Foreword

In an oral history recorded in 2017, my grandmother Agnes Thiessen (née Klassen) remembered, "In 1927 my parents were desperate to immigrate to Canada but could not get permission. We moved to the nearby village of Blumengart instead." Though she would eventually arrive in Canada in 1950, the consequences of this failed attempt at emigration from the Soviet Union were devastating for the Klassen family. Her father was arrested and executed in 1938 and her mother was "repatriated" to Omsk during the Second World War, where she passed away in 1972. Only in the 1970s would Agnes's siblings, also exiled to the Omsk region, receive permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

The 2024 JMS Forum is dedicated to that fateful moment in the early Soviet period—prior to the coming decades of collectivization, famine, Stalinist purges, and war—when more than 21,000 Mennonites, the "Russlaender"/"Russländer" as they would become known, found a fleeting opportunity to immigrate to Canada. We present five peer-reviewed papers initially delivered at the July 2023 conference at the University of Winnipeg titled "The Russlaender Mennonites: War, Dislocation, and New Beginnings." The conference was part of an extraordinary multi-week tour that was years in the making. Organized by the national Russlaender Centenary Committee with corresponding provincial subcommittees, the "Memories of Migration" tour invited participants to retrace the train route taken by Russlaender from Quebec City to their varied destinations in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.

Our Forum opens with Colin Neufeldt, who provides a detailed analysis of the decision-making process of thousands of Mennonites in the Soviet Union. Neufeldt explains why some, like my maternal grandparents, wished to leave but were unable to do so, and, importantly, why others chose to stay. A dizzying array of "personal,

familial, economic, agricultural, social, political, ideological, and religious factors" confronted potential emigres. Shifting Soviet policy and unintentional delays related to the operation of the CPR and the Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage (UCDL) presented other barriers. Challenging a hegemonic view of Mennonite attitudes in this era, Neufeldt asserts that some saw "new possibilities to thrive and participate in the construction of a new socialist state." Following Neufeldt, Nataliya Venger's contribution to our Forum shifts from individual decision-making to explore the strategies employed by B. B. Janz in negotiating with Soviets in his role as a leader of the UCDL. As Venger shows, Janz skilfully advocated for a Mennonite role in economic reconstruction even as "emigration remained the principal, if carefully disguised, goal of the Union."

The following three articles consider the transit and resettlement of Russlaender. Building on his 2022 *JMS* article on Dutch food aid, Ad van de Staaij explores the role of the Hollandsch Doopsgezind Emigranten Bureau (HDEB). Initially, HDEB provided a means for Doopsgezinden to support Mennonites transiting through Holland en route to Canada. Beginning in 1930, when the door to Canada had closed, HDEB would fund a new settlement venture in Brazil. In assessing the fundraising campaigns of the HDEB (including the promotional material that graces our cover), this article carefully considers how notions of kinship were mobilized in drawing Doopsgezinden to support their Russlaender brethren. While appeals to a shared origin, evident in the naming of the new Brazilian colony Witmarsum, were successful, the growing influence of Nazi ideas among the transplanted Russlaender raised doubts among HDEB members about continuing support as funding priorities shifted in the late 1930s.

Even after escaping the Soviet Union, resettled Russlaender, who were struggling to pay off their travel debts, also faced the spectre of deportation if they became public charges in Canada. Hans Werner offers a detailed rendering of the tragic case of Cornelius Unger, who was deported after being admitted to a Saskatchewan mental institution in 1930. He compares the series of events that led to Unger's deportation with other cases in which the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBoC) successfully intervened to prevent deportations. For Werner, Unger's case ultimately highlights both the increasing machinations of the Canadian state to deport "undesirable" migrants amid the Great Depression (including those, like many Russlaender, who were admitted without formal identification from their countries of origin) and the considerable authority exercised by the CMBoC, as a sponsoring institution, to intervene.

The final article in our Forum returns to the theme of *JMS* 41.1: Indigenous-Mennonite relations within the evolving structures of settler colonialism. In multiple locales throughout the hemisphere, Russlaender would settle on Indigenous lands, including on Enlhet territory in the Gran Chaco and on the recently drained Sumas Lake in British Columbia, whose fluctuating waters had nourished the Semá:th people for millennia. In southern Alberta, Russlander came to "Namaka Farm," immediately to the west of Siksika Reserve 146. Siksika lands—set out in Treaty 7—had been aggressively targeted by the federal government for land surrender beginning in 1910, leading to the loss of more than 100,000 acres. By foregrounding oral histories with Siksika Elders, Jansen, the granddaughter of Namaka farmers, challenges the exceptionalist self-mythologizing that cast Mennonites as distinct from other settlers. It is a "denial" that one Elder reminds readers, "needs to be unmasked". Despite silence in the archival record, oral testimonies gathered by Jansen reveal multiple points of Indigenous-Mennonite encounter. Some involve knowledge transfer, transport, trading, food security, and quotidian exchanges.

Following our Forum, two research articles speak to distinct but emerging areas of scholarship for Mennonite/Anabaptist Studies. The first, by Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, follows several hundred young Mennonites from the Halbstadt district (formerly Molochna colony), including two of the author's uncles, that joined the Ethnic German Calvary Unit. Historians continue to explore Mennonite relationships to National Socialism within the diaspora as well as in German-occupied territories during the war. Neufeldt-Fast tracks the activities of this unit from its formation, through its indoctrination in SS ideology, to its anti-partisan activities.

Our final article considers the near absence of academic research on sexual abuse in Amish communities, even as other methods of inquiry into this subject—from investigative reporting to memoirs and documentaries—has increased markedly. Sabrina Voelz recognizes the challenges of conducting such research and carefully considers how scholars might ethically include testimonials from survivors.

We conclude with our regular slate of book reviews as well as a memorial to Max Shtatsky, a young Ukrainian researcher who died defending his country. Shtatsky had a profound interest in the history of Mennonites in Ukraine and worked tirelessly to locate and recover historic Mennonite gravestones from the Khortytsia region, before enlisting in the military after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

A final note: By the time this issue of *JMS* arrives in mailboxes we will have just concluded our October 2024 sesquicentennial conference, "Settlers, Subjects, Citizens: The 1870s Mennonites in Historical Context." Publishing two issues of JMS per year for the past two years allowed us to incorporate an expanded slate of papers from the "MCC at 100" conference (hosted by the University of Winnipeg) as well as the "Indigenous-Mennonite Encounters in Time and Space" conference (Conrad Grebel University College). With this issue, our hard-working editorial team is returning to publishing once a year. As a result, selected peer-reviewed papers from the "Subjects, Settlers, Citizens" conference will appear in our JMS Forum in late summer of 2025.

Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Editor