

Foreword:

This issue marks a special anniversary. In 1978, 25 years ago, the Chair in Mennonite studies at the University of Winnipeg was founded. It was made possible through generous gifts from the Dr. David Friesen Foundation and the Canadian Government's Multiculturalism Secretariat, gifts that created a significant endowment. Five years later, in 1983, the Chair launched the peer-reviewed interdisciplinary *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. In this issue we present reflections on the meaning of these two achievements. We also publish a number of articles on the main focus of the *Journal* over the years, that is, studies of the Mennonite experience in Russia and in Canada. These articles also represent the full range of disciplines employed by *Journal* articles over the years, including narrative history, cultural and social history, social science and literary analysis.

In the *JMS Forum* section of this issue, we present articles on crucial components of the Chair in Mennonite Studies program. Dr. Harry Loewen, the first holder of the Chair, uses the details of his own life – refugee boy from the Soviet Union, university student in Germany, professor at the University of Waterloo, and finally Chair in Mennonite Studies – to contextualize the significance of teaching Mennonite Studies in a secular university; as he argues, the Chair was established not to propagate a faith, but to study it and the people it has shepherded as objectively as the tools of the humanities and social sciences allow. Dr. Al Reimer, long-time Associate Editor of the *Journal*, evaluates the evolution of the *Journal*. He notes how the ambitious vision to create a critical Canadian-based academic

instrument succeeded and how over the years scholars have become comfortable in offering perspectives on Mennonites that embrace ethnic identities, reflect both successes and failures, consider urban cultures and include themes of social significance. Dr. Catherine Hunter, presently on faculty in the Department of English, recalls her time as a “non-Mennonite” student in a Mennonite Studies class; it was a time of open, liberal and critical thought that became relevant in interpreting a wider, Canadian literature.

We begin the “Research Articles” section with a textual analysis by the noted Canadian ethnic historian, Frances Swyripa. She traces the cultural markings imposed on prairie Canada by two of its most significant immigrant groups, the Mennonites and the Ukrainians, and highlights the manner in which the two groups’ theologies and worldviews are reflected in the physical monuments they created.

Next we present three articles that survey the divergent experience of the Mennonites in Russia and Prussia, including its economic, political and literary sides. Natalia Venger, more commonly known in Canada as Natasha Ostasheva, details the history of the Khortitsa Colony Mennonite industrial elite. Venger outlines the economic opportunities these families took on the frontier of the Ukrainian steppes and takes an almost laudatory approach in charting the benevolence these families showed toward their workers and indeed Ukrainian society. John Staples follows with an article that uses the Peter J. Braun (Odessa) Archive to re-examine a central controversy in nineteenth century Russian Mennonite history, the pitched cultural battle between the progressive reformer Johann Cornies and the conservative Elder Jakob Warkentin; Staples argues that the conflict was not so much a religious war as a disagreement over the economic implications of the Mennonite *Privilegium*. Finally, Lauren Friesen interprets the rise and fall of the famed 19th century East Prussian playwright, Hermann Sudermann: the son of Mennonites, Sudermann rose to fame by critiquing German upper class pretensions, but fell from grace when his East Prussian and Mennonite roots, culture and accent became the object of scorn from Berlin’s cultural elites.

Another four articles analyze Mennonite society in Canada and include works on political behaviour, church growth and educational values. Two of these works were presented at the 2001 “Mennonites and City” conference held at the University of Winnipeg. Bruno Dyck presents an interpretation of church growth in the so-called world capital of Mennonites; he uses a model derived from family procreation studies to show how ecclesiastical growth in Winnipeg resembles the creation of clan lineages. Sam Steiner narrates the development of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Ontario, showing how old boundaries broke down in urban contexts, providing churches of

significant cultural and theological differences the impetus to join forces and create an innovative Mennonite conference. This is followed by a social scientific analysis of “pro-social values” held by two large groups of Mennonite high schoolers in Winnipeg; Eduard and Shirin Schludermann and Cam-loi Huynh argue that religiousness is linked to positive social attitudes and that the culture at Mennonite schools serves less of a “social control” function than a “social facilitation function.” Joe Friesen adds to the nascent field of Mennonite political history by studying “Mennonite” polling station data in Winnipeg and contextualizing those findings with interviews with Mennonite politicians and a reading of Mennonite newspaper letters; he finds a shift in support from the Liberal to the Social Credit parties in the ‘50s and ‘60s, and then with Mennonite professionalization in the ‘70s and ‘80s, a divergence to either the Conservative or NDP parties.

Again we include reviews of the best in Mennonite Studies during the past year. Joining the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* as book review editor for literature is Dr. Kathleen Venema of the University of Winnipeg, Department of English; Kathleen’s expertise in Western Canadian historical narrative creation and her experience as an MCC worker in Africa equip her well for this new challenge. In the meantime, we thank Dr. Mavis Reimer, for seven years of committed and generous service as literature review editor.

Finally, we include an index of articles published over the last ten years. The 2003 index can be taken as a companion to the index prepared for the 1993 issue which listed the publications in the *Journal’s* first ten years. We thank, student Karin Kliever for taking on this assignment.

Warm congratulations to the many contributors to the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* in its 20-year history and thank you to the many community members who have made the 25 years of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg possible. In a spirit of thanksgiving for past blessings and commitment to continued excellence we carry on with unabashed enthusiasm.

Royden Loewen, editor