



UWinnipeg Russian Mennonite Fellowship cracks open KGB archives

UW RELEASE – 2018/

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Friday, February 23, 2018

WINNIPEG, MB – In the 1930s, thousands of Mennonites disappeared in Russia without a trace. The KGB archives in Ukraine has thousands of files on these missing Mennonites and a newly announced UWinnipeg Fellowship wants to crack into these archives to uncover the stories of lost relatives, ancestors and much more.

Through the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg the newly created ***Paul Toews Fellowship in Russian Mennonite History*** will help mine these archives.

Recent postdoctoral fellow at the Centre, Dr. Aileen Friesen, has undertaken extensive archival research in Russia, notes there is an urgency to access these KGB files, “these records are now fully open, but they stand the chance of being closed once again should the political situation in Ukraine change.”

The Paul Toews Fellowship will fund researchers in recording, translating and archiving these KGB materials in the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg.

The Fellowship will also support other research programs. These include history conferences, graduate and post-doctoral fellowships on Russian Mennonite history, funds for visiting scholarships, and other archival research in in both Ukraine and Russia.



This Fellowship is named in honour of the late Dr. Paul Toews (photo at left), who was the resident historian of the *Mennonite Heritage Cruise* that took Mennonite ‘pilgrims’ on a journey back to Ukraine.

Rudy Friesen, resident architectural historian on the *Heritage Cruise* notes that with this Fellowship, “we can continue the important work that Paul Toews began and give new energy and vision to Russian Mennonite studies for decades to come.”

The Fellowship is based on a \$450,000 fund that has been pledged or donated to date. This Fellowship is part of the broader campaign goal of raising \$3,000,000 for the establishment of a Professorship in Russian Mennonite History.

The wider campaign continues to raise funds for the Fellowship. The Paul Toews Fellowship will guarantee that earnings from monies donated to the campaign will go to work at once. It is estimated that the Fellowship will eventually provide some \$20,000 per year in the support of

numerous research programs. These include history conferences, graduate and post-doctoral fellowships on Russian Mennonite history, funds for visiting scholarships, and archival research.

Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies and Director of the Centre notes, “it is great to reach this significant milestone of \$450,000 and as a Centre we are deeply grateful to the fundraising committee for their work in recognizing the significance and timeliness of this initiative.”

The Centre is very pleased to be working closely with the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg on this project. Loewen says he “looks forward to close collaboration with Canadian Mennonite University on this enhanced study of Mennonites in Russia and the Soviet Union.”

The late Dr. Paul Toews was Professor of Mennonite and US history at Fresno Pacific University in California; he was an active participant in the Mennonite Studies program at UWinnipeg having co-chaired the UWinnipeg - sponsored *Mennonites in Siberia* conference with Royden Loewen in Omsk in 2010. He was also Resident Historian on the Mennonite Heritage Cruise which sent more than 3000 North American Mennonites to visit the birthplace of their parents in Ukraine over the last 20 years.

The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies facilitates the study of transnational relations among Mennonites who today are spread around the world. This Centre is a research and educational hub that brings a global perspective to the migration of Mennonites from the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia.

For further information contact Dr. Royden Loewen at r.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca.

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