

# A Tribute to Dr. David Friesen

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David Friesen was born in Saratov, Russia in 1911. His family experienced great difficulty during and after the Russian Revolution and thus in 1924 when David was 12, the Friesen family migrated to Canada where they lived in Carmen, Manitoba. There were two girls and two boys in the family, and Christina, a sister, predeceased them in Russia. During the

Depression David worked on the farm and in Winnipeg. During these years, however, David was able to complete his high school at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, Manitoba and go on to study at the University of Manitoba, where he earned a law degree. In 1941 he was called to the bar, and later was named Queen's Counsel and established the law firm of David Friesen and Associates. In 1963 David obtained a Master of Science in Business Administration from the University of Minnesota and in 1973 a doctorate in Business and Economics from St. Gallen in Switzerland.

In 1943 David married Katherine Loewen, also a post-Russian Revolution refugee to Canada. Her family had settled in Saskatchewan and Ontario before coming to Winnipeg, where Katherine worked as a teacher. David was baptized by *Aeltester* J.P. Klassen at the First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, the church where David and

Katherine met . After their marriage they made it their home church. In the years following their marriage the young couple pursued their respective careers, but on the side built two houses, one in which they lived and another which they sold. In 1951 the couple saw an opportunity in real estate as housing was in great need following World War II and thus hired five workers and constructed 13 houses. This was the first year of Quality Construction, which over the years has developed into a fully integrated real estate development company with operations in Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Winnipeg.

David and Katherine Friesen's Mennonite heritage, education and willingness to undertake hard work have given them the opportunities and desire to help others. Through the years David Friesen has involved himself in many charitable activities and foundations. Those involvements include the following: a founder and director of the Mennonite Benevolent Society; a founder and past chairman of Autumn House, a senior citizens' residence; a founder, donor and past president of Menno Simons College at the University of Winnipeg; a co-founder and donor with Katherine Friesen of Menno Simons School in Calgary; a founder and donor of First Mennonite Church Expansion Project; the co-founder of the David and Katherine Friesen Family Foundation; a builder and donor of Canadian Mennonite Bible College Family Residence; donor of Canadian Mennonite Bible College Scholarship Funds; donor of Mennonite Brethren Bible College Scholarship Funds; donor of the University of Manitoba Dr. David Friesen Scholarship; donor of Winnipeg Foundation; and donor of numerous other private school and church organizations.

In 1981 David Friesen was the recipient of an honorary doctorate at the University of Winnipeg. On that occasion Dr. Al Reimer wrote a citation that included the following statement: "As a philanthropist and promoter of education, Dr. Friesen is making a unique contribution to our community. He is that rare man who regards success in business primarily as an opportunity for service to the community, to help others by supporting educational and social services. Dr. Friesen cherishes his Mennonite heritage and has done much to foster and preserve it in his adopted homeland....David Friesen's life and career provide a classic model of the immigrant boy from Europe who succeeds in the new world without forgetting his roots, and who is determined to give back to his adopted country more than he took from her."

Of particular importance for the readers of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, David Friesen was the community donor to an endowment fund that enabled the creation of the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg 25 years ago in 1978. His gift was matched by the Canadian government's Secretary of State for Multiculturalism. Through his generosity, Dr. Friesen has provided an invaluable impetus to Mennonite higher education in Canada. At 91 years of age he is still passionate about his giving and thankful for his Mennonite heritage.