

German Canadians as Settler Colonists

Transatlantic Migration and German-Indigenous Encounters on the Canadian Prairies, 1890-1940

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1 Abstract

This PhD project explores German-Indigenous encounters on the Canadian prairies from 1890 to 1940. Therewith, it responds to calls to include settler colonial perspectives in a changing historiography of German Canadians. So far ethnic histories on German Canadians have not studied German Canadians as settler colonists. Yet, as this PhD project argues, German Canadians did participate in and benefit from settler colonialism in multifaceted ways. Indigenous removal to reserves made room for German migrants and their homesteads, German priests worked in residential schools, and German migrants were involved in resource extractivism on the Canadian prairies that pushed Indigenous people off the land. German migration to Canada thus created complicities in processes of Indigenous dispossession on different levels. By tracing German-Indigenous interactions in Canada, I seek to bring German settler colonial movements into general discourses on German colonialism, answering calls from Sebastian Conrad, Matthew Fitzpatrick and Peter Monteath for an unbound and interaction focused history of German colonial activity.

2 Research Question

Tracking the history of German migrants in the three prairie provinces Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, my PhD project asks how German migrants encountered and interacted with Indigenous communities, how settler colonial legislation and policies framed these encounters, and in what ways German migrants contributed to—or problematized and addressed—processes of Indigenous dispossession.

3 Hypothesis

Processes of Indigenous dispossession were not only an essential pre-condition for migrants moving to Canada and their success, but German migrants were also directly involved in these settler colonial processes in multifaceted ways.

4 Conceptual Framework

- Settler Colonial Studies as analytical lens
 - Using settler colonialism as an analytical lens, but also as a concept that has to be critically tested and reflected upon in dialogue with the available archival records and materials
- Indigenous Studies and Narratives of Survival
 - Complementing settler colonial theory with Indigenous agency and narratives of survival
 - Applying Brian Burkhart’s concept of “epistemic locality,” emphasizes knowledge from the land and Indigenous perspectives
- Contribution and Impact
 - Addressing gaps in settler colonial studies by contributing empirical historical analysis
 - Challenging colonial narratives and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of German-Indigenous encounters
- Research Objectives
 - Tracing logics of elimination in German-Indigenous encounters
 - Investigating structures of dispossession established or influenced by German Canadians

5 Archival Sources

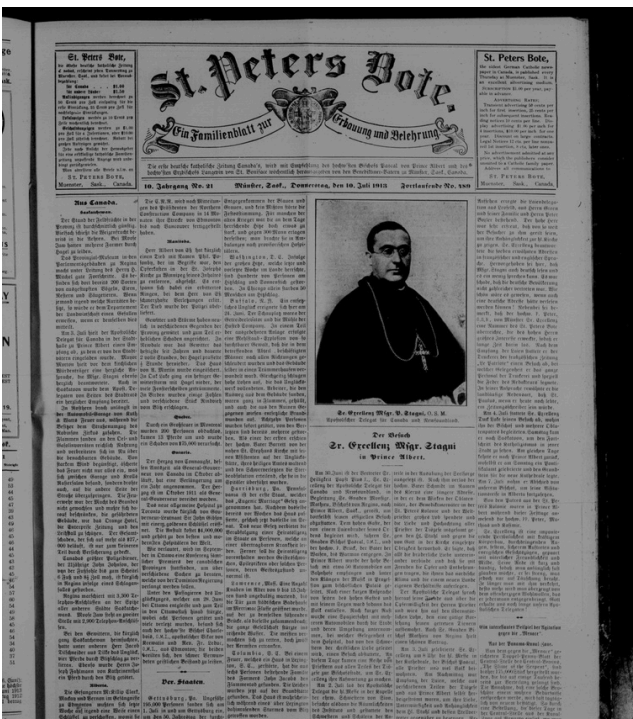
For the first case study on homesteading I will study reports from land companies on German settlements, reports from German embassies, the Canadian Department of Agriculture, the Interior, and Indian Affairs, as well as letters, biographies, oral history interviews, and German-language and English newspapers. The second case study on residential schools uses church and governmental documents, newspapers, letters, and oral history interviews. The third case study on resource extractivism draws from trade documents by the German embassies and consulates, newspaper articles and archival fonds dealing with individual businessmen such as Alfred von Hammerstein and Martin Nordegg.



1909 Canada West Magazine Cover, “Glenbow Archives. Cited in: Selling the Prairie Good Life - Canada's History,” <https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/settlement-immigration/sell-ing-the-prairie-good-life>.



Canadian Pacific Railway Pamphlet. Bundesarchiv 34 R 1505/1. Reichsstelle für das Auswanderungswesen. Auskünfte über Kanada. 1902-1914. Bl. 53-61.



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