

Molochna '04: Mennonites and Their Neighbours

Molochna '04: *Mennonites and their Neighbours*, an international scholarly conference, will convene from June 3-6 2004 in Melitopol, Ukraine. It will be a keystone event in the 2004 bicentennial celebrations of the Mennonite settlement in the Molochna River basin of southern Ukraine. Scholars from the United States, Canada, Paraguay, Brazil, Germany, Holland, Russia, and Ukraine will gather in the Molochna to reflect on the history of one of the most prominent minority communities in the Tsarist and Soviet empires.

Mennonites played a unique role in the Molochna as engines of change and modernization, keen observers, who recorded fundamental developments in both their own communities and those surrounding them, and a litmus test for the Soviet system, challenging its all-engrossing principles. They are, today, searching for ways to create sustainable, locally led, development programs.

Scholars increasingly recognize the value of the Mennonite case for understanding broader issues of Tsarist and Soviet minority history. The landmark 1999 conference *Khortitsa '99: Mennonites in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union* gained the attention of national television and newspaper media in Ukraine, and was widely praised in academic communities as a model of scholarly collaboration.

Ukrainian and Russian scholars, benefiting from grants provided by the "Khortitsa '99 Program of Support for Research, Publications, and Library Acquisitions in Mennonite Studies in the Former Soviet Union" have built upon the legacy of Khortitsa '99 to construct new and challenging interpretations of their own and Mennonite history. Mennonites now appear in Ukrainian high school and university textbooks as examples of Ukraine's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural past, and as models for a more tolerant future.

Molochna '04 will build upon the achievements of Khortitsa '99. Participants will explore subjects from across the humanities and social sciences that address all aspects of the history of the Molochna Mennonites and the region in which they settled as well as their interactions with their larger environment and their Molochna neighbours.

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