

# Mennonite Historian

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA



Ken Reddig (left) is awarded the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's Award of Excellence during the MHSC's January 2024 meeting. Conrad Stoesz, the MHSC president, makes the presentation. See page 7 for the text of the award citation. Photo credit: Bert Friesen.

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## Biking to Gretna in January 1900!

by Carole Grier, Winnipeg

“History is alive” was my mantra to skeptical students throughout my 32-year teaching career. We are who we are—because of those who came before us. Look no further than our own family’s story. My family owes a debt of gratitude to our patriarch—Grandpa Abraham K. Friesen—as well those who inspired and influenced him, such as Gerhard E. Kornelsen and Heinrich H. Ewert.



**Abraham K. Friesen (1881–1963)**  
as a young man. Photo credit:  
Friesen family private collection.

Grandpa was born in 1881 at Lichtenau, East Reserve, Manitoba (just west of Steinbach). His father, Abraham

**Mennonite Historian** is published by the Mennonite Heritage Archives (Mennonite Church Canada, Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies, and Canadian Mennonite University) and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches).

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Subscription rates: \$17.00 per year, \$32.00 for two years, and \$46.00 for three years. Individual subscriptions may be ordered from these addresses.

ISSN: 07008066

R. Friesen, immigrated on the *SS Prussian* in 1875 with his wife, Agatha Kornelsen, and one young daughter. Great-grandfather A.R. Friesen was a teacher and farmer, as was customary then. They settled in Blumenhof where he unexpectedly and tragically died in 1884 at age 38, leaving great-grandmother Agatha a widow with four children, the youngest only one month old! Grandpa A.K. Friesen was only three-and-a-half years old. Exactly one year later, Agatha re-married, settling with her new husband at Lichtenau, close to her Kornelsen siblings. Her brother and Grandpa’s uncle, Gerhard Enns Kornelsen, was a renowned pioneer educator and farmer, teaching in Lichtenau and later in Steinbach.

Life did not get easier for the new family. Grandpa started school at age seven in 1888. After just three years of marriage, Grandpa’s stepfather passed away, leaving his mother a widow once more. She married for the third time when Grandpa was 10 years old. During this time, as a young boy, it was common for Grandpa to go to the woods with a sleigh and a team of horses, cut trees for firewood, load the sleigh, and drive home. For this, he received 25 cents, presumably from one of his stepfathers. The next day, he would cut the wood with a buck saw, and again be paid 25 cents.<sup>1</sup> Grandpa stopped school in 1894 at age 13 after only six years of schooling. For several years, he was a teamster and helped at home.

At the time, education standards in village schools were substandard at best. Teachers themselves only received their education in the village schools and were expected to farm as well. A higher education was usually not considered necessary for farming. However, probably on the advice of his uncle, Gerhard E. Kornelsen, who had also been his teacher, Grandpa was encouraged to resume his education. Through word of mouth, the Kornelsen family had met the founder of the new Gretna Normal School or teachers’ college, Heinrich H. Ewert, who travelled to the East Reserve to encourage continuing education. Ewert founded the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in 1891 to improve the standard of education for Mennonites in the newly settled East and West Reserves. So it was that in 1900, at 17 years of age, Grandpa became the first in our family to go to university, riding his bicycle to Gretna to attend M.C.I. in January 1900.<sup>2</sup>



**Heinrich H. Ewert (1855–1934).**  
Photo credit: MAID MHC 511-224.0.

Ewert’s influence on Grandpa is considerable. Not only did he encourage Grandpa to travel to Gretna for teacher training, but Ewert continued to be a very important mentor. Among Grandpa’s collection of letters stored at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg, there are many letters authored by Rev. Heinrich Ewert. There is evidence that Ewert even lent Grandpa money to enable him to attend school and again around 1902 when he was teaching in Lowe Farm and preparing to marry Grandma. Furthermore, Ewert was a Bergthaler pastor, but Grandpa was raised *Kleine Gemeinde*. It is significant that Ewert not only officiated at both Grandpa’s baptism in 1901 but also his wedding in 1902.<sup>3</sup>

Today’s students might be in awe if asked to walk a few blocks to school! Our grandfather was so thirsty for knowledge that he overcame improbable odds to attain an education. After only six years of formal schooling, and at age 17, he travelled over 80 miles on his bicycle to continue his education! This would be no easy task in 1900. But could it really have happened in January, as documented?

It is possible! Continuing my research, I found credible evidence that my grandfather’s trip in 1900 from Steinbach to Gretna by bicycle could actually have happened in January! I know it is unbelievable, but this is what I discovered.

First, the documented January weather in 1900 shows a pattern of “warmer” weather for January 6–7 and January 18–22 where the daytime highs were above freezing.<sup>4</sup>

Second, this same source notes a very low precipitation level for the months of November and December 1899 and January 1900. The only significant snowfall was 6.4 cm on November 10, 1899, and then

(cont’d on p. 4)



# Genealogy and Family History

## Mennonites in Russian Revision Lists (1795–1858)

by Glenn H. Penner <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>

Most Mennonite genealogists are familiar with the so-called Russian census lists.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these lists are not from Russian censuses, but rather colony or village lists compiled by the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers, usually in spring and fall of each year.<sup>2</sup> During the entire time period before 1897, there was no Russian national (or state) population census. The first national tax lists were started in 1719.<sup>3</sup> These lists were known as Ревизские сказки (Revizskie skazki) in Russian and are known as Revision Lists in English (henceforth called RL).

The primary purpose of the RL was for tax collection, and, although many incorrectly call them census lists, they were not. The population was divided into many taxation categories. The Mennonites in imperial Russia were in their own category (which also included the Hutterites). The thousands of German settlers surrounding the early Mennonite colonies were classified as *Kolonists*. This is a tremendous help for Mennonite genealogists as each page in an RL indicates the taxation class near the top of the page. Why were the Mennonites in their own category? The Mennonites had their own arrangement with the Russian government with respect to taxation.

The 5th RL of 1795 was the first RL of any importance to the Mennonite population. There were two Mennonite settlements in Russia at the time: the Chortitza colony (founded in 1789) and the village of Michalin in Volhynia (founded about 1791). The 1795 Chortitza RL has been translated.<sup>4</sup> I have recently obtained a copy of the Michalin RL,<sup>5</sup> which is proving to be a challenge to translate from Russian. The 1795 RL gives the population by family, with first and family name for the household head, followed by only the first names of other family members. The true relationship between the household head and each family member is rarely given—so stepchildren and most foster children are given the surname of the household head.

There are no known surviving copies of

the 6th RL (which took place in 1811) for the Mennonite settlements in Russia. The 1816 (7th) RL is available for Antonowka in Volhynia<sup>6</sup> and Schoenwiese<sup>7</sup> and Krons Garten<sup>8</sup> in the Chortitza settlement. One might wonder why the Schoenwiese and Krons Garten RLs are available while those for the rest of the Chortitza colony are not. Schoenwiese was administratively part of the city of Alexandrovsk, while Krons Garten was within the jurisdiction of the city of Ekaterinoslav. So, while the 1816 RLs for the Chortitza and Molotschna colony are lost, and all attempts to find them have failed, those for the cities of Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav have survived. An index of the Chortitza RL, which lists the villages, household numbers, household heads, and counts of males and females for each family, is available.<sup>9</sup>

Although the RL for the Chortitza colony is lost, there is a rough draft of this census available, which was drawn up in November 1815.<sup>10</sup> Several genealogically beneficial features were introduced in the 1816 RL. The patronymic of each household head is usually given—which tells us the names of their fathers. A column was added giving the ages of the males in the previous (1811) RL. If a male died between 1811 and 1816, his

death year is added in a separate column. In most families the relationship between the household head and members of the household who were not biological children is given.

The 8th RL was conducted in 1835.<sup>11</sup> An important feature of the 8th revision is the inclusion of information on movements of families and adult males who moved to other locations. For example, if a family recorded in the 1816 RL moved to another location, the year and name of the new location is recorded in that location, as well as in the RL of the new location. The only complete 1835 RL of interest to Mennonite genealogists is that for the Molotschna colony. Unfortunately, the first microfilm copy of this census was of such poor quality that the translations<sup>11 12</sup> are packed full of errors, many of which have found their way into the GGrandDMA (GM) database.<sup>13</sup> A much improved spreadsheet and high-resolution photographs will be available on the mennonitegenealogy.com website<sup>1</sup> in summer. At the same time, related errors in the GM database will be corrected.

The 9th RL was conducted in 1850. This is the first RL to include Mennonites living in a daughter colony. Unfortunately, the RL for the Bergthal colony has yet to be located. Complete 1850 RLs are available for only two locations: the village of Schoenwiese in the Chortitza colony,<sup>14</sup> and

(cont'd on p. 10)

РЕВИЗСКАЯ СКАЗКА.				
1850 года Августа 4 <sup>е</sup> дня, Екатеринославской Губернии Александровского уезда Мортитцкаго Округа колонистъ Меннонитъ				
Семья.	МУЖЕСКИЙ ПОЛЪ.	По послѣдней ревизіи состояло и послѣ оной прибыло.	Изъ того числа выбыло.	Нынѣ на лицо.
№	Множества	Лѣта.	Когда именно.	Лѣта.
17.	Гергардъ Гергардовъ Рампель Его жена Іоганна Іоганна Гергардова дѣвочка: Іоганна Гергардъ Давидъ Петръ	62 29. 4. 1. родивъ въ 1837 году родивъ въ 1846 году	умеръ въ 1847 году умеръ въ 1847 году	. 44. . 16. 13. 4.

Extract of the Schoenwiese 1850 census for part of the family of Gerhard Rempel (GGrandDMA #63748). Note that the census gives his age as 62 at the time of the 1835 census and shows that he died in 1847. Photo credit: Glenn Penner.

## Biking to Gretna

(cont'd from p. 2)

7.6 cm on January 10, 1900, and another 5.1 cm three days later. The roads and trails would have been firm and passable before January 10.

As well, Grandpa said in his memoirs that he worked in K. Reimer's store in December 1899. Klaas Reimer's store was actually mentioned in E.K. Francis's *In Search of Utopia*<sup>5</sup> as a large, successful enterprise.

For these reasons then, it could have been physically possible for my grandfather, A.K. Friesen, to ride his bicycle on or around the dates January 6–8, enrolling at the Gretna Normal School in January as documented. See maps at right.<sup>6</sup>

I have wildly mused about trying to recreate this trip as Terry Doerksen has done travelling by historic Red River Cart along the Red River Trails.<sup>7</sup> If only I had thought of biking to Gretna when I was 17 years old!

H.H. Ewert was a controversial figure in southern Manitoba. But our family will continue to appreciate his impact on the lives of the descendants of his students—especially, our own grandfather, Abraham K. Friesen.

*Carole Grier was born in Winkler, Manitoba, to Russlaender and Kanadier parents. After retiring, she has pursued her interest in genealogy by travelling to the Ukraine and Western Europe, as well as by volunteering at the Mennonite Heritage Archives. Please contact her at carole.grier1@gmail.com if you would like to meet the challenge of biking in Manitoba in January!*

## Endnotes

1. Words of A.K. Friesen as told to his son, Harry S. Friesen, in Abram R. Friesen diary, vol. 5903, file 4, Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg.

2. 1874–1949, 75th Commemoration of Mennonite Immigration in Manitoba (Festival Committee of the Mennonite Eastern Reserve, 1949), 90.

3. Paul Schaefer, *Heinrich H. Ewert: Teacher, Educator and Minister of the Mennonites* (CMBC, 1990).

4. <https://www.extremeweatherwatch.com/cities/winnipeg/year-1900>

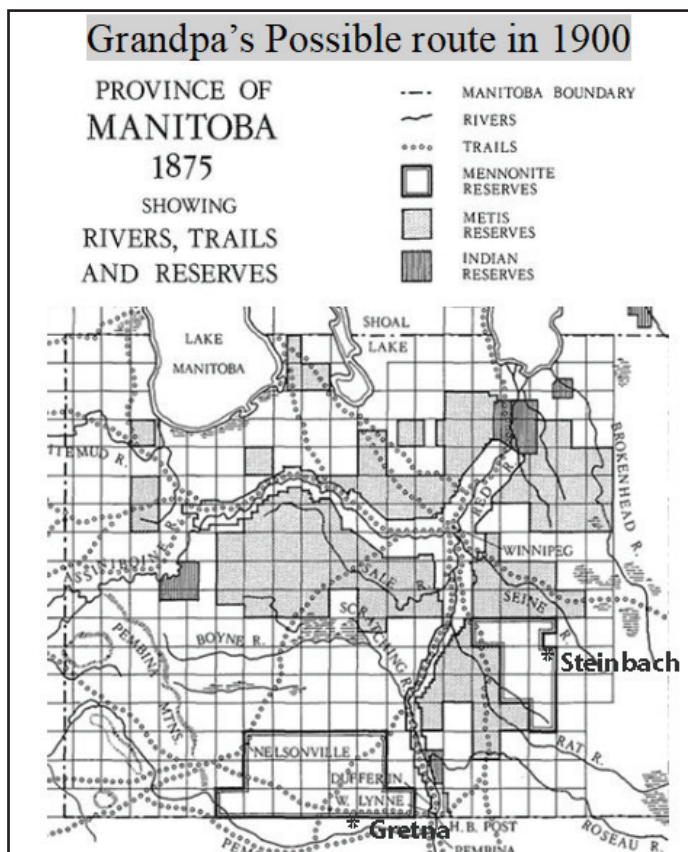
5. E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (1955), 153.

6. Thanks to Ernest Braun for help with these two maps.

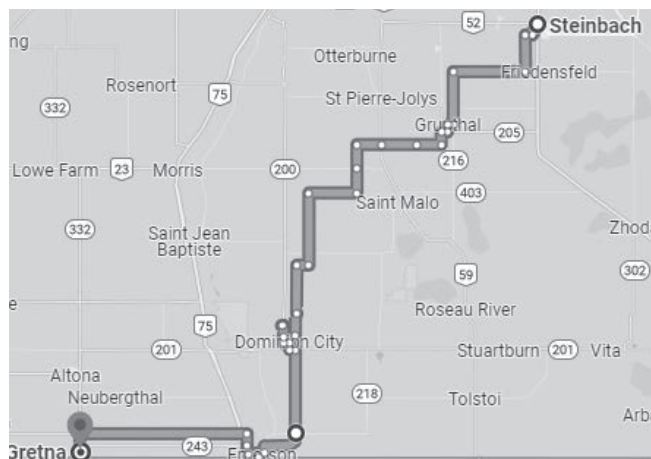
7. In the summer of 2022, Terry and Patty Doerksen, along with Zik-the-ox pulling their replica Red River Cart, retraced the 800 kilometres of the historic Red River Trail, from Winnipeg to St. Paul, Minnesota.



The first classroom/dormitory building at MCI in Gretna, Manitoba, completed in 1908. Photo credit: MAID MHC 166-214.1.



Manitoba trail map from 1875, with the addition of markers for Steinbach (\*) in the East Reserve and Gretna (\*) in the West Reserve. Photo credit: [https://www.facebook.com/groups/188039766161558/search/?q=province of manitoba map 1875](https://www.facebook.com/groups/188039766161558/search/?q=province+of+manitoba+map+1875).



A possible route today from Steinbach to Gretna covers 83 miles (133 kilometres). Biking on paved highways could take about seven hours. Photo credit: Google Maps.



## The Janzen Family from Kitay

by Maria Lotsmanova, Pittsburgh, PA

The idea to write this article came up when I discovered this photograph (below) in the Koop family fonds at the Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg. It is the only known photograph of Peter P. Janzen's family, my ancestors, who lived in South Russia at the turn of the 20th century. The photograph was taken at the funeral of Dietrich Janzen in 1912 and tragically resonates with the future fate of this family, my family. A few years after this photo was taken, Russia would enter the Soviet period, a very turbulent stage of its history. Many of the people pictured in the photograph would be killed or die other horrible deaths.

I started to research the history of the Janzen family in 2015 when I made my first archival requests referring to Jakob P. Janzen, my great-grandfather. About two dozen ancestors have been in my focus since then. Growing up in Moscow, Russia, I knew little about Mennonite history and culture until I started this research. To be honest, I am still trying to figure out how much I have in common with these people.

In this article, I pull together some facts from various sources to reconstruct a short history of Peter P. Janzen's

family—and maybe reveal some new information. I look at these people from a non-Mennonite angle, and I certainly don't understand much about the religious aspect of these relatives, although I know it was fundamental to who they were. My simple goal is just to put their lives on a timeline and—what I find just as important—to establish when and how their lives ended. I still have many questions that remain, but I will do my best to avoid inaccuracies. Please see this article as an attempt by a total stranger to sort out who their Mennonite ancestors were and what happened to them.

The Janzens came from Prussia to South Russia in September 1827.<sup>1</sup> Peter P. Janzen (GRanDMA [GM] #499329, standing at the far left in the middle row), my great-great-grandfather, was born on October 3, 1859. He had seven siblings: six sisters and one brother. The family lived in the Molotschna region until they moved to Schöntal, the newly established (1880) Mennonite settlement in Crimea.

On October 13, 1883,<sup>2</sup> Peter P. Janzen married Anna Kroeker (GM #85700, sitting on the far left in the front row), my great-great-grandmother. Unfortunately, the only two facts I know about this petite woman (she looks small in the photograph, doesn't she?) are that she was born in Orlovo (Ohrloff), Molotschna region, on

July 5, 1860, and died in Spat, Crimea, on May 18, 1926.<sup>3</sup> It's that simple: she was born, she got married, she had kids, and then, at the age of 65, she died. And that's why I don't like genealogy, per se; beyond the dates and facts, you don't learn much about their lives, their characters, their personalities.

Peter and Anna Janzen had seven children: Elisabeth (b. August 28, 1885), Anna (b. March 20, 1887), Helena (b. July 27, 1890), Peter (b. 1891), my great-grandfather Jakob (b. June 10, 1893), Dietrich, and Hans (b. August 20, 1898). The first five children were born in Schöntal. Unfortunately, I can't find Dietrich's birth date (maybe sometime in 1895?), the only thing I know is that he was the second youngest son.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1890s, Peter Janzen bought the land in Annowka (Annenfeld), just a couple kilometers from Schöntal, and set it up as a village estate of 20 farms, renting it at favourable rates to poorer members of the Mennonite Brethren Church of which he was a member. Moreover, he moved there with his whole family. His youngest son, Hans, was born there. Annowka had good land, a nice school, and a steam mill built by Peter Janzen. The estate began to flourish with time.<sup>5</sup> While the village of Schöntal (renamed in 1948 as *Kovyl'noe*)

(cont'd on p. 8)



Dietrich Janzen funeral, 1912. Back row (l-r): Kornelius H. Koop, unidentified, Peter Janzen, Jakob Janzen, Dietrich Janzen, Hans Janzen; middle row: Peter P. Janzen, Heinrich Dick, Lenchen Janzen, Johann Huebert, Jakob Huebert; front row: Anna (Kroeker) Janzen, Katharina (Janzen) Koop, Elizabeth (Janzen) Dick, Maria (Penner) Janzen (widow of Dietrich Janzen), Liese (Janzen) Huebert, unidentified, Anna (Janzen) Huebert. Photo credit: Koop family fonds, MHA, vol. 4771; MAID MHC 500-397.0.

# Mennonite Heritage Archives

## Volunteer Appreciation Event

by Graeme Unrau

The Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) relies on volunteers to complete its mission to preserve and share the Mennonite story. In the last year, the MHA has responded to approximately 1,200 information requests and welcomed an average of 73 visitors a month. With just two permanent staff, and a few term and contract employees, volunteers are indispensable to the current reach and operations of the MHA. These volunteers process donations of materials, update the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID), scan materials for information requests, digitize materials, translate text, and assist with mailings. For all this work, the MHA is incredibly grateful.

In recognition of the ways that volunteers enrich and enable the operations of the MHA, volunteers and staff with guests gathered on Wednesday, February

(cont'd on p. 11)

## Voices from EMC & EMMC



Fifty years ago, EMC missionary Gilbert Reimer (at right in photo above, pictured along with his brother, Cliff) disappeared from his apartment building in Panama City, Panama. His mutilated body was found six days later eight miles from his home. Gilbert and his wife Jean (née Little) had served in Panama for several years in evangelism and theological education. At the time of his death, they were holding a Bible study in their home that included university students. The reason Gilbert was targeted wasn't known for more than 30 years until Gil's former student informed Jean that three missionaries had been targeted (though only Gilbert was killed) because their evangelism was subverting a leftist student movement. Though he had heard rumours of the plot, he had been too afraid to speak up during this tumultuous time. Jean and

the family felt a measure of relief, knowing that the death had not been random, but had been because of the gospel. See *The Messenger*, vol. 45, no. 12, June 20, 2007. Text and photo credit: Erica Fehr.



When the EMMC became more active in sending missionaries to various parts of the world and acquiring its own mission fields, it became more difficult for mission board members, who were all volunteers, to do all the administrative work involved. In a giant leap forward, the Board of Missions and Service hired Jerry Hildebrand as the full-time Missions Director (pictured above). He took up this new position in 1976 and kept that post until 1985 when he resigned to pursue further studies (see Jack Heppner, *Search for Renewal*, 1987, p. 190). Text and photo credit: Lill Goertzen.



MHA volunteers, February 2024. Back row (l-r): Isaiah Letkemann, Henry Fast, Barry Heinrichs, Dan Dyck, Sara Dyck, Ted Barg; middle row: Graeme Unrau, Eleanor Chornoboy, Verna Reitmeier, Elfriede Rempel, Conrad Stoesz, Darryl Neustaedter Barg; front row: Peter Rempel, Bernie Toews, Iris Toews, Helen Ens, Sally Nickel, and Erika Marand. Photo credit: Krista Neustaedter Barg.



## Ken Reddig: Historian, Storyteller, and Visionary

by Conrad Stoesz

The Award of Excellence was established in 2004 by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and is given 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. Members of the society are invited to nominate persons for this award by forwarding a one-page citation of that person to the MHSC executive.

Ken Reddig—archivist, historian, educator, and visionary—began his career in archives in 1979 with his appointment at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS), Winnipeg. He quickly became involved in the larger Mennonite historical scene. By 1981, he was attending the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) meetings on behalf of CMBS and was recording secretary of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS). In 1985, Ken served as secretary of MHSC and continued his regular attendance at the national and provincial level.

In 1989, Ken was a key figure in getting Mennonite heritage concerns on the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) map with seven initiatives to be launched



**Ken Reddig in the 1986 archival slide presentation, “It’s News to Me.”** Photo credit: MAID CA CMBS NS25-01-68.

during the MWC assembly held in Winnipeg in 1990. This included an audio-visual resource called “It’s News to Me,” which explained the important role of archives in a new way (see the 132 slides preserved at <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/mennonite-archives-audio-visual-its-news-to-me>).

At the end of 1990, Ken resigned from CMBS to take a position at the Archives of Manitoba, but he maintained his involvement with MMHS and served for a time on the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* editorial board. In the early 1990s, Ken was part of the committee that envisioned and carried out the Mennonite Jewish Ukrainian “Building Bridges” conference that took place in 1995, and from that



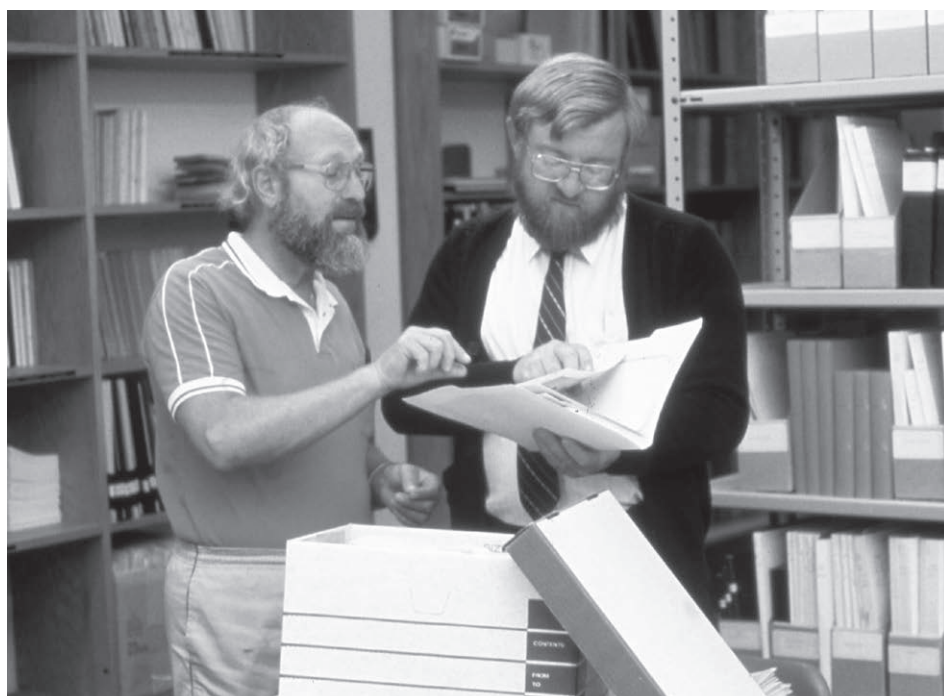
conference a book of selected conference papers was published.

In 1997, he returned to Mennonite archival employment, this time at the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC). Here he was the principal designer behind the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery that became a place where people of faith could talk about art, faith, and build community within and across cultures. Ken was also part of the committee that began the Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia project that was to be an online authoritative resource, but which grew into the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO). He left the Mennonite Heritage Centre position in 1999 to take on tasks with MCC Manitoba and St. Boniface Hospital Foundation.

In the early 2000s, Ken represented Mennonite Central Committee at MHSC annual meetings and became a long-time member of the Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites committee that planned and oversaw numerous history conferences, pulling in research and ideas from a plethora of subjects often not part of the historical mainstream. During 2003–2004, Ken was part of a committee that met to represent the Mennonite perspective on human rights as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights was being envisioned.

In 2005, Ken returned to lead the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in its new facility at 1310 Taylor Avenue, taking on the position of president of MHSC until 2008. During this time, he got the MCC Canada 50th anniversary book project started and organized the scanning of the five-volume set of the old Mennonite Encyclopedia in his role on the GAMEO Canadian editorial committee. Ken resigned from CMBS in 2008 to take on a role at Eden Health Care until 2012.

Ken Reddig 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. The MHSC is pleased to recognize Ken Reddig in this way, presenting him with this year’s Award of Excellence.



**This slide is of visitor Mr. Vlaming (played by Henry Visch) and Ken Reddig looking at an archival file folder at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies archives in the 132-slide presentation called “It’s News to Me.”** Photo credit: MAID CA CMBS NS25-01-88.

(cont'd from p. 5)

Unlike his wife, Peter Janzen was lucky enough to have his character documented in several sources. For example, Peter Joh. Rahn<sup>7</sup> describes him as *ein ziemlich energischer Mann* [quite an energetic man].<sup>8</sup> Peter's daughter, Helena Harder (née Janzen), composed a whole essay dedicated to her father. In one of the first chapters, Helena starts with the following words:<sup>9</sup> *Auf der Anhoehe von der Bahnstrecke lag das Gut Kitaj. Klug und weise verwaltete Herr Janzen sein Besitz. Sein groesster Einfluss erwuchs aus seiner warmen Herrn Frömmigkeit, denn Gott war mit ihm. Heiter und gluecklich*

Small descriptions like these are significant because they give me a general image of my great-great-grandfather and help me to reconstruct his character; they help me connect with him emotionally. I now imagine him as a well-educated and entrepreneurial person, strict but fair, honest, and generous.

was located more to the south, closer to Simferopol.<sup>10</sup>

In 1948, the village was renamed to Shyrokoe<sup>12</sup> and it still exists today. In 2020, I was lucky enough to go to Crimea and discover the estate house of Kitay; the granary and the barn were also still there. These solid buildings have served the locals for over 110 years. Here's how the estate house was described in the inventory in 1915: Дом каменный, крытый железом, длина 12 сажень, ширина 6





сажень, занимает сам хозяин. Вышина 6,5 аршин снаружи ... 8 комнат, и кухня, кладовки, отапливается центральным отоплением. [The house is made of stone, roofed with iron, 12 sazhen (25.6 m) in length, 6 sazhen (12.8 m) in width, occupied by the owner himself. The height is 6.5 arshins (4.6 m) ... 8 rooms, and a kitchen, storage rooms, heated by central heating.]<sup>13</sup>

According to what the locals told me on my visit, the house had been used for various purposes: as a commandant's office, a kindergarten, a dormitory, etc. Today it hosts a local museum, although some parts of the house are badly in need of renovation. It is called the "Museum of Labour and Military Glory of the Shyrokoe Village" and mostly tells the history of the village's achievements during the Soviet period. I was disappointed that the museum didn't give much information about the original inhabitants of the house. Moreover, there were even some false narratives about the lives of my ancestors. I did share corrected information with the museum staff, but I am not sure if it was ever used.

But before I continue the Janzens' story, I want to get back to the photograph and describe what was happening in the lives of these people at that time.

The photograph was taken at the funeral of Dietrich Janzen, Peter Janzen's younger brother, who died in Schöntal, Crimea, on December 11, 1912, at the age of 45 after a long-lasting disease.<sup>14</sup>

Two of Peter's daughters, Elizabeth ("Liese," GM #77959) and Anna (GM #77960), sitting in the front row, married two Huebert brothers (they stand in the middle row on the right). Liese married Johann (GM #77655) in 1904, and Anna married Jacob (GM #77656) in 1905. The youngest daughter, Helena ("Lenchen," GM #326105) Janzen, who would later write that essay about her father, is standing in the middle row. She was already in her 20s but wouldn't get married for another five years or so.

Peter's sons are all standing in the back row to the right. The older sons, Peter (GM #1414389) and Jacob (GM #421304), I believe, have finished high school by 1912 and now help their father at the farm. The younger sons, Dietrich (GM #1414387) and Hans, are still in school, and we can see them wearing uniforms.

In 1915, soon after the First World War

began, the Russian government introduced several laws concerning land tenure and land use by Austrian, Hungarian, and German colonists in the Russian empire. According to those laws, Peter P. Janzen was forbidden to own the Kitay estate and had to sell it to the Peasants' Land Bank.<sup>15</sup> He followed the law but also managed to rent the Kitay estate, so he and his family could continue living there. Those laws were just the beginning of many oppressive measures taken against those of German descent in Russia.

In her article about the Janzen family, Naemi Fast made a list of all the members of the family who lived at the Kitay estate in 1918.<sup>16</sup> In addition to Peter P. Janzen and his wife, Anna, five of their children lived there: a daughter, Anna, with her husband, Jacob, and kids, older sons, Peter and Jacob, with their wives, Maria and Katharina, respectively, who both married in the same year, younger sons, Dietrich and Hans, who were still in school and not married.

The oldest daughter, Elisabeth, lived with her husband, Johann, and children in Temir village (now called Yastrebovka), next to Schöntal. The youngest daughter, Helena, married Abraham Harder (GM #326104) in 1917, the son of Justina and Abraham A. Harder who operated the Grossweide orphanage in the Molotschna region where Helena worked for years. The next year, Helena and Abraham organized their own orphanage in Halbstadt, Molotschna region, and settled there.

The Russian Civil War that started right after the October Revolution of 1917 brought unrest all over the country. Crimea was no exception. On July 15, 1918, the Kitay estate was attacked by bandits. They broke into the house while the family was there and killed Peter's son, Dietrich. Peter himself was wounded. He had returned home right in the middle of the attack and tried to stop the bandits who also stole 19,000 rubles.<sup>17</sup> According to Helena's memories, Peter had to flee his house soon after the attack and hide because the bandits were still after him. I don't know the exact date, but somewhere around the beginning of the 1920s, the family had to leave the Kitay estate. The estate was turned into a collective farm (*kolkhoz*). Hans, Peter's youngest son, managed to get a job there and worked at the Kitay Kolkhoz as the head of the farm from 1920 to 1923.<sup>18</sup>

Peter's daughter, Anna, and her family

moved to Temir after the attack to live next to her sister, Elizabeth. In 1924, they moved again, this time to Münsterberg, Molotschna region. That same year, the youngest daughter, Helena, and her family immigrated to Germany, settling in Kaiserslautern for a while. The rest of the Janzens—Peter, his wife, and three sons with their families—relocated to Spat at the beginning of the 1920s, one of the largest Mennonite colonies in Crimea. They continued to make their living from agriculture. Hans married Agnes Wiens in 1924. Peter & Maria and Jacob & Katharina had their first children.

Their relatively peaceful life didn't last long though. As I already mentioned earlier, Peter's wife Anna died in 1926 from heart failure. Around 1926–1927, brothers Hans and Jacob were both convicted of having hired workers. It was considered at that time an exploitation of the people by the Soviet government; therefore, they were listed as "disenfranchised." It's known that Jacob lost his property and had to leave Spat for several months until he managed to prove he was innocent. I am not sure what consequences Hans had to face at that time. It's documented though that he tried to emigrate to Canada around 1928–1929 but failed to get a visa.<sup>19</sup> Alfred H. Redekopp writes that Elisabeth and Johann had the same intention. In 1929, they "sold everything and fled to Moscow in an attempt to emigrate to Canada,"<sup>20</sup> but didn't succeed either. Things were getting worse for Mennonites in the Soviet Union. "Our people know they have very little time left,"<sup>21</sup> somebody from Spat wrote to their relatives in 1930.

Peter P. Janzen died on January 29, 1930, also from heart failure.<sup>22</sup> He was 70 years old. His daughter, Helena, wrote in her essay: *Das so oft vor Gott gebrachte Gebet, "Herr, schenke mir die Gnade, eines natuerlichen Todes sterben duerfen," ist ihm erfuellt worden.* [The prayer he so often prayed to God, "Lord, grant me the grace to die a natural death," has been fulfilled.] He was one of the few.

In 1930, Hans was accused of anti-Soviet agitation and sentenced to exile in Siberia.<sup>23</sup> His property was confiscated, and he had to move with his wife and two small kids to the Tobolsk region.

In 1931, Jacob was again listed as disenfranchised, his property was confiscated, and he, along with his family, was sent to a special settlement

in Arkhangelsk region.<sup>24</sup> They had five small kids with them, and Katharina was pregnant with my grandmother, Elena ("Leni"), who would be born later that year.

In 1933, Jacob Huebert, Anna's husband (already disenfranchised by then), was arrested for counter-revolutionary agitation but was released several months later.<sup>25</sup>

In 1933, Peter, the oldest son, and his wife, Maria, were both accused of anti-Soviet agitation and sabotaging the work of the Fereininug (Ферейнинуг)<sup>26</sup> Kolkhoz in Spat where they worked; they were sentenced to five years in a labour camp.<sup>27</sup> It's believed that Peter died while being transported to camp. He was around 42 years old. Unfortunately, I have no clear idea of what happened to Maria or their three kids who were still very young at the time of their parents' arrest (Peter 8 years, Ilsa 6 years, Elisabeth 3.5 years).

In 1933, Jacob Janzen, living with his family at a special settlement in the Arkhangelsk region in very poor conditions, corresponded with his sister, Helena, in Germany. He wrote to ask for some support but was accused of anti-Soviet agitation and collaborating with fascist organizations. He was sentenced to five years in a labour camp and sent to Sibltag, the largest camp in western Siberia.<sup>28</sup> Jacob was released in 1936 and reunited with his family for a while.

During the years of Stalin's Great Terror (1937–1938), the intensity of oppression became just insane.

In September 1937, Hans was sentenced to death and executed on September 15, 1937, in Tobolsk. He was 39 years old. His wife, Agnes, and their children remained under Special Settlers status until the middle of the 1950s.

In September 1937, Jacob Hubert was sentenced to ten years in a labour camp<sup>29</sup> and sent to Sibltag where he died on September 26, 1938.<sup>30</sup> He was 58 years old. His wife, Anna, managed to flee the country with their youngest daughter, Tina, in 1942. They eventually arrived in Canada and settled in Yarrow, B.C. Anna died in 1968; she was 80 years old.<sup>31</sup> Their other children had different fates: the older son, Johann, immigrated in 1926 to Germany, while Anna immigrated to Germany in 1994. The younger sons, Peter and Jacob, died during the repressions of the Stalin era.<sup>32</sup>

In March 1938, my great-grandfather,

Jacob, was sentenced to the death penalty and killed on November 15, 1938, in Arkhangelsk.<sup>33</sup> He was 45 years old. His wife, Katharina, and their children remained under Special Settlers status until the middle of the 1950s.

In August 1938, Johann Huebert was sentenced to the death penalty and killed on October 15, 1938, in Crimea.<sup>34</sup> He was 61 years old. His wife Elisabeth is believed to have died a year later at the age of 54. Not much is known about what happened to their children.

All the accused were later "rehabilitated" by the state and found not guilty.

Helena died in Paraguay (where she moved after leaving Germany) on May 4, 1940.<sup>35</sup> She was 49 years old.

I didn't have a chance to spend much time with my grandmother, Leni, and talk to her about our Mennonite heritage as she lived far away and died when I was still a teen. My mother, Ekaterina, who was born at the end of the 1950s, tried not to mention her origin much as she had enough trouble growing up in the Soviet Union with a German surname.

When I look at this timeline of suffering throughout the 20th century, I can understand why my family preferred to keep silent. Hopefully, I can speak up for them now.

*Maria Lotsmanova originally comes from Moscow, Russia, where she used to work at the GULAG History Museum (Museum of Soviet Repressions). In August 2022, Maria moved to Pittsburgh to reconcile with her wife who is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pittsburgh. Maria would like to acknowledge the help and support of the following persons who contributed to creating this article: Ira Roldugina, Conrad Stoesz, Naemi Fast, and Eduard Andryushchenko.*

## Endnotes

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5. Helmut Huebert, *Crimea: The Story of Crimea and the Mennonites who Lived There* (Winnipeg: Springfield, 2013), 39, 58, 59.
6. [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ковыльное\\_\(Красногвардейский\\_район\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ковыльное_(Красногвардейский_район))
7. Peter Rahn, "Mennonitensiedlungen in der Krim, Süd-Rußland" in Martin Dürksen, *Die Krim war unsere Heimat* (Winnipeg, 1980), 31.
8. All translations in this article are by the author.
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10. Helmut Huebert, *Mennonite Estates in Imperial Russia*, 2nd ed. (Winnipeg: Springfield, 2008), 101.

11. Kulak = a farmer wealthy enough to own his own farmland and hire labour. Emerging after the emancipation of serfs in the 19th century, the kulaks, which also included Mennonite landowners, resisted Stalin's forced collectivization, but millions were arrested, exiled, or killed.

12. [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Широкое\\_\(Симферопольский\\_район\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Широкое_(Симферопольский_район))

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14. *Friedensstimme*, no. 3 (January 1913), p. 6.

15. The Peasants' Land Bank was a financial institution of the Russian Empire founded in 1885 during the reign of Tsar Alexander III and designed to help peasants purchase their own farms.

16. Naemi Fast, "Glaube, Reichtum und Verlust. Aus dem Schicksal einer mennonitischen Gutsbesitzerfamilie vor 100 Jahren," *Aquila*, no. 1 (January 2023), p. 22.

17. *Friedensstimme*, no. 40 (1918), p. 8; no. 41 (1918), p. 6; and no. 43 (1918), p. 7.

18. GARK, fond R-4808, opis 1, delo 015844.

19. GARK, fond R-4808, opis 1, delo 015844.

20. Alfred Redekopp, *The Muensterberg Hueberts: A Family History and Genealogy of the Descendants of Claas Huebert, 1785–1853* (Winnipeg, 1992), 338.

21. Harold Jantz, *Flight: Mennonites Facing the Soviet Empire in 1929–30, from the pages of the Mennonitische Rundschau* (Winnipeg: Eden Echoes, 2018), 373.

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23. GARK, fond R-4808, opis 1, delo 015844.

24. GARK, fond R-1639, opis 3, delo 861.

25. DAZO (State Archives of Zaporizhzhya Region), fond R-5747, opis 3, delo 8043.

26. There is no such word in German; it's likely to be *Vereinigung*. The word might have been misspelled by the investigator.

27. GARK, fond R-4808, opis 1, delo 014187.

28. UFSB (Department of the Federal Security Service) in Arkhangelsk region, fond 7, delo P-14928.

29. DAZO, fond R-5747, opis 3, delo 8043.

30. GU MVD (Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) in Novosibirsk region, a reference letter to Maria Lotsmanova, dated September 15, 2023.

31. Redekopp, *The Muensterberg Hueberts*, 349.

32. GM #77960, #85758, #85759, #85760, and #85762.

33. UFSB in Arkhangelsk region, fond 7, delo P-9175.

34. GARK, fond R-4808, opis 1, delo 010833.

35. Peter Wiens, *Geschichte der Mennonitengemeinde Fernheim, 1930–1990* (Fernheim, Paraguay: Mennonitengemeinde Fernheim, 1990).

## Revision Lists

(cont'd from p. 3)

the village Heinrichsdorf in Volhynia.<sup>15</sup> An important new feature in the 1850 RL is the inclusion of the patronymic for household mothers in many lists.

The 10th and final RL was conducted in 1858. Complete RLs are available for the village of Schoenwiese in the Chortitza colony,<sup>16</sup> the village of Michalin in Volhynia,<sup>17</sup> and the Bergthal colony villages of Bergthal, Schoenfeld, Heuboden, and Friedrichsthal (Schoenthal is missing).<sup>18</sup>

Although a small fraction of the 1795 to 1858 revision lists is still available,



there are hundreds of census extracts found in numerous documents. For example, although the 1835 RL for the Chortitza colony is lost, we have extracts for many people found in that census. Those Chortitza Mennonites changing locations after 1835 are recorded by the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers, and the extracts from the previous (1835) RL are included in the transfer documentation. There are other examples of available RL extracts, including the 1852 lists of families living outside the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies<sup>19</sup> that cite the 1850 RL, lists of families living outside the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies in 1859, Chortitza colony census extracts for those living in Yazykovo colony in 1872, and extracts of those founding the new village of Jadwinin in Volhynia.<sup>20</sup> These cite the 1858 RL.

An important difference between a Revision List and a Census is that the census counted all those physically situated in a location, even if they belonged to another family. If your ancestor was recorded in a location in a Canadian census in 1901, you know that's where the person lived in 1901. If your ancestor was recorded in a specific village in the Revision List in 1835, it only means that person was registered in that household and village for taxation purposes and may be living elsewhere. This important difference has caused much confusion among Mennonite historians and genealogists. Another important difference was the numbering system used. The early census lists counted families, first by property (*Feuerstelle* or *Wirtschaft*) number; then landless families were assigned arbitrary numbers. On the other hand, the RL lists families by household number, starting with the landowning households. This difference has also confused researchers.

The next article will discuss the 1835 Molotschna census in detail.

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13. More information about the GReNDMA database can be found at <https://www.grandmaonline.org/gmolstore/pc/Overview-d1.htm>.
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## Volunteer Appreciation

(cont'd from p. 6)

7, 2024. Over a delicious meal catered by Canadian Mennonite University, the MHA community was able to gather and connect. This was followed by a presentation from long-time supporter and volunteer at the MHA, Peter Rempel, on his research of Johann P. Klassen and the Mennonite migration from the Soviet Union to Canada in the 1920s. Conrad Stoesz, archivist at the MHA, ended the formal portion of the evening with a speech of appreciation.

The evening also provided the chance for volunteers—who seldom meet otherwise—to connect. Some volunteers work remotely, while others follow a weekly schedule, so this was an excellent chance for them hear about the different ways that they are all contributing. Many volunteers have been involved with the MHA for decades, while others are newer. The pandemic in 2020 also delayed the usual volunteer appreciation events and saw some volunteering drop off. As operations resumed following the extended period of closures and uncertainty that followed, the MHA has been rebuilding its volunteer network. This volunteer appreciation night

was the first since 2019 and is intended to be the first of a renewed annual tradition.

Verna Reimer Reitmeier, a volunteer who started in November 2023, was initially drawn by a desire to be productive following retirement. Her interest in Mennonite history and working with books and papers made volunteering at the MHA an easy fit. She has assisted with sorting and labelling archival deposits and is currently working on a research project.

Volunteers offer skills developed in rich professional and personal lives, from teachers and accountants to avid family history researchers. Some of the volunteers are recent graduate students or those currently enrolled in courses and looking for ways to apply new skills. Volunteers can be an excellent resource for an organization, and happy volunteers are some of the greatest cheerleaders for the MHA. Passionate volunteers are essential to the operation of the MHA and the preservation and sharing of the Mennonite story.

## MHSC 2024 Meeting

by Linda Klassen, Abbotsford, B.C.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) held its annual meetings at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) in Winnipeg, January 18–20, 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, 2024, and the annual general meeting was held on Saturday, January 20, 2024. 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 16th 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, which 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 Soviet Russia to Quebec City and as far as British Columbia from 1923–1930. The tour

began in July 2023 in Quebec City and made stops in Montreal, QC, Waterloo, ON, Winnipeg, MB, Saskatoon, SK, Didsbury, AB, and Abbotsford, BC. At each stop, local societies planned a series of 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. As MCC was originally formed to help Soviet Mennonites in 1920, 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, 2024. This year's event featured Dr. Nataliya Venger, Professor of History and Chair of the World History Department at Dnipro National University, Ukraine. Her topic

was "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 were installed in a prominent location in the main gallery.

Board Members agree that a highlight 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.

For further information, contact Conrad Stoesz, [cstoesz@cmu.ca](mailto:cstoesz@cmu.ca).



**MHSC at January 2024 meeting. Back row (l-r): Brian Froese, Jon Isaak, Ed Krahn, Alf Redekopp, Victor Wiens, Richard Thiessen, Gary Dyck; middle row: Graeme Unrau, John Reddekopp, Aileen Friesen, Katie Harder, Bert Friesen, Jake Buhler, Henry Paetkau; front row: Bruce Guenther, Jeremy Wiebe, Conrad Stoesz, Linda Klassen, and Laureen Harder-Gissing. Photo credit: Willa Reddig.**