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Main content

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Helmut Harder, a Mennonite institutional leader of the latter twentieth century, has undertaken a critical biographical assessment of David Toews, perhaps the foremost Mennonite institution builder among the Canadian "Russian" Mennonites in the first part of that century. Harder taught theology at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now part of Canadian Mennonite University) from 1962 to 1990. He then served as general secretary of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada until retirement in 1999. He was one of the strongest Canadian voices advocating the two-country denominational model that culminated in the recent formation of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.

His own background as a church bureaucrat provided Harder, a "father" of Mennonite Church Canada, a unique insight into the life of David Toews, a "father" of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. Harder's personal history also suggests why this biography has a more institutional focus than, for example, Esther Epp-Tiessen's recent biography of Toews's younger Canadian Mennonite colleague, J. J. Thiessen.

David Toews began life in the emerging Mennonite colony of Am Trakt, just east of the Volga River...

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