

**MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA**

**École de théologie évangélique de Montréal
4824 Côte-des-Neiges
Suite 301
Montréal, QC H3V 1G4
Ph: 514-331-0878**

**24 January 2009
9:00-3:30 PM**

Present:

Sam Steiner, President, MHSC, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

**Royden Loewen, Vice-President, MHSC, Chair of Mennonite Studies,
University of Winnipeg**

Lucille Marr, Secretary MHSC, La Société Mennonite Historique du Québec

**Richard Thiessen, Treasurer MHSC, Mennonite Historical Society of British
Columbia**

Alf Redekopp, Member at Large, MHSC, Mennonite Church Canada

Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan

Victor G. Wiebe, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan

Bert Friesen, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

Richard Lougheed, La Société Mennonite Historique du Québec

Robert Goertzen, Evangelical Mennonite Conference

Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada

Maurice Martin, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario

Conrad Stoesz, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

Colin Neufeldt, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Luke Martin, La Société Mennonite Historique du Québec

1. Welcome & Introductions:

Sam Steiner welcomed the group and invited Richard Lougheed to give a formal welcome and a brief devotion.

2. Devotional:

Richard Lougheed welcomed members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada on behalf of La Société Mennonite Historique du Québec. In thinking about the role of the historian, Richard suggested that this society's members seem like a particular group – low key and humble. He proposed several analogies for the historian. Historians are translators, or the people who have done the work to understand the local language and interpret it. They are also tour guides, discovering wonderful treasures that they wish to share with others. He affirmed that Mennonites are proud of their history as opposed to some who are ashamed of theirs. Finally, before a word of prayer, he challenged members of the society to seek the truth as we search out the acts of people and the acts of God throughout the church.

3. Minutes of the 19 January 2008 Annual Meeting

Motion: That the minutes be accepted as corrected. M/S/C Lucille Marr/Jake Buhler

4. Business arising from the minutes

It was noted that:

- the executive had appointed Alf Redekopp as our representative to the Humans Rights Committee.
- Ken Reddig had been invited to contact MCC Canada regarding the history project

Following discussion around whether the minutes need to summarize the reports, it was agreed that only discussion leading up to and including recommendations need be recorded. People can read the reports for fuller information. It was suggested that the reports should also be posted on the web site.

Jake Buhler asked whether we wish to bring in an assistant secretary. The executive was asked to take this up.

Richard Thiessen noted that the numbers in the circulated Book inventory was incorrect.

5. Approval of the agenda

6. Reports from the Provincial Societies

6.1 Quebec

Roy Loewen suggested historical research on the delegations of Manitoba Mennonites that came to Quebec to investigate settlement in the 1920s. In the end, the group went to Mexico instead.

A motion was presented to thank the Quebec society for hosting the 2009 MHSC meetings. Roy Loewen/Conrad Stoesz. Carried

6.2 Ontario

Maurice Martin prefaced his report with a tribute to entrepreneur Milo Shantz who passed away recently. Maurice emphasized Mr. Shantz's desire to tell the Mennonite story and to tell it well, as evidenced by his establishment of the Mennonite Visitor Centre in St. Jacobs, Ontario. Maurice also reported that the Ontario board meets four times a year and that their archives, the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, is under the auspices of Conrad Grebel University College.

Maurice also indicated that an issue is how soon can we talk about history? In other words, how much time has to pass before we can talk about history?

6.3 Manitoba

The Manitoba board also meets four times a year. Alf Redekopp noted there is no Mennonite museum for human rights; but rather a Mennonite committee for human rights. Manitoba has several archives under the authority of various conferences along with some regional ones.

6.4 Saskatchewan

Jake Buhler noted that there are stirrings in Saskatchewan between Hutterites and Mennonites. Positive action emerged last year in the PeaceWorks event.

The Saskatchewan board meets monthly. Their archives is under the authority of the society, although it shares space with the conference. Jake suggested that 2008 was one of the most successful years in the number of things done and people attracted.

6.5. Alberta

Colin Neufeldt reported that Alberta has had an eventful year. The board has two phone meetings and two meetings in person each year in conjunction with public meetings. The Alberta archives is owned and operated by the society. They are presently housed at the MCC building, although their future location is uncertain. Irene Klassen a member at large on the provincial executive, reported on her book, which deals with important Mennonite leaders in Alberta, at the society's fall session.

6.6 British Columbia

Richard Thiessen reported that the BC society meets four times a year and their Archives is owned by the society. BC Mennonite denominations do not have their own archives.

7. President's Report & Report from the Board

Sam Steiner read a note that Ted Friesen sent to him, remembering the dream that Ted, Frank Epp and J. Winfield Fretz had for a Mennonite Historical Society in Canada. He expressed concern with the excess stock of *Mennonites in Canada* and suggested donating copies. Ted affirmed his continuing deep interest in MHSC.

Roy Loewen asked Sam Steiner to talk about his vision as President of the society. Sam pointed out that the society's strength is that it has more than one project. A weakness of earlier years was a single project, the *Mennonites in Canada* history project. Sam affirmed the new life that the society gained with DVCM and GAMEO. He also noted that there is strength in bringing together provincial societies around the table once a year. Finally, he affirmed that the society does need to grapple with future vision.

8. MHSC Award of Excellence

Sam reported that the 2009 Award of Excellence had been given to David K. Schellenberg. He will create a press release about the society and Mr. Schellenberg's contribution to Canadian Mennonite history to be posted on the MHSC web site. The Manitoba group will find an appropriate way to present the award.

9. MHSC Incorporation Update

Recommendation: The executive moves that the activities of MHSC Inc. be transferred to a new unincorporated society of the same name. Richard Thiessen/Victor Wiebe/Carried

The question was raised as to whether the society will need a letter with legal advise affirming that it doesn't need incorporation. The answer is no. If the society re-incorporated it would seek provincial incorporation rather than federal status with Industry Canada.

Recommendation: That the MHSC authorize Richard Thiessen take the follow up steps needed to implement this decision. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/Alf Redekopp

The Executive indicated that it is giving notice of a by-law change next year.

10. Project Reports

10.1 Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) report

10.1.1. Report of MHSC representative to GAMEO Management Board

Bert Friesen reported that meetings with people in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and Indiana are creating several new regional editorial committees. He also highlighted connections that GAMEO has with Hutterite groups in Manitoba. There was some discussion around the potential of a Face book group to facilitate interaction among those interested in GAMEO and a suggestion that templates for geographical input be made available for writers.

Recommendation: That the Canadian editorial group continue as a MHSC standing committee. The committee will consist of chair person, managing editor and associate managing editor as well as one representative from each province. Each provincial society will select the individual to represent it. M/S/C Alf Redekopp/Maurice Martin

10.1.2. Canadian Editorial Committee appointments

Recommendation: The chair of the Canadian Editorial Committee of GAMEO will be appointed annually and will also serve as MHSC's representative to the GAMEO Management Board. M/S/C Alf Redekopp/Conrad Stoesz

Recommendation: that Bert Friesen be appointed as 2009 chair of the Canadian GAMEO group. M/S/C Alf Redekopp/Colin Neufeldt

10.2 Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM)

Roy Loewen's suggestion of "Mennonites, Madness and Mental Health" as the title for the 2011 DVCM conference drew a great deal of discussion. No decision was made. Roy asked for volunteers for the planning committee.

10.3 Mennonite Women in Canada by Marlene Epp

Roy Loewen reported that book launches at University of Winnipeg and Conrad Grebel University College were well attended.

10.4 Mennonites and Money Conference

See the DVCM report.

10.5. Global Mennonite History

Roy Loewen reminded the MHSC that Mennonite World Conference had supported the writing of a five volume history of Mennonites around the world. The South American volume should be out by the Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay to be held in July. The intent is that Mennonites on five continents will write their own histories. The problem is that many Mennonite groups in Africa, Asia and South America are new and lack archives. The volumes on Africa and Europe are out. Roy and his co-author Steve Nolt have a draft

together and are hoping for fall 2009 publication. Their problem is what *not* to say with the rich history in North America.

10.6 Mennonite Committee for Human Rights

Esther Epp-Tiessen, recording secretary of the committee wrote a draft report. Alf Redekopp highlighted the objectives and work of the committee as outlined in its annual report.

There is a debate about whether human rights language belongs in our theology. It seems to put human rights in terms of justice in the world - the right for food for all, etc. The Mennonite voice is unique in that it wants to have input – not about how it has suffered, but in terms of justice for all. Mennonites are concerned not with individual rights, but with corporate rights.

10.7. Genealogy Committee proposal

Bert Friesen presented his proposal that each provincial society move its genealogical information to a centralized site (<http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/>) under the sponsorship of MHSC. The representative from each provincial historical society responded as follows:

Richard Thiessen noted that in British Columbia, genealogies already are listed on both the Mennonite genealogical site and the local society's website in British Columbia. Their society sees this dual listing as being important for their provincial society's fundraising.

Colin Neufeldt stated that the Alberta Mennonite Historical Society has not discussed this possibility. Although in principal he sees no problem, their volunteer base is small and they need to prioritize and in the immediate future continue to focus on Alberta materials.

Victor Wiebe reported that the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society supports the idea of a centralized genealogical site in principal, and it has people willing to volunteer their time to work on it. They do have questions, however: Would census data be loaded there? What about cemetery indexes? How would the material be organized?

Maurice Martin stated that in Ontario, there are lots of Amish and Old Mennonite materials ready to go. He wondered if this was primarily a western Russian-Mennonite project?

Conrad Stoesz and Alf Redekopp responded for the Manitoba society. Alf indicated that Manitoba already has moved all of its material to <http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/> and has decided not to keep genealogical information on its own site. However the Manitoba society supports the idea of duplicating materials on local provincial sites.

Alf Redekopp raised the question of who should own the [mennonitegenealogy.com](http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/) domain at this point. So far it is in Manitoba. Should this be a Canada-wide domain? Is MHSC interested in taking over this domain? A sub group would need to look after it.

Richard Lougheed gave the perspective from Quebec. Put simply, is the proposed project does not include the genealogy of Quebec Mennonites.

Roy Loewen raised the broader philosophical issues around Quebec and Ontario's priorities. He suggested they are not focused on genealogical records, and suggested keeping

genealogical projects within the provincial societies, with the national society only in a supportive role.

Recommendation: That Richard Thiessen, Richard Lougheed, Victor Wiebe, and Bert Friesen form a Task Force to do a review of the proposal for a genealogical committee and expanded MHSC website in light of the MHSC's mandate and budget and that they identify what kind of web site we want to have and come back with a proposal next year. M/S/C Roy Loewen/Jake Buhler

Richard Thiessen will take leadership in initiating the review.

10.8. MCC Canada History Project

With MCC Canada's ongoing support of our society, the executive suggests that the MHSC put in a budget line of \$250.00 for the MCC History project. It also suggests that we remove the MHSC 40th Anniversary Booklet from the budget.

10.9. *Mennonites in Canada* – one volume report

Recommendation: That the MHSC continue to encourage Ted Regehr to write a one-volume history of Mennonites in Canada of no more than 250 – 300 pages. M/S/C Roy Loewen/Alf Redekopp. The society assumes that new research would take the chronology beyond **Mennonites in Canada**, volumes I-III.

10.10 *Mennonites in Canada*, Vols. I-III

Recommendation: That the society investigate with Friesen's Printing the cost of sending *Mennonites in Canada III* to each Canadian Mennonite congregation postage paid. We will invite congregations to also order Vol. II at no cost except for shipping. M/S/C Victor Wiebe/Lucille Marr

11. Institutional Reports

11.1 Mennonite Central Committee Canada

No report

11.2 Evangelical Mennonite Church Archives

Robert Goertzen prefaced his remarks by saying how much David Schellenberg, who was the life and breathe of the archives for the last several decades, is missed.

11.3 Mennonite Archives of Ontario & MCEC

With the hectic pace during the change of personnel at the Archives, there was no written report. Sam Steiner explained that he retired December 20th, and apologized for the absence of a report. He highlighted that three collections came in just at the end of his tenure in the MAO – account books of Benjamin Eby and Joseph Schneider as well as a couple of collections of diaries including LJ Burkholder and others reflecting religious activity in late 19th century Waterloo county.

Sam then introduced Lauren Harder-Gissing as the new Archivist/Librarian. The Frank H Epp collection is close to being fully processed and the Mennonite Archives of Ontario is looking for a way to celebrate that.

11.4 Chair in Mennonite Studies

Roy Loewen highlighted various aspects of his written report.

11.5 Mennonite Heritage Village

There was no report submitted.

11.6 Mennonite Heritage Centre of Mennonite Church Canada

Alf Redekopp highlighted aspects of his written report.

11.7 Centre for MB Studies/MB Historical Commission

Conrad Stoesz offered a summary of that report on behalf of the new director, Doug Heidebrecht.

11.8 Mennonite Books

Alf Redekopp noted that this organization no longer exists. We need to stop expecting a report from them.

8. Financial Statement

Motion: That the MHSC financial statements be accepted, including writing down *Mennonites in Canada* stock. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/ Conrad Stoesz

GAMEO financial report is for information only

9. Budget

Motion: That the 2008-09 budget be accepted as presented. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/Maurice Martin

14. Appointment of an auditor

Motion: That the MHSC appoint Rod Ewert as our auditor for 2009. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/Victor Wiebe.

15. Report of the Nominations Committee and Elections

Motion: That the current executive continue for 2009-10.

Sam Steiner: Chair
Roy Loewen: Vice-Chair
Richard Thiessen: Treasurer
Lucille Marr: Secretary
Alf Redekopp: Member-at-Large

Motion: That nominations cease. M/S/C Maurice Martin/Jake Buhler

16. Appointment of a Nominations Committee

Motion: That Maurice Martin and Laureen Harder form the new nominating committee. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/Roy Loewen

17. Dreaming of Future projects

It was agreed that we need to focus on the ones that we have right now.

18. Next meeting:

Manitoba, Jan 22-23, 2010: The Manitoba society was encouraged to consider meeting outside of Winnipeg

2011: Saskatchewan

2012: Winnipeg

19. **Adjournment** Conrad Stoesz moved. There was no objections