

New Publication Explores History of Mennonites in Siberia

by Paul Toews

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Ethno Confessions in a Soviet State: Mennonites in Siberia, 1920-1980, Annotated Archival Listing of Documents and Materials, Select Documents (2006) is a joint publication of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Russian Academy of Sciences. Published in March, the book is the first fruit of the Siberian Mennonite Research Project begun in 2002 by the Center.

The goal of the project is to explore the history of Mennonites in Siberia. Beginning in the late nineteenth century many Mennonites moved to Siberia. During the Soviet period many others were relocated or exiled to the region. There are more Mennonite communities and congregations today in this region of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) than elsewhere.

Since the demise of the Soviet Union many archival sources relative to the Mennonite story have been retrieved from Ukraine and European Russia. The project hired Dr. Andrej Savin, a historian with the Russian Academy of Sciences, to discover the materials that will document the Siberian story. Dr. Savin has written extensively on Germans and Evangelicals in Siberia. *Ethno Confessions*, the first of three projected volumes, includes an annotated listing of 1000 archival files from depositories across Siberia and from several archival institutions in Moscow, 103 selected documents and a number of photographs and illustrations.

Co-publishing these volumes with the Russian Academy of Science, the most prestigious scholarly entity in Russia, gives the small sub-field of Russian Mennonite studies an instant visibility and credibility. It comes at a time when there is a renewed interest in ethno-religious studies in Russian historiography. We anticipate that this project will only further spur this interest.

Through contacts with the Mennonite aussiedler communities in Germany five hundred copies are being freely distributed to Mennonites across Siberia. We have already received reports of the interest the publication has created in their communities.

The Center is currently having the book translated and hopes to release an English edition sometime in 2007. Dr. Savin is continuing his work with a view toward publishing two additional volumes of documents from the materials identified in this first volume.

The project is being largely underwritten by the descendants of Peter Dick who spent his youth in Siberia before migrating to Canada in the 1920s. We are, however, in need of additional support to complete the publication of the projected two volumes and do cherish the assistance of the Society members for this important project.

