced the increasing professionalization of their work, and (despite occasional setbacks) revelled in the religious and intellectual freedom that their workplace offered them.

Historian John Roth observes that “themes of identity, crisis, and renewal are familiar motifs in the biblical story.”⁴ They are certainly key motifs in the Westgate story as well. The school, for example, has an increasingly non-Mennonite student body and has adjusted its governance structure in response. Westgate is not the only Mennonite educational institution to have faced such a shift in student composition. Bluffton University (Ohio), affiliated with Mennonite Church USA, has had a largely non-Mennonite student body almost since its beginnings in 1899. Like Westgate, Bluffton survives “because of its own creative utilization of a progressive Anabaptist approach” to Mennonite education, forging its own path between the two extremes of secularism and evangelicalism.⁵

In keeping with the independent nature of its founders, Westgate was governed initially by an educational society rather than by churches. With increasing financial demands and decreasing involvement of society members, the govern-

4 Roth, *Teaching That Transforms*, 211.

5 Bush, *Dancing with the Kobzar*, 19.

ing structure of the school changed. In 2008–9, the school’s constitution was revised to bring it into alignment with actual practice. At the time, virtually all board members were chosen from the thirteen church congregations that were the financial supporters of the school. Approximately half of Westgate students, however, did not participate in those churches. Representation on the board of these non-church students was desired “while still ensuring that all Board members are in agreement with the aims and objectives of the school.”⁶ The board was simultaneously reduced in size. The Mennonite Educational Society of Manitoba Incorporation Act (1960, re-enacted 1990) was accordingly repealed in 2010; the school is now governed by the province’s Corporations Act.

Debates about identity and renewal are fruitful and necessary for any faith-based institution. Faith-based schools like Westgate persist because of a willingness of Canadians to grapple with “fundamental questions about what it means to be both a good member of the faith and a good Canadian.”⁷ Such grappling can, as we have seen, lead to disagreement and conflict, as members of the same religious community or educational institution may answer these questions differently. Yet the “communal deliberation that results from the conflict of diverse perspectives on educational options can be a powerful source of democratic education, both for the community’s children and adolescents and for the community as a whole.”⁸ Such debates and conflicts, education professor Avi Mintz suggests, “may allow community members to revisit and renew their religious identity and practice and ... sends a powerful message to the school’s

6 Governance structure committee report, annual general meeting, November 22, 2010.

7 Mintz, “Diversity and Deliberation in Faith-Based Schools,” 240.

8 Ibid.

students about the value of communal deliberation and dissent.”⁹ The ultimate outcome of such debate is the “opportunity to use schools to undergo conscious social reproduction, rather than replication”¹⁰ – an outcome that should resonate strongly with Mennonites, given their emphasis on voluntarism and the “priesthood of all believers.”¹¹ Mintz reminds us that “there are ample conflicts, tensions, and disagreements that arise in every faith-based school.”¹² Westgate has had its fair share. Yet Westgate supporters continue to possess the “necessary idealism” requested of them by the school’s founders, in order that they may continue to “inspire and empower students to live as people of God.”¹³

9 Ibid., 241.

10 Ibid., 247.

11 For details of the latter, see Harold S. Bender and Marlin E. Miller, “Priesthood of All Believers,” *GAMEO*, 1989, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Priesthood_of_All_Believers&oldid=93326.

12 Mintz, “Diversity and Deliberation in Faith-Based Schools,” 245.

13 Westgate mission statement.

Appendix A

Principals of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate

DATE	PRINCIPAL
1958–65	Frank Neufeld
1965–66	Victor Peters
1966–72	William Kruger
1972–79	John Enns
1979–81	D. Leonard Wiebe
1981–91	Erwin Strempler
1991–2001	Reg Klassen
2001–6	Gail Schellenberg
2006–7	Ed Neufeld
2007–18	Bob Hummelt

Sources: "Education," typescript, 1982, courtesy of Helene Riesen; *Westgate Perspective* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2006); *Westgate Perspective* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2006); 30th anniversary publication, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986.

Appendix B

Chairs of the Board of Directors of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate

DATE	BOARD CHAIR
1958–59	John Peters and Peter Enns
1959–60	Ernest Enns
1960–63	Peter Enns
1963–64	Ernest Enns
1964–67	Peter Enns
1967–68	Heidi (Hedwig) Redekop
1968–72	Jacob Dyck
1972–73	John Dyck and Jacob Dyck
1973–74	Jacob Dyck
1974–80	Dave Epp
1980–82	John Lohrenz
1982–87	Rudy Regehr
1987–89	Henry Dyck
1989–90	Alex Janzen
1990–91	Peter J. Priess
1991–94	Gerald Gerbrandt
1995–98	Terry Dick
1998–99	Reinhard Penner
1999–2002	Calvin Friesen
2002–7	Richard Klassen
2007–10	Colleen Braun-Janzen
2010–13	Tom Penner
2013–16	David Epp
2016–18	Brad Janzen

Sources: "Education," typescript, 1982, courtesy of Helene Riesen; *Westgate Perspective* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2006); *Westgate Perspective* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2006); 30th anniversary publication, MHA, XXII B4 Westgate Collegiate Institute, Catalogs Vol. 986; Minutes of board of directors meetings.

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Using both documentary materials and oral history methodologies, Janis Thiessen has produced a splendid institutional history of a private Mennonite high school in Winnipeg, Manitoba – Westgate Mennonite Collegiate. This volume undertakes a careful, historical examination of the school's history, admittedly by a sympathetic insider (alumna and former teacher), and makes a significant contribution to the history of ethnic and religious private schools in Canada.

"[The Board of Directors] was interested in casting Westgate's history before a critical eye, where it could be placed in a context that would inform not only the wider Westgate community but also scholars and readers of independent faith schools in Canada. Dr. Janis Thiessen offered that critical eye, belying the notion that a former student and staff member would not be able to fairly evaluate the historical record. Dr. Thiessen appreciates the nuances of the classroom, the staffroom, and the school boardroom that give meaning to the meeting minutes and the recorded personal interviews she has used in her research."

BOB HUMMELT

Principal, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,
from the Foreword



Dr. Janis Thiessen is Professor of History, and Associate Director of the Oral History Centre, at the University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has previously authored *Snacks: A Canadian Food History* (University of Manitoba Press, 2017), *Not Talking Union: An Oral History of North American Mennonites and Labour* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), and *Manufacturing Mennonites: Work and Religion in Post-War Manitoba* (University of Toronto Press, 2013). She is also the project lead for the Manitoba Food History Project and its Food History Truck.

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