

Celebration, collegiality and considerations for the future mark Mennonite Historical Society of Canada meetings

At the recent Mennonite Historical Society of Canada meetings held at Winnipeg's Mennonite Heritage Centre on the Canadian Mennonite University campus January 17-18, celebration and the usual strong sense of collegiality provided a fertile environment for considering further ways of highlighting our history as Canadian Mennonites.

"Celebrating Words" with the society's vice-president and Chair of Mennonite Studies Royden Loewen's launch of his latest book *Village Among Nations: Canadian Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006* and fifteen other Manitoba Mennonite authors published in 2013 brought out sixty-five people. Among the authors was Esther Epp-Tiessen, who launched her *History of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada*, co-sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and Mennonite Central Committee, at University of Winnipeg 13-14 December 2013 to coincide with MCC Canada's inaugural meeting fifty years ago.

The Chair of Mennonite Studies at University of Winnipeg has played a significant role in the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's work. This year, in anticipation of that office's thirty-fifth anniversary, its founder Dr. Harry Loewen, now of Kelowna, British Columbia, was chosen as recipient of the MHSC annual Award of Excellence. Serving as teacher, researcher and writer, Dr. Loewen knew how to reach both popular and academic audiences and has been an inspiration to many young intellectuals over several decades. His publications include a comparison of 16th Century Anabaptism and Lutheranism, early 20th century work on Mennonites in the Soviet Union, and his own story of coming to Canada with his widowed mother. He also approached contemporary topics such as Mennonite literature and Mennonite identity, with his collection *Why I am a Mennonite*. His legacy includes significant institution-building. As the founding Chair in Mennonite Studies (1978-1995) he inaugurated the idea of teaching Mennonite history in public places; as the original editor of *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (1983-1995) he conceptualized and created a space where Canadian Mennonite scholars could engage in valuable academic discourse.

The Award of Excellence is given annually to persons who have made significant contributions to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by their research and/or writing.

This year, new faces extended the table. The society was delighted to invite the Mennonite Heritage Village (Steinbach, MB) to become a formal member. Further, with Mennonite Church Canada's and the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Church's potential of sending a representative to the annual meeting for every 10,000 members, a special invitation was extended this year to several youth. Their participation, and that of other guests including Mennonite researchers from Brazil added a welcome dynamic.

Our guests and youth joined the society on Friday for its annual learning tour. Prairie snows let up enough to allow three vans to travel an hour and a half south to Altona for a tour of Friesen's Corporation. The tour of the impressive book printing company celebrated the Society's long relationship with Ted Friesen, former co-owner of Friesen's and one of the society's founders. Friesen's adaptation to technological advancement and the high-quality books produced are both instructive and impressive.

The society sponsors a variety of projects including the MHSC Archivist group taskforce created two years ago to explore the possibility of a national Mennonite photo database. Thus far, eight partners

have pledged \$27,000 for this project. In addition, good progress has been made in exploring the software that will work best for our various Mennonite archives.

The Genealogy committee reports a new content management system for the web site (www.mennonitegenealogy.com) and members continue to actively write and edit articles for the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (www.gameo.org) established some years back.

New projects include exploring ways of telling the story of Mennonites in Canada after 1970, where *Mennonites in Canada*, Volume III ends. How to tell the story of the changing face of Mennonites including the variety of new immigrant congregations that now are part of the story was lodged with Divergent Voices of Mennonites in Canada. There is also interest in a potential travelling exhibit.

Established in 1968 to sponsor the *Mennonites in Canada* history series by Frank H. Epp and Ted D. Regehr, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada comprises 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 2014 executive is Lucille Marr (Montreal, Quebec), President; Royden Loewen, (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Vice-President; Alf Redekopp (St. Catherines, Ontario), Secretary; Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, B.C.), Treasurer; and Maurice Martin (New Hamburg, Ontario), fifth member.

Photos attached.

Captions: Harry and Gertrude Loewen receiving Award of Excellence
Eugene Letkemann giving tour to MHSC at Friesen's Corp.

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