This year, REEEC is pleased to welcome postdoctoral fellow Aileen Friesen. Dr. Friesen received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Alberta in 2013. Her dissertation was titled “Building Orthodox Communities Outside Mother Russia: Church and Colonization in Omsk Diocese, 1885-1917.” While at Alberta, she taught second-year courses on the history of Christianity and Modern Europe. Her main research interests are in settler colonialism, religion in the Russian Empire, and spatial history. She has published two articles in the Journal of Mennonite Studies on different aspects of Mennonite interaction with the state in the Russian Empire. To her, “Mennonites pose a fascinating case study of the integration and eventual alienation of an ethno-confessional community in imperial Russia.”

Currently, Dr. Friesen is working on turning her dissertation into a book manuscript. Her project, tentatively titled “Stewards of an Orthodox Empire: Settlers, Clergymen, State Officials and the Building of a Siberian Diocese, 1885-1917,” focuses on the religious implications of the settler movement to places like Siberia and Central Asia in late Imperial Russia. Specifically, this project explores Omsk diocese as a site of interaction, where the state, the Russian Orthodox Church, and settlers collaborated and struggled with each other as they rebuilt Orthodox religious institutions and life. At the University of Illinois, she will add new chapters that incorporate a spatial dynamic into this story by investigating different factors that influenced the development of Orthodox religiosity in settler parishes using a geographic information system (GIS). Her research is funded by the Government of Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Though new to campus, Dr. Friesen is already familiar with REEEC. She has twice participated in the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center’s Summer Research Laboratory, and had great experiences interacting with the faculty and staff associated with REEEC as well as using the outstanding library collection. The resources of REEEC and the prospect of working with Prof. John Randolph (Department of History) as her research supervisor contributed to her decision to come to Champaign-Urbana. At REEEC, she is “looking forward to its numerous events and taking advantage of the Slavic Reference Service.”

Stephanie Chung is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests are in Soviet literature and culture, Russian women’s writing, and Czech literature. She received her B.A. in Plan II Honors, and Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies in 2007; and her M.A. in Slavic Languages and Literatures in 2009 at the University of Texas at Austin. She hopes to write a dissertation on Soviet Russian women’s memoirs, with a particular focus on the writer and translator Lilianna Lungina.