



**Mennonite  
Historical  
Society of  
Canada**

NEWS RELEASE

Feb. 5, 2025

## **Award of Excellence presented to two Ontario historians**

In the opening moments of the annual general meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Brian Froese challenged attendees to “test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good” (1 Thes. 5:21). As historians, we examine the historical record, we sift through the material, choosing what to remember and what to forget, and ask the question “but was it so?” “We are in the memory business and we test and hold fast, as best we can, to what is true.”

The Society’s annual gathering was held at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo from January 16 to 18, 2025. A number of committees met on Thursday and Friday in preparation for the AGM on Saturday, January 18. Society members reported on their work in researching, preserving, and telling Canadian Mennonite stories, and shared their successes and challenges in the process.

Every year, MHSC presents their Award of Excellence to a person who has made significant contributions to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research, writing, organization, or the dissemination of Mennonite historical knowledge. This year, the award was presented to two worthy recipients. Linda Huebert Hecht was cited “for her contributions in research, writing, and archival preservation.” Through her work she has furthered understanding of the histories of Mennonites in Canada and of Anabaptist women. Fred Lichti received his award “for his dedication to Amish history in Canada.” Through his volunteerism and work as a pastor, he has represented this history to numerous Amish, Mennonite and public audiences. He is known as an instigator of, and collaborator on, historical projects. Both recipients thanked the Society for this recognition and spoke of the relationships they had built while working on these projects.

An ongoing project of MHSC is the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, which last year had 394,000 active users engage with the site. Another project is the book *Mennonites in Canada, 1970–2020*, which is being written by Brian Froese and Laureen Harder-Gissing.

The past two years have been filled with a variety of commemorations and anniversary celebrations. The cross-country Russlaender 100 Tour of 2023 marked 100 years since the first migration to Canada of Russlaender Mennonites. The year 2024 marked 100 years since the Russlaender came to Ontario. Also in 2024, Manitoba celebrated the 150th anniversary of Mennonites arriving in the province, and the Mennonite Heritage Village celebrated its 60th anniversary. The *Leaving Canada* exhibit was created to commemorate the migration of

Canadian Mennonites to Latin America that began in 1922. It travelled across the country in 2023 and 2024. It was noted that after a busy season, it's okay to take a breath, relax, and come back next year refreshed. And so, there's a pause, with time to rest and savour the joy of celebration.

MHSC gatherings are also learning times. David G. Neufeld led a tour of some key historic sites in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, sharing information and stories of prominent Mennonites who once lived in the area. The tour ended at First Hmong Mennonite Church, who welcomed their guests with a traditional Hmong dinner prepared by church members. Two speakers shared moving stories about why they are Mennonite. It was a highlight for all the visitors.

The evening finished with a visit to Waterloo Kitchener United Mennonite Church for a service commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the Anabaptist movement, which began on January 21, 1525.

On Friday, Society members experienced more of the range of Ontario Mennonite history by touring the Mennonite Archives of Ontario and the 1850s Brubacher House Museum. One highlight was viewing a newly restored Froschauer Bible, published in 1531, at the Archives.

MHSC members also attended the annual Bechtel lecture by Karl Koop, professor of history and theology at Canadian Mennonite University, on the topic of "Anabaptist Beginnings and the Stories We Tell."

The volume of work being done across the country to tell Mennonite stories is impressive. Seeing or holding a historic artifact inspires awe and reverence and brings depth and richness to the stories we tell. This is the work of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, to test and hold fast, as best we can, to what is true, both for the present and in the future.

The executive committee of MHSC for 2025 includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; and Bruce Guenther, fifth member.

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Board members at the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's annual general meeting, January 18, 2025.

Seated in front is the MHSC executive: Laureen Harder-Gissing, Jeremy Wiebe, Linda Klassen, Conrad Stoesz (missing, Bruce Guenther). Standing, left to right: Sara Dyck, John Reddekopp, Carina Gallardo, Alf Redekopp, David Neufeldt, Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Katie Harder, Graham Schellenberg, Graeme Unrau, Andrew Klassen-Brown, David Y. Neufeld, David G. Neufeld, Lucille Marr, Brian Froese, Aileen Friesen, Richard Thiessen, Jake Buhler.



Mennonite Historical Society of Canada president Conrad Stoesz, left, with 2025 Award of Excellence recipients Linda Huebert Hecht and Fred Lichti.