



Mennonite  
Historical  
Society of  
Canada

NEWS RELEASE

Feb. 18, 2024

## **Annual meetings recognized significant accomplishments and addressed theme of change**

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada held its annual meetings at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) in Winnipeg from January 18 to 20, 2024. In spite of a polar vortex that created chaos for some travellers, board members gathered from across the country to hear reports of the past year and to explore ideas for future projects.

The Society's board meeting was held on Friday, January 19, and the annual general meeting was held on Saturday, January 20. Each member of the society gave a report that included some accomplishments of the past year along with challenges they are currently facing. It was an opportunity to be inspired by and to encourage other members. A theme of change emerged over the course of the meetings. There are changes in our Mennonite churches and organizations and the question of how to respond to these changes produced a lot of discussion. A committee was formed to examine this in greater detail and to develop ways to reach out to the larger constituency.

The Mennonite Archival Information Database committee reported that they have welcomed their 16<sup>th</sup> partner to the MAID team. This newest partner is from Neuland, Paraguay, and is the second partner from Paraguay.

A highlight of the AGM was the MHSC Award of Excellence, which is given each year to a person who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research, writing, organization, or the dissemination of Mennonite historical knowledge. This year's award was presented to Ken Reddig. He is an archivist, historian, educator, and visionary who began his career in archives in 1979 with his appointment at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS), Winnipeg. He is a creative thinker who has a passion for history and storytelling that he has used to the benefit of the Mennonite Historical Society and the wider Mennonite constituency. Ken commented that "one of the funnest things I ever did was be an archivist." He acted as a mentor to current board members Conrad Stoesz and Alf Redekopp of the Mennonite Heritage Archives and Aileen Friesen of the University of Winnipeg, something he is especially proud of.

A major project of MHSC in 2023 was the *Memories of Migration: Russlaender 100* tour, organized by the Russlaender Centenary Committee. This event was a cross-country train tour, commemorating the initial journey taken by the Mennonite Russlaender immigrants from

the Soviet Union to Quebec City and as far as British Columbia from 1923 to 1930. The tour in July 2023 began in Quebec City and made stops in Montreal, QC, Waterloo, ON, Winnipeg, MB, Saskatoon, SK, Didsbury, AB, and Abbotsford, BC. At each stop, local historical societies planned events and concerts celebrating the faith of the newcomers, remembering the loss of their former communities, memorializing the challenges of resettlement, and acknowledging race and displacement in Canadian history. A documentary of the centennial is being planned.

Along with the tour and celebrations the Russlaender Centenary Committee established the Russlaender Remembrance Fund through Mennonite Central Committee Canada. MCC was originally formed to help Soviet Mennonites in 1920, so this fund has a historical connection to MCC's beginnings. A total of \$103,000 was raised for the general fund and for three special projects: MCC's Indigenous Neighbours program, MCC's Ukraine program, and MCC's International Refugee Settlement program.

Board members were invited to attend several events happening outside of meeting times. One of these was the 2024 John & Margaret Friesen Lectures, held on the CMU campus on January 18. This year's event featured Dr. Nataliya Venger, Professor of History and Chair of the World History Department at Dnipropetrovsk National University, Ukraine, titled, "Revisiting the Mennonite Experience in Ukraine."

A Friday morning drive through Winnipeg brought the group to the Manitoba Museum, where they were given a behind-the-scenes look at the finer workings of the museum. This was an enriching experience, especially for the museum curators and archivists in the group.

Friday evening the Mennonite Heritage Archives hosted an opening of Alvin Pauls's art exhibit entitled "From Here to There: A Retrospective in Paint, Clay, Glass." On display were a variety of paintings, murals, stained glass, and ceramic pieces representing over 60 years of Pauls's work. A series of eight large stained-glass panels was installed in a prominent location in the main gallery.

Board members agree that highlights of the yearly meetings are the connections made over a meal, the shared learning experiences, and the spontaneous conversations that arise, which are often the beginnings of a new project!

The executive committee of MHSC for 2024 includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; and Bruce Guenther, fifth member.

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Ken Reddig (left) receives the Award of Excellence from Conrad Stoesz, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. (Photo by Bert Friesen)



Board members and participants in the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's annual meetings, January 19–20, 2024. (MHSC photo)