



**Mennonite  
Historical  
Society of  
Canada**

NEWS RELEASE

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## **Saskatchewan Historian Receives Award of Excellence**

When the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada wrapped up its meetings at Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim, Sask., on Jan. 22, the freezing rain had started. Dick Braun loaded up the 15-passenger van with people going directly to the airport, but it was too late. The laneway at Shekinah was too slippery and he could not get up the long hill. But no one missed their flight back home. John Reddekopp and Jake Buhler packed as many as possible into their four-wheel drive vehicles for the one-hour trip to Saskatoon and one of them made a second trip.

Twenty people met at Shekinah on the weekend of Jan. 20–22 for these historical society meetings, representing Mennonite museums, archives, educational institutions and provincial historical societies from across the country. After two years of meeting online, the group appreciated making personal connections. The exchange of ideas among these Mennonite historical organizations is invaluable as it encourages inspiration and collaboration.

This year the Award of Excellence went to Leonard Doell, a Mennonite genealogist, oral historian and collector of community knowledge who has written a number of books and articles. He has also researched local Indigenous land claims and has developed invaluable connections with local First Nations communities.

Doell was deeply appreciative of the award and pointed out that he was able to build on what others have done before. He thanked the historical society for their work saying, “Keep up the good work in preserving our history and seeking ways to make it relevant to today’s world.”

Along with other members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Doell was a knowledgeable tour guide as the group visited the original Old Colony Mennonite church in Neuanlage, the museum at Hague, and Stoney Knoll, a place that acknowledges that land sold to Mennonite settlers was actually a reservation of the Young Chippewyan First Nation. The group also stopped in Rosthern to see the former train station where 100 years ago, hundreds of Mennonites arrived from the Soviet Union.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada has been working on two commemorative projects. Over the past year an exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Man., has told the story of the large migration of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico and Paraguay 100 years ago. Thanks to the hard work of curator Andrea Klassen, this exhibit is now being prepared to travel across Canada. It will generally work its way west through 2023 and go to Ontario in 2024.

The other big project happening this summer is commemorating 100 years since thousands of Mennonites arrived in Canada from the Soviet Union. Henry Paetkau, the chair of

this centenary committee was happy to announce that there are nearly 60 people signed up for each of the three legs of the train trip from Quebec City to Abbotsford, B.C. Generous donations have allowed them to subsidize about 30 young adults on the trip.

“This is very exciting, and it will impact the dynamics of the tour,” said Paetkau. “There will be some young adults on each leg of the tour and that will enrich the conversations.”

Other on-going projects supported by the Canadian historical society are the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) and the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). Various Mennonite archives are also work at digitizing periodicals and other records to make them available to the public.

The executive committee of MHSC includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; Bruce Guenther, fifth member.

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Conrad Stoesz, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, presents the Award of Excellence to Leonard Doell. (Photo by Graham Schellenberg)



The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada met at Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim, Sask., Jan. 20–22, 2023. (MHSC photo)



Leonard Doell (right) tells the story of Stoney Knoll, where Mennonites, Lutherans and the Young Chippewyan agreed to work together to redress the wrongs of the past. Listening are (from left) Jeremy Wiebe, Jon Isaak and Alf Redekopp. (Photo by Barb Draper)



The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada stopped to see the former train station platform in Rosthern, the final destination of the first Mennonite immigrants from the Soviet Union 100 years ago. Standing on the caboose is Conrad Stoesz, president of MHSC. (Photo by Barb Draper)