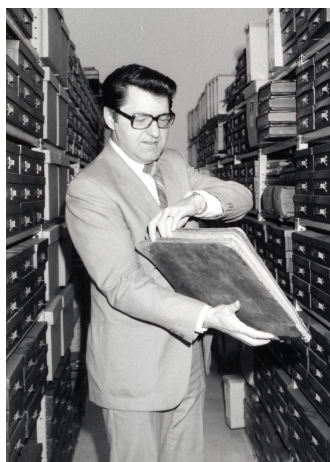


In Memoriam

Lawrence Klippenstein (1930–2022)

In Lawrence Klippenstein’s professional life he was known as a historian, archivist, pastor, educator, mission worker, organizer, mentor, and friend. Lawrence once mused that a way to explain his life would be to say that he was an “educationist”—he was always involved in gathering knowledge or imparting it. Lawrence was active in his research, writing, organizing, and mentoring up to the last weeks before his death at the age of ninety-one on March 18, 2022.

Lawrence Klippenstein was born July 16, 1930, in the village of Altbargthal, west of Altona, Manitoba, to Cornelius Klippenstein and Helena Rempel, growing up alongside Buffalo Creek on a mixed farm. After his mother’s death, when Lawrence was fourteen, Susan Friesen became his capable stepmother. He enjoyed school and finished his Grade 12 year at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna. He moved to Winnipeg in 1948 to attend Normal School and earned a teacher’s permit. He took his first teaching position in Greenland, Manitoba, in 1949. In 1951 he returned to studies at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC), and during this time he met his future wife LaVerna Reimer at a University of Manitoba



summer school German class. He took a teaching position in the Indigenous community of Grand Rapids, Manitoba (1954–1956), while corresponding with LaVerna.

In 1956 Rev. Henry Gerbrandt invited Lawrence to take a posting with Mennonite Pioneer Mission at Matheson Island. Before accepting the position, he proposed to LaVerna and they were married in Steinbach on August 31, 1956. The years he worked in these northern communities were impactful, and led to him becoming an early academic contributor to the discussion of relationships between Mennonites and Indigenous peoples with articles appearing already in 1974.

Lawrence and LaVerna left teaching to undertake further studies, moving to Indiana to attend Goshen College in 1958, where he earned a BA in 1959, and continued at Mennonite Biblical Seminary, eventually graduating with a Bachelor of Divinity in 1962.

Lawrence served in junior roles at a number of congregations including Yellow Creek Mennonite Church (Goshen, Indiana), Concord Evangelical United Brethren, and George Street Mennonite (Waterloo, Ontario). He was ordained in April 1967 and served at Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship (Winnipeg, 1967), and Altona Mennonite Church (Altona, Manitoba, 1974–1975). He and LaVerna also served for many years in leadership roles at Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

After seminary Lawrence took up a teaching position at CMBC. In the fall of 1967, he was again on the move, relocating his family of five to Minneapolis for PhD studies in European history in the hopes of landing a long-term position at CMBC. By the time they moved back to Canada in 1971, their family had grown to four children. He completed his dissertation in 1984 entitled “Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations, 1789–1936.”

When the Klippensteins returned to Manitoba, they first lived in Gretna, where Lawrence was on staff at Elim Bible School in nearby Altona from 1971–1973. In 1974 he chaired the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society’s Mennonite Centennial Committee, which was a catalyst for churches, communities, and families to commemorate the founding of Mennonite communities in Manitoba that began in 1874. While he was disappointed that a tenured teaching position at CMBC was no longer available, this led to his long and impactful term as archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. He was the first salaried archivist, starting half-time in 1974, at the beginning of the Canadian multiculturalism movement and at the height of the Manitoba Mennonite Centennial celebrations. In this role Lawrence used his networks to build understanding and

relationships about the importance of the historical record and the role of archives. In 1975 he began a magazine of the Mennonite Heritage Centre entitled *Mennonite Historian*, which today is sent to most Mennonite Brethren, Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Mennonite Church Canada, and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference congregations in Canada. Under Lawrence's guidance, the archival collection began to grow. A dedicated building was opened in 1979 thanks to P. W. Enns and the Mennonite business community, and an endowment for the archives was created. He relished the opportunity to develop a program from the ground up.

Lawrence's research and writing interests were wide-ranging but often centred around conscientious objectors in Russia and Canada, Mennonites in Manitoba, and the establishment of Mennonite communities in Russia. His articles appeared in English, Polish, Russian, and German publications. His bibliography is over one hundred pages long.

Lawrence was also a promoter who loved to mark anniversaries and special historical occasions with a gathering and a lecture. He was an optimist who focused on what could be done and was not deterred by what others said was beyond reach. Seemingly whenever he met a friend or acquaintance, he not only asked how a family member was doing, pulling some detail from his intranet-like mind, but also had some historical literature to hand out.

Seeking adventure, Lawrence travelled to Russia, starting in 1976, for conferences and research, as well as leading tours (1992 and 1996). He and LaVerna served with Mennonite Central Committee in London (1984–1986) and Moscow (1992–1993), and with the General Conference Commission on Overseas Mission in Bechtold, Germany (1999). In each location he and LaVerna built new friendships and expanded networks.

Lawrence was dedicated to his work and undertook raising over a third of the archives' budget himself. When there were cuts to his salary, he seldom worked less. He reflected that while the Bible school and church conference managed the archives, both entities were somewhat ambivalent toward the archival program. But it is here in his role as archivist, collecting materials that were in danger of being lost, that his most enduring contribution to the Mennonite community can be seen. Lawrence used his networks to build trust and to find and acquire one-of-a-kind documents for the archives. He was invited to conduct workshops on Mennonite history and archiving to congregations, historical societies, and historians across North America. Lawrence was involved with most major Mennonite historical endeavours in Canada, and many international projects. Where documents did not exist, he used his tape recorder,

conducting oral interviews of “old timers” to capture their thoughts and experiences. While even good research and writing becomes dated, the original sources that Lawrence collected and saved in the archives have enduring value. While some may have initially questioned the materials he collected and saved, these documents are now gifts to future generations.

Lawrence’s energies went beyond the archives. He served on the board of the Mennonite Heritage Village and was a founding member of the Association for Manitoba Archives (1980) and the North American Mennonite Archivists and Librarians (NAMAL) group (1977). He was a long-time board member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, serving up to his last month by helping with the latter’s *Heritage Posting* magazine.

In 1998 he received the Manitoba Prix award from the Manitoba government for his accomplishments as a writer, teacher, researcher, historian, archivist, and linguist of Mennonite culture. In 2017, he received the award of excellence from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada for his contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research, writing, organizing, and disseminating Mennonite historical knowledge.

Lawrence was generous with his time, knowledge, research, and finances. He had a warm and encouraging personality. His friendship and wisdom blessed many and will be missed.

Conrad Stoesz, Archivist
Mennonite Heritage Archives