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Recent German Immigration to New Brunswick

When a wave of immigrants landed in North America, there were usually very definite, clearly identifiable reasons why these newcomers undertook such a drastic step as to break the age-old bonds with country, customs and language, to entrust their fate to the uncertainties of an ocean voyage and later to a new life in an unknown land. It was not only a thrust from Europe but also a need in and lure from the North American continent, i.e., active recruitment in Europe to attract desirable settlers, which brought immigrants to the New World. This was true in the early history of Canada, and remains so today.

When the British wanted to create a counterbalance to the Catholic French presence in the Maritime Provinces of Canada, they founded Halifax, but the British colonists who arrived in 1749 to settle the land and supply the necessary provisions for the military were unsuccessful.¹ Governor Cornwallis suggested instead that Swiss and German Protestants be recruited who had such a good reputation and who had been credited with success in the development of Pennsylvania by Lord Halifax and Governor Shirley of Massachusetts.² By using an agent, John Dick, the English recruited about two thousand Germans and brought them to Nova Scotia. Most of them did not have the funds for their own passage, but could pay it off by working for the British in road and fortification construction. After three years they founded the town of Lunenburg (or Lüneburg), which was for many years an almost purely German community.

About twenty years later, still in the midst of the Seven Years' War, the British again made efforts to attract settlers to fill the vacant lands and marshes,³ from which the French Acadians had been expelled upon their refusal to swear allegiance to the British King. Rather than encourage people to settle directly, as in the case of Lunenburg, British government officials opted to grant land to companies which in turn were responsible for settling it.⁴ The promise of land attracted a number of settlers from Pennsylvania who had come to North America to begin a

new life, only to find that good inexpensive agricultural land was becoming scarce after the middle of the eighteenth century.⁵

There were several other larger groups of immigrants who came to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.⁶ Let it suffice to say, however, that the desire of immigrants to come to Canada, may it be for religious, economic, or political reasons, was almost always accompanied by an equal desire in North America to have these settlers.

At the end of World War II Canada became very attractive for a large number of impoverished refugees. After Canada opened up its borders to German nationals in the fall of 1950, almost half a million Germans came to Canada over a period of about twenty years.⁷ With the German economic recovery and Canada's restrictive immigration laws of the 1970s, this flood was reduced to a trickle. Over the last few years German-speaking immigrants have again been coming to Canada, and to New Brunswick in particular, but for very different reasons than before. The Maritimes were left behind in the general development of Canada. Although this is not a matter which the local population would readily acknowledge, it is nevertheless true that many of the young and enterprising people, those from farms, and professional and skilled people have been leaving the province for the last sixty years, abandoning those who are content with things the way they were and are.⁸ The result is that unemployment is high, wages are low, and land is relatively inexpensive.

New Brunswick, which would cover about two-thirds of the area of West Germany, has a population of a little more than six hundred thousand. It is of little surprise then that people from the German-speaking countries view this land as a veritable heaven.

Whereas immigration is a federal matter, provinces have some influence as to the type of newcomer whom they accept into their territory.⁹ For example, industrial Ontario might want to attract different immigrants than those desired by New Brunswick.

For some time now the province of New Brunswick, through its Department of Commerce and Technology, has been actively promoting this province in Europe in an effort to attract what is called the "business immigrant." This does not mean that immigrants interested in tourism or farming are not welcome, but it does mean that the Department of Commerce and Technology is actively recruiting because of the special needs of this area. This activity is the result of the realization that industrial development in New Brunswick is limited and that input is needed. It is part of a larger effort to develop this province industrially and economically.

The attraction to set up a business in New Brunswick is the promise of support to the venture up to a maximum of 50 percent of a total of \$150,000. It is clearly intended to attract the small businessman, whose trade employs the largest number of people in relation to the dollar value invested.

Germany does not view this loss of tradesmen and entrepreneurs to Canada as a brain drain, as does Canada when qualified people move to the United States, but as an investment in the future. As Tony Lampart

of the New Brunswick Department of Commerce and Technology points out: "Germans are outward-looking. In order to prosper they must make sure that Germans settle outside. This guarantees that German equipment will be purchased at a later stage, because Germans have a tendency to stay with German equipment." Particularly the government of Baden-Württemberg holds the view that every German entrepreneur abroad means orders in the future. There are thus not only no hindrances to leaving the country but there exist powerful reasons to get away from the pressure and fierce competition of an economy that has been saturated for years and can only expand outwardly. In Canada these businessmen can concentrate on their strengths and develop more easily.

Although business prospects are important for these recent immigrants, other factors play a significant role in their decision to settle in Canada. About half of the business projects have a political component; namely, fear of creeping socialism, increasing power of the unions and above all, fear of a Russian move into western Europe. As people of some means they are not prepared to wait for the last plane to leave, as one immigrant interviewed pointed out, "which will only be for the big shots anyway."

A very large component in the decision to come to New Brunswick is the different lifestyle there. Whereas many prospective immigrants realized that they would do better economically in British Columbia and Ontario because of the better infrastructure, they also recognized that living in the industrialized area of Ontario, the "Golden Horseshoe" around the western part of Lake Ontario, would not be so much different from living in Germany. The rural setting, the wide open spaces, the seemingly endless forests, the deserted beaches, the tranquillity and pace of life; in short, the quality of life in New Brunswick was and is a powerful attraction to Germans who are harried by an overpopulated land, deafened by jets at tree level and affected by every pollutant imaginable. These immigrants feel like all the ones before them that there is no future for their children in their homeland.

Whether these newcomers decided to come on their own or under the auspices of the Department of Commerce and Technology, they visited Canada on one or more occasions previous to their settlement. There were some preconceived notions about New Brunswick but in general these immigrants were fairly well informed. There is a marked difference between these recent arrivals and those who came during the mass exodus of the 1950s and early 1960s, the main one being money. They do not come hat in hand as displaced persons but as self-assured settlers who know they have something to contribute and that they are wanted. By far the largest percentage of these immigrants is successful and stays in New Brunswick. Their investment here goes into the tens of millions of dollars. In the following, several of the recent immigrants will be used as case histories to illustrate the above general remarks:

1. Heinz and Helga Skiba¹⁰ from northern Germany gave three main reasons for wanting to come to Canada: The uncertainty in Germany

regarding the environment and possible military or other catastrophe; an unsatisfactory, office-oriented work situation for Mr. Skiba as an engineer, and the lack of opportunity to live and shape their lives as individuals in a mass society. The German dream of a little farm on which to spend one's leisure time, to plant a few vegetables, to have a few horses, etc., is realizable only for the wealthy few. Mr. Skiba had his profession, he wanted to change his lifestyle. At the trade fair in Hannover he came into contact with a representative of the government of New Brunswick, the Department of Commerce and Technology. He was deeply disappointed at the news that Canada and New Brunswick would not accept him as an engineer, but only as a businessman setting up his own company. After a great deal of soul-searching he decided to visit the eastern part of Canada with the vague idea of perhaps establishing himself in beekeeping, which was his hobby in Germany. He discovered that only two honey companies were set up in New Brunswick and that 80 percent of the honey was imported from outside the province. He decided that this was enough of an opening to attempt his business venture. Mr. and Mrs. Skiba bought a large parcel of land in a remote part of the province and built their dream house. Since no financial support from the Department of Commerce and Technology was forthcoming, at least during these first crucial years, they had to make do with their own resources. There were many unforeseen difficulties, one of them being supplies. Whereas the Canadian beekeeper has to build his own boxes for the hives, there are thirty-seven different kinds of boxes ready for the taking in Germany. Wild animals, namely bears, ripped apart twenty beehives in the first year of operation. There were difficulties with the language and selling their honey in large enough quantities to make a living. It occurred to them one day that no one in the Maritimes seemed to make use of a by-product of honey-making, i.e., beeswax. They embraced with enthusiasm the old Bavarian tradition of crafting candles and wax ornaments. At first they simply copied Bavarian designs, but now they incorporate more and more local motifs, dyes and materials. The Skibas blend beautifully into the New Brunswick craft scene, which boasts the highest number of artisans and craftspeople on a per capita basis in all of Canada. Mr. Skiba is full of praise for the various agencies of the provincial government, notably for Lampart, and New Brunswickers in general, for their advice and assistance, although it is only recently that he has received financial assistance under the business development program.

2. A project of quite a different magnitude was initiated by Dr. Hans Westner and his wife, Dr. Dorothea Westner.¹¹ Her Ph.D. is in social work and his in brewing. Their dream was to set up a brewery, but since there were already eight hundred of them in Bavaria alone, where they came from, there was no chance in Germany. Besides nobody, not even a Ph.D. in brewing, can crack the age-old barriers of the guilds, which only allow master brewers to brew.

Although Canada has its own large breweries, they use chemicals to

hasten the brewing process and increase the shelf life of the beer. Dr. Westner intended to produce his beer according to the Bavarian purity law of the year 1519 which permits no additives and preservatives. The incentives to come to New Brunswick were government grants and the absence of a small brewery of this kind in the province. The push factors from Germany were the stresses of business competition and daily life. Because of the large initial investment needed—in excess of \$150,000—Dr. Westner had to apply to a different program, a federal one. Although promises of up to 50 percent government participation were given, this was reduced to 25 percent because of austerity measures introduced shortly before submission of the application and after a great deal of preparatory work and money had been invested. Dr. Westner was forced to seek financial support at this late date. Since banks and other lending institutions considered the production of beer too risky a venture, the dream of a family brewery was shattered when a partner had to be taken on. Dr. Westner was also critical of the way in which the reduced grant was paid out. It was made available only in stages after different officials such as the development officer, the evaluation officer, the claims officer and the audit officer had become involved. The last payment was made thirty days after commercial production had commenced. The value of the brewery is estimated at about one million dollars.

3. Mr. and Mrs. Esser¹¹ came to Canada with four of their children in order to farm. The difference in land prices in Germany and Canada provided the necessary push-pull momentum. Mr. Esser owned some land in Germany. The rest was rented to run his riding stable with forty-four horses, his farm with twenty-five milk cows and fifteen head of cattle. His rented land was becoming smaller and smaller because the owner was parceling it off and selling it as building sites. Mr. Esser and his family would have had to abandon his small farm in any case, in order to set up somewhere else, but a larger farm could have run into a million deutsche marks. In this state of indecision he saw an advertisement in a farm newspaper about farms for sale in New Brunswick for a fraction of the cost. He came to see on his own but could not decide, so on a second trip he and his wife made plans to sell their farm in Germany and buy a larger one in New Brunswick. There were no political reasons, or fears of war or the "Russians," but it was simply felt that Germany was getting too small, too expensive and too hectic. They were like many other immigrants under the impression that they could make a living through farming, a mistake which they realized all too soon, especially since they only had enough money to buy ten dairy cows and a cream quota rather than a lucrative and expensive milk quota. Mr. Esser had considered resurrecting his old profession as a baker as a fallback position if things did not work out as planned. He began experimenting with North American varieties of flour to bake bread in his wife's kitchen stove. His products—rye bread, white bread, buns, tortes and pastries—were so good that he soon had to invest in a pizza oven. Demand has grown in such a way that he had two modern

bake ovens shipped over from Germany. His bread is baked in the European tradition without additives. It never occurred to him to ask for help from the government.

4. Mr. and Mrs. Marks¹³ came to New Brunswick with their now three teenage children seven years ago. They were looking for a change in lifestyle and are now living on a farm. In Germany Mr. Marks had worked himself up to a very responsible position in an importing and exporting company with an annual turnover worth billions. His personal budget was one billion United States dollars. Since the company was doing business around the globe, its activities never really shut down but simply switched from Hamburg to New York, from there to Singapore, from where Mr. Marks picked up the strings again when he entered his office in Hamburg and turned on the computers. After two colleagues died unexpectedly on the job and a holiday was ruined on account of unstable market conditions which caused him to stay in his office instead of going on vacation, the decision was made that something had to change. To work for a smaller firm or a bank was not a realistic alternative, for people with a certain expertise are channeled into certain positions. There was the possibility of retiring for a few years or building something up as a family venture. Competition and land prices even in Ireland, which they considered for a while, ruled out any such "retirement" or "new project" in Europe. Because of their previous knowledge of the English language—e.g., Mrs. Marks is a qualified translator in English—only English-speaking countries were seriously considered as their future home. Although Australia, New Zealand and the United States fit into that category they were rejected either because of their distance from Europe or their lack of social protection. Canada was selected because of its good reputation with regard to its ecology, international relations and its basics in social services. Its relative proximity to Europe, at least of its Maritime Provinces, was also an advantage, for the Marksés did not want to lose contact with Europe completely. Ontario was rejected since it seemed too much like Europe and the Prairie Provinces were too extensive and limitless. New Brunswick was chosen because the people were friendlier than elsewhere and the Marksés sensed, not just on account of the name, an old-country spirit and flavor. They bought a farm as a rural residence and to be self-reliant with regard to food, not as a means of earning a living. Mr. Marks had been granted landed-immigrant status on the basis of his managerial and entrepreneurial talents and his willingness to start a business. His plan to build a greenhouse and go into the sale of plants, shrubs and trees was dropped because the market was saturated. He then became a co-founder of a window manufacturing company which continues to be very successful but from which he withdrew for personal reasons. The Marksés are integrated members of the community and are still working their farm, teaching their children important lessons about nature, the spirit of cooperation and contribution, the work ethic and the value of education. They are still actively searching for a project in which they as a family can become involved.

5. Roland and Annemarie DeBerti¹⁴ came from Switzerland. They had sold their wholesale and retail pet business in Thun in order to set up a model farm in New Brunswick. The availability of inexpensive land, the underdeveloped state of the province, the possibility of making a positive impact and the geographical position and condition of land close to the ocean were strong pull factors for coming to New Brunswick. The push factors were to some extent personal, but they included overcrowding and the high price of land in Europe.

Because of their background and education the DeBertis were eminently qualified to contemplate such a project. Their readiness to experiment with new approaches and to expend effort and money, their insight into the interdependency and interrelationship of different life forms and the balances they strike, their eagerness to serve others and to give them direction by way of this venture, yet at the same time their recognition of the special make-up of the area in which they lived, all these made this couple a prize acquisition for this area.

When arsonists set fire to the one-and-one-half-century-old house which they had wanted to renovate after their arrival from Switzerland, they built a new one which architecturally blended into the area but which contained the latest in ecologically-sound amenities. A large lean-to greenhouse provided almost year-round fresh vegetables. They shipped in a new kind of purebred cattle and milk cows. They had sheep, goats, pigs, ducks, geese, ordinary chickens and those that are disagreeable to rats, and due to the variety of natural fertilizers at their disposal, a beautiful garden with fruit trees, expertly pruned, and cross-pollinated by their own bees. They had a large pond dug out which they were planning to stock with fish. The system was marvellously interrelated. They were almost completely self-sufficient with respect to the everyday needs of life. Excess food such as the different kinds of cheeses, eggs, smoked or fresh meats, honey, etc., was sold. Although the project came to an untimely end when Mr. DeBerti was killed in a hunting accident in the fall of 1986, it showed, nonetheless, the feasibility of raising certain types of cattle in the Maritime climate; cattle that have a higher percentage of meat than other types, and it showed above all that good techniques can make farming productive once again in the Maritimes.

Although the provincial and federal governments stipulate that immigrants must have the necessary entrepreneurial skills as well as financial means to apply them to self-generated projects, the attraction of qualified persons certainly has priority, as financing can be secured elsewhere if necessary. Many immigrants had to change their projects, on the basis of which they were admitted, when they were confronted with the realities of the new country, but the expectation that a certain type of person would be successful has been fulfilled. These new arrivals are contributing in tangible ways to the society which they entered, not just in terms of wealth but also in the quality of life, bringing over traditions from their European homelands, adapting them to their new environment and making a needed contribution. Whether

these contributions can be sustained remains to be seen, but there seems to be a wider acceptance of them, not limited to linguistic groupings.

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Notes

¹ Winthrop Pickard Bell, *The "Foreign Protestants" and the Settlement of Nova Scotia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 9-12.

² Bell, 11.

³ Proclamation by Governor Lawrence of Nova Scotia of October 1758 that the time was right "for the peopling and cultivating . . . the lands vacated by the French as every other part of this valuable province" (Public Record Office, C.O. 217, XVI, p. 311).

⁴ Bell, 9.

⁵ Christopher Moore, *The Loyalists* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1984), 15.

⁶ Hartmut Froeschle, *Die Deutschen in Kanada* (Wien: Ekart Schriften, 1987), 10-34, gives a concise summary of these groups.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-32 (the net gain due to remigration to Europe was about 250,000).

⁸ The Maritime Provinces have only recently been able to arrest the net loss in the population that has persisted for many years.

⁹ Tony Lampart, Project Executive, Department of Commerce and Technology, Government of New Brunswick, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, Canada, E3B 5H1. Much of the following information regarding New Brunswick's activities to attract the "business-immigrants" and its stipulation for persons to qualify as such comes from this source.

¹⁰ Heinz and Helga Skiba (interview 1988), Petitcodiac, New Brunswick, Canada, E0A 2H0. All persons interviewed have given permission to publish their names and addresses.

¹¹ Dr. Dorothea and Dr. Hans Westner (interview 1988), 103 Henderson Avenue, Riverview, New Brunswick, Canada, E1B 4B6.

¹² Hans Esser (interview 1988), Baie Verte, New Brunswick, Canada, E0A 2K0.

¹³ Günter Marks (interview 1988), RR#3, Port Elgin, New Brunswick, E0A 2K0.

¹⁴ Roland and Annemarie DeBerti (interviews and meetings in 1985 and 1986), former residence: Fort Road, Port Elgin, New Brunswick, Canada, E0A 2K0. See also the article by J. A. Burnett, "Self-Sufficient Homestead," *Atlantic Insight* (September 1986), 33-35.