

MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA
9:00 AM- 3:00 PM, Saturday, 22 January 2011
Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Present: Sam Steiner, President, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Royden Loewen, Vice-President, Chair of Mennonite Studies,
University of Winnipeg
Lucille Marr, Secretary, La Société Mennonite d'histoire du Québec
Richard Thiessen, Treasurer, Mennonite Historical Society of British
Columbia
Alf Redekopp, Member at large, Mennonite Church Canada
John VanDyck Jr., Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia
Wesley Berg, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Ralph Dahl, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Ted Regehr, Alberta
Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Victor G. Wiebe, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Elizabeth Guenther, Saskatchewan
Elmer Regehr, Saskatchewan
Vitoria Neufeldt, Saskatchewan
Helen Kruger, Saskatchewan
Bill Kruger, Saskatchewan
Ed Schmidt, Saskatchewan
Ernie Bergen, Saskatchewan
Henry Janzen, Saskatchewan
Leonard Doell, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Bert Friesen, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Conrad Stoesz, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Robert Goertzen, Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives
Ken Reddig, Manitoba
Maurice Martin, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
Linda Huebert Hecht, GAMEO
Richard Lougheed, La Société Mennonite d'histoire du Québec

1. Welcome & Introductions :

Sam invited Jake Buhler, the host for the MHSS, to say some opening words.

- 2. Devotional :** Jake Buhler pointed our thoughts to the trembling aspen, the most humble tree growing on prairie soil, extending east as far as Quebec. It's a community tree; one bush is one organism. It comes back after a fire because each part of the tree carries precisely the same DNA and it propagates by sending out roots which give way to new growth. The trembling aspen is a good metaphor for the church, Jake suggested. When one hurts, we all hurt. Compared to the more individualistic maple, the trembling aspen is the better model for the church, and the community that sustains and maintains us. As we deliberate, Jake suggested, we can think of the leaders and

visionaries who played the role of the maple tree, but it is important to remember that they are rooted in community; as the trembling aspen metaphor, the more humble aspect of the community does the things that need to be done.

Following the opening prayer, Sam thanked Jake for organizing the local arrangements, the MHSS for its hospitality with opening their homes for us, and a delightful tour to the Old Colony Mennonites and Blumenort yesterday, all in the context of the good, crisp Saskatchewan weather.

3. **Minutes of the 22 January 2010 Annual Meeting: Lucille moved/Conrad seconded/ carried**
4. **Business arising from the minutes:** The question of the possibility of an interactive website versus a print version of a one-volume history of Mennonites in Canada was noted for later discussion.
5. **Approval of the agenda:** approved
6. **Reports from the Provincial Societies:** Highlights from the leisurely discussion follow. For detailed reports please see attached.

a. **British Columbia:** Richard reported that there are now two part-time staff, with about 30 volunteers. Several events were highlighted including talks by Colin Neufeldt and Marlene Epp respectively in February and May. The June AGM featured a film about Mennonites in Siberia. The archives continues to develop with microfilm digitizing projects including the *Mennonitsche Rundschau* and *Der Bote*, and volunteers cataloguing items. The society is exploring the possibility of archival space.

b. **Alberta:** The MHSA is in transition with a new chair, a new treasurer and new members at large. Long-time volunteers such as Irene Klassen and Judith Rempel are moving on and it is a challenge to find new people to take on some of the jobs they have been so capably filling. The challenges of a scattered membership also continue. The AGM was positive and the executive is happy with its newsletter. There were four presentations at the October meeting, one being a gentleman who followed his grandfather's footsteps on the Great Trek.

Our chairperson wished them well on behalf of the MHSC during these times of transition.

c. **Saskatchewan:** Jake proudly presented that society's new logo designed by Peter Siemens, a grade 10 student. He noted that a new provincial law requires charities to have ten board members and that Leonard Doell came on as chair to meet that requirement. The board now has a Swedenborgian along with reps from the Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren churches. Finally, Jake announced that Victoria Neufeld has stepped up to fill the role of editor of *The Historian*.

Victor Wiebe added that there is a great deal of archival material, which is a good problem, although it is not always clear how to dispose of it.

d. **Manitoba:** Conrad Stoesz reported that the Manitoba society has produced a calendar designed to serve as a Public Relations piece, along with a newsletter called *Heritage Postings*. Their local history committee is the most active, although there are also genealogy, family studies, historic site and Monuments committees. Their board recently gave the society's website the go-ahead to go live.

As one of a variety of parallel history societies in Manitoba, it is a challenge, often, to find

volunteers to get this society's things done. The board is hopefully looking to baby boomer retirements as a potential source of volunteers.

e. Ontario: Maurice Martin suggested that if the society would choose trees as symbol, there would be two: black walnut and oak. This society is closely linked to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario and the history department, and as such, it is housed at Conrad Grebel University College. Sam Steiner's research on the history of the Ontario Mennonites was featured at the 2010 AGM, with the topic being getting in touch with "cousins in the faith": Mennonite Brethren in Christ.

Other activities included the launch of Barb Draper's book and an art-quilt commissioning. The society is on the Peace Committee struck in response to 200th anniversary celebrations of the War of 1812. Along with the Quakers and Brethren in Christ, the Ontario Mennonite Historical Society is making plans to remember Conscientious Objectors: "There are some people who chose a different way." Discussion includes the potential of highlighting EJ Swalm's significant role in modeling Conscientious Objection during World War I and keeping that story alive through World War II and afterwards.

f. Quebec: Richard Lougheed began his report by asking: "Do we really fit in this group?" Our churches are all within fifty miles; few people have Mennonite ancestry; and it is a small society with only six members, three of whom are trained historians. The archives consists of two boxes and one hard drive and it shares space with the French historical society in the Mennonite Brethren college in Montreal. Most of the data is in the form of interviews on DVD. The history is only 50 years old, largely concentrated on the 50th anniversaries of the Mennonite Church Eastern Canada churches and the upcoming 50th of the Mennonite Brethren. Another project is Richard's history of comparing the missions of four different denominations: Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Church Canada, Holdeman and Brethren in Christ. Perhaps the society's claim to fame in this larger group is that the first other language articles on GAMEO are in French.

Chair Sam Steiner responded by thanking the Quebec society for joining and said it has been "a shot in the arm" for the national society, with its important role in Quebec in teaching about Anabaptist - Mennonite beliefs and roots.

7. **President's Report & Report from the Board:** President Sam Steiner reviewed activities of the year, including giving the society's Award of Excellence to Lorraine Roth. It was only a small event because she is quite feeble, but he affirmed that it felt good to give it to her. He also reported on the Genealogy Committee, DVCM and GAMEO. He emphasized that the latter two continue to flourish, and the society needs to discern on the former with care. With his stepping down as GAMEO managing editor, he noted that Richard Thiessen will take on that role in Jan 2012.
8. **MHSC Award of Excellence:** Last evening, the society awarded Saskatchewan historians Dick Epp and Esther Patkau, the former posthumously and the latter in person. The decision to give two awards emphasizes the flowering of history-making in Saskatchewan. Jake Buhler emphasized that there is the risk of overlooking others also worthy of award, so it is important to think of these awards as representing all those working on promoting the history of Mennonites in Saskatchewan.
9. **MHSC Incorporation Update:** Richard Thiessen gave the updates. For wording, please see attached. The changes emerged as a result of the difficulty of finding a chartered accountant willing to do an audit for a fee the society could afford. The result was the decision to move all operations to an unincorporated society. Notice still needs to be given to the Charities Directorate. With no constitution in the files, Richard pulled out items from the society's By-laws and applied them to a

template provided by the Charities Directorate. Sixty days notice needs to be given for any change. Today he is formally giving notice of change in our By-Laws with this constitution. Sixty days from this meeting, the society will hold an electronic vote and Richard will be able to notify the Charities Directorate that we comply with their requirements. The final step will be to file the information that the Corporation ceases to exist with Corporations Canada.

In terms of finances, the Charities Directorate will require an annual report which will include a financial review. An accountant is now doing the review for no charge. It turns out to be equally rigorous to an audit.

10. **Genealogy Committee recommendations:** Victor Wiebe reported. Please see attachment for the full report. Following are highlights:

A proposal to PeaceWorks is in the works for a web-based tool designed to manage data. It would offer a server and a tool to manage that data. From its Manitoba office, it is offering a server that would be dedicated exclusively to the Canadian society and GAMEO. PeaceWorks is quoting \$25,000 to start up, with an annual fee yet to be disclosed.

It needs to be noted that this is a major initiative for the MHSC. This new committee holds the potential of launching the first genealogical site in North America that offers a merger of data from both Swiss and Prussian/Russian Mennonite sources.

In terms of implications for the national society, the new committee is not asking for money, but rather for the name, with the assumption that they can approach provincial societies for funds. There is the expectation of charging a small access fee for use.

The committee hopes to go ahead once enough funds have been found. Sam noted that three groups are now doing fundraising: GAMEO, MCC book project and the new genealogical committee. The committee was asked to revise and clarify its recommendations to bring back after the lunch break.

12:00-1:00 adjourned for lunch

Genealogy Committee recommendations (continued):

1. The Genealogy committee should be authorized to accept any relevant data.
2. The committee should be authorized to raise or have a commitment for funds for the genealogical website.
3. Following the raising of necessary funds, the genealogical committee is to be authorized to negotiate with PeaceWorks for the creation of a content management system data base.
4. that the funds in the 2010 budget for meetings be carried forward to 2011 for meetings.
5. once the content management system/data base is in operation, the committee may ask MHSC for annual ongoing operating budget for operating expenses.

M/S/ Victor/Bert

The following questions and concerns were raised:

- i. can we be sure we are not working against each other?
- ii. it is important to know that the new genealogical committee will be asking for money from the society
- iii. why would GAMEO and the Genealogy site not be under one budget as far as use of

- PeaceWorks is concerned? (PeaceWorks charges on size of data base, not traffic)
- iv. Our chairperson asked whether more needed to be said on the principle of the direction that this is heading?
 - a. Roy: agrees in principal with the direction in terms of our mandate to facilitate discovery of history of Mennonites in Canada
 - b. Laureen: it has not yet been brought to the Ontario society board; do we have time and energy and commitment from enough people to make this viable?
 - c. Ralph Dahl: Alberta needs more information

Unanimous vote in favour

11. Project Reports

a. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) report: Sam Steiner will step down from managing editor at the end of 2011 and Richard Thiessen has agreed to take on the position. Other updates included the following: a) With the awareness that there are still people who do not have access to the internet, DVD copies of GAMEO will be made available. This may include a nominal fee. b) The encyclopedia has multilingual capacity and GAMEO is moving towards making it more global. c) The Canadian editorial group needs people to produce content. Please see attached for the managing editor report.

b. Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM): Roy gave a brief review of the attached report. Highlights are as follows: a) For the last conference in DVCM II the committee is looking at “Human Rights: Torture, Incarceration and State Abuse.” b) Also noteworthy is the announcement that Esther Epp Tiessen has been approached and has agreed to write a history of MCC Canada. DVCM will be coming to the board regarding a subvention for publication. c) The MHSC board and MCC Canada have already approved a DVCM III. d) Finally, Roy reported on the phone conference DVCM meeting of yesterday. Suggested are the following as future DVCM conferences:

2013: celebrating and critiquing MCC Canada's history
2014: history of land and environment (water, food, and environmental history)
2016: evolving Mennonite identity
2018: childhood and youth or immigration

c. Archivists Meeting Report : Conrad reported on the exchange among archivists that happened Thursday. They are asking for affirmation for a second archivists meeting at AGM 2012. There was affirmation around the table for a similar meeting next year. The question was raised as to whether we want to add a line of \$1,000 to the budget for archivist travel.

d. Global Mennonite History Project: Roy reported on the five-volume project. Asia is still scheduled to come out this spring. The North America issue must be ready by June 2011 with the entire project to be completed in fall 2011.

e. Mennonite Committee for Human Rights: Alf reported that the objective of the committee is to explore the intersection between our faith and human rights language and to be a Mennonite voice for human rights. For Mennonites, an issue is the use of human rights language versus justice. This past year the committee looked at the right to food. An art exhibit is on display in Manitoba and will be touring across Canada for the next couple of years including Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Waterloo in July 2011.

f. **MCC Canada History Project:** Ken Reddig updated the meeting on the local reference committee based in Manitoba. It is noteworthy that J.M. Klassen, the first MCC Canada director, voiced support for the project before he passed away in late December. The budget is \$50,000, with about half in hand. The project will need a publication fund of about \$6,000. The plans are to raise the remainder from MCC alumni. Ken informed the meeting that donations can be made out to MHSC designated to MCC Canada History project. A reading committee is yet to be struck.

g. ***Mennonites in Canada* – one volume:** Ted Regehr reported that once he started work on this, it became clear that between new material and reinterpretation, the history would be much longer than a single volume. The question remains, will undergraduates need this information in book form, or in an electronic version?

We need to keep the conversation on the agenda and perhaps give it more space at our next meeting. The question remains: do we need a book, or do we need to find some other way to dispense the information that Ted has gathered?

h. *Mennonites in Canada*, Volumes. 1-3

- i. Inventory held & value: Last year the society sold forty-two copies of volume I and none of volumes II or III. Volume III is now available as an ebook.
Volume I: 173
Volume II: 200
Volume III: 300

At least 500 copies of Volumes II and III were distributed for free, touching every conference and congregation.

12. Institutional Reports: In the interest of time, people were encouraged to read the attached reports where provided for the following:

- a. **Mennonite Central Committee Canada**
- b. **Evangelical Mennonite Church Archives**
- c. **Brethren in Christ Archives**
- d. **Mennonite Archives of Ontario & MCEC**
- e. **Chair in Mennonite Studies**
- f. **Mennonite Heritage Village**
- g. **Mennonite Heritage Centre of Mennonite Church Canada**
- h. **Centre for MB Studies/MB Historical Commission**

13. Financial Statement: Richard Thiessen moved the acceptance of the financial reports. Conrad seconded

Alf pointed out that Mennonite Church Canada had designated \$5,000 towards the *Mennonites in Canada* one-volume project. The society still needs to decide how to handle this. **M/S/C**

Sam suggested that \$1,000 be added as a line for the archivist committee. Currently there is some \$32,000 in the bank. According to Revenue Canada, it is a problem to hoard money in the bank. Should we dispense of some of these funds?

14. Budget: Richard T. moved acceptance of the proposed Budget/seconded by Robert Goertzen/
carried

15. Appointment of an auditor: Richard T. recommended Mr. Ewert again as auditor/ Maurice Martin seconded/ carried

16. Report of the Nominations Committee and Elections: Victor reported for him and Laureen that the slate was the same as last year's. With no additional nominations **Richard L moved that nominations cease. /Conrad second/ carried.** Noting that some things will have to change next year, Sam announced that 2011 will be his last year as president.

17. Appointment of a Nominations Committee: Roy moved appointing Sam and Laureen to the committee/ Richard T seconded/ carried

18. New business: none

19. Next meetings:

- a. The January 20-21 2012 meeting was scheduled to be held in Manitoba. That society offered to give it up to Ontario because there will be 200th anniversary celebrations of the War 1812, including the input of the peace committee. The Ontario board members accepted the opportunity to plan a meeting in the Vineland area.
- b. Manitoba – 18-19 January 2013
- c. Manitoba –23-24 January 2014

Robert Goertzen noted that the EMC conference will be celebrating its 200th anniversary along with the annual convention and local churches; a Mennonite Heritage tour to Ukraine is planned for May 21st, 2012.

20. Adjournment : Victor moved/carried