

Mennonite Historical Society Launches New Projects

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC), hosted by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, held its annual meeting on January 22, 2011 at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon.



Esther Epp-Tiessen

The board approved two new multi-year initiatives in its deliberations. The first is the writing of a history of Mennonite Central Committee Canada, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2013. The Society has contracted with Esther Epp-Tiessen of Winnipeg to write the history of this remarkable organization. MCC Canada's work in international relief and in a wide variety of Canadian projects is well known within and outside the Mennonite community. However the ability of widely disparate Mennonite groups to work together in 1963 was not a foregone conclusion. This history will provide a fascinating opportunity to explore the story of an organization that has come to symbolize "Mennonite" for many Canadians. Funding for the project will be shared by MCC Canada and the Historical Society. Ken Reddig chairs the project steering committee on behalf of MHSC, and will take leadership in fundraising for it.

The Society also approved creation of a genealogical website that will give particular attention to digitizing primary source documents for display, with transliteration and translation as required. The site will provide one standardized internet source for Mennonite-related genealogical data in Canada. Most of the provincial Mennonite historical societies have already endorsed the venture. The first step will be fundraising for creation of the necessary software.

Two "Awards of Excellence" were presented to persons who have made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research and/or writing. The late Dick Epp (1927-2009) was a longtime leader of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, and edited its *Historian* for eleven years. He wrote extensively on Mennonite life in Saskatchewan. Esther Patkau has written family histories, as well as histories of Rosthern Junior College and First Mennonite Church (Saskatoon). She has led workshops on memoir-writing, and has helped to translate and transliterate many older German-language documents.

Prior to the board meetings, members enjoyed a tour of the Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, including a heritage home in Blumenheim. Friday evening, January 21, the board joined the Saskatchewan Society's program that featured Ruth Derksen Siemens' presentation on letters to Canada from Stalin's Russian Gulag, as well as her film, *Through the Red Gate*. The "awards of excellence" were presented at this meeting of the Saskatchewan society.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was established in 1968 to sponsor the *Mennonites in Canada* history series by Frank H. Epp and Ted D. Regehr. Its membership is composed of six provincial Mennonite historical societies, four Mennonite denominational bodies, Mennonite Central Committee Canada and the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

The 2011 executive is Sam Steiner (Waterloo, Ontario), President; Royden Loewen, (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Vice-President; Lucille Marr (Montreal, Quebec), Secretary; Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, B.C.), Treasurer; and Alf Redekopp (Winnipeg, Manitoba), fifth member. The board approved a budget for 2011 of \$41,000.

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Photo attached.

Caption: Esther Epp Tiessen

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