

DRAFT

MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

Conrad Grebel University College
Waterloo, Ontario
Saturday, 4 December 2004, 9 a.m.

Present: Royden Loewen (President; Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg),
Sam Steiner (Vice-President; Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario),
Victor Wiebe (Secretary; Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan),
Laureen Harder-Gissing (Treasurer; Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario),
Richard Thiessen (Member-at-large; Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia),
Leonard Doell (Mennonite Central Committee Canada),
Abe Dueck (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches),
Henry Fast (Evangelical Mennonite Conference)
Walter Franz (Mennonite Central Committee Canada)
Bert Friesen (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society),
David Giesbrecht (Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia)
Lucille Marr (Mennonite Church Eastern Canada)
Alf Redekopp (Mennonite Church Canada),
Judith Rempel (Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta)
Conrad Stoesz (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society)
David Wiebe-Neufeldt (Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta)

Guests: John Sharp, Ken Reddig, Peter Penner, Paul Toews, Marlene Epp

1 Opening and Reflections:

Judith Rempel opened the meeting with reflections on the theme of “I am part of all I met!” She told of her church and educational background and emphasized that understanding “Mennonite” has to be done in a larger context. Varieties of record keeping are needed to ensure a “total archive.” National standards are necessary and the discipline of archives needs to be followed. Further, outreach in such forms as exhibits are important and should be done well as should kinds of outreach like indexes and publications.

2. Introductions:

A round of introductions followed with Roy welcoming the guests, Ken Reddig from MCC Canada; Peter Penner from Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta; John Sharp, Mennonite Church USA and Paul Toews from Fresno Pacific University and Marlene Epp of Conrad Grebel University College.

3. Minutes: December 2003, Winnipeg AGM:

Victor Wiebe reviewed the minutes of the Winnipeg Annual General meeting of 6 December 2003. A few corrections were noted. **Moved/Seconded/ Carried (M/S/C) (V. Wiebe/C. Stoesz) – to approve the minutes of 6 December 2003 as corrected.**

4. Business Arising from Minutes:

Ken Reddig reported on the Human Rights Museum proposed for Winnipeg. He observed that local and national political issues will delay this project probably permanently, thus no further action was taken.

5. Approval of Agenda:

The agenda was approved as circulated.

6. Reports from Provincial Societies:

a) Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta – David Wiebe-Neufeldt reviewed the Alberta report and highlighted a busy year of meetings, workshops and especially the move into larger newly constructed quarters but still in the MCC Thrift Store in Calgary, 2946 - 32 Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7. He pointed out the grants the Society has received; the conservation assessment and the concern for the humidity and the security system in their new quarters. Finally he commented that the rate of acquisitions has slowed but they have receive significant number of books. Henry Fast offered to give them a large collection of the newspaper Steinbach Post.

b) Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia. - Dave Giesbrecht reviewed his Society's report and commented on the large number of visitors, in person, via e-mail and by telephone that the B.C. Centre received this past year. Their newsletter has been renamed Roots and Branches. Richard Thiessen will be leading the genealogical workshop. The special events have been very popular and one of the special highlights was the event with Ray Dirks on "Mennonites and Art."

c) Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society – Bert Friesen reported on behalf of Roland Sawatzky and reviewed the Manitoba report. He pointed out that unlike the others their society does not have an archive. Bert commented on a workshop he presented at the Winnipeg Public Library which was very popular. Bert suggested this different venue was reaching a significant group of Mennonites who are connected with any of our historical societies and the uses of different venues should not be overlooked. One of the most interesting development has been the large influx of over 8,000 Mennonites from Germany into southern Manitoba with another 6,000 soon expected. These are mostly Mennonites with recent roots in Russia and are a people with a highly developed sense of their own identity. However, they are a mixed group of Mennonites and non-Mennonites and their language of common use is either Low German or Russian. They are a people whose stories have not yet been told. These recent immigrants have had a major impact on the public school system. For example the Steinbach School district now has about 6,500 ESL (English as Second Language) students. Ken Reddig indicated that several films on these people are being made.

d) Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario - Sam Steiner began by commenting on the death of Rod Sawatsky and reported that he is buried in the cemetery of the 1855 Detweiler Meeting House and then elaborated on the nearby historic Brubacher House which is located on the University of Waterloo Campus. Sam reviewed the Ontario report. In the summer of 2005 the Society will be participating in the 200 anniversary celebrations of the German Land Company that was organized to settle Mennonites in what later became known as Waterloo County. He also pointed out that to honour the Mennonites of Russian background an oak tree has been planted near Conrad Grebel University College which is a grandchild of the Chortitza oak and a Black Walnut tree, which the earliest Pennsylvania German Mennonite settlers took as a sign of very good soil, was also planted to honour those Mennonites.

e) Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan - Leonard Doell brought greeting from Dick Epp a long time member and former MHSC executive member. He reviewed the Society's report. He discussed the problem of trying to engage all the different Mennonite groups in the province in a variety of historical activities and the reluctance of some to participate. Victor commented on some of the archival collections now held in Saskatchewan.

* [At this point Roy introduced the item that a vote was needed for accepting the revised bylaws]

(M/S/C) (V. Wiebe/S. Steiner) – That the amendments to the bylaws previously circulated be accepted. The vote was unanimous.

7. President's Report and Board Report:

Roy Loewen began his report by passing on encouragement to Lucille Marr for Mennonites of Quebec to form their own Historical Society. He then thanked the outgoing executive for their years of service: Laureen Harder-Gissing for her service as treasurer and Victor Wiebe as Secretary. Universal thanks was expressed to Roy for his able and long service as President.

Roy then commented on the establishment of the Delbert F. Plett Research Foundation. This foundation is established for research and publication on the 1870's Manitoba Mennonite immigrants and their conservative descendents. Delbert it seems surprised a number of people, including Roy and Leonard, by naming them in his will to the Foundation Board. He left detailed instruction as to the work of the Foundation which will include such activities as awards to students, funds for education and access to historical materials. Preservings is to be continued as a historical magazine and as a promoter of the conservative point of view. An organization meeting is planned for 14 December 2004. Roy indicated that because of the size of the foundation and its many functions it may take a couple of years to get everything sorted out. This foundation is both a weighty challenge and very promising.

Abe revisited the issue of awarding the MHSC 2004 historian award to Delbert Plett. He felt the award was made in haste and it seemed wrong to discuss criteria after an award was made. The discussion on the details of the award should always precede any award. The process used, Abe asserted, does not validate the award that is why he abstained in the Board's earlier vote to grant

the award. Abe added that Delbert Plett should be honored for his considerable interest and accomplishments in Mennonite history. For some he gave voice to the voiceless. However, Delbert sometimes gave the view that his agenda included criticism of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Roy responded that he developed the idea for the award when Delbert was still alive but known to be seriously ill. He had expected Delbert to be able to accept the award in person. Abe reiterated his primary concern was the need to establish award criteria first and then to apply them.

Dave expressed the great appreciation of the group for Roy's long term service as this was Roy's last function as president.

8. Project reports:

a) Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (CMEO)

There was general agreement in the meeting to approve the recommendation of the Editorial Board of CMEO to invite an expansion of the encyclopedia first to the USA. The tentative name of the expanded encyclopedia will be "Anabaptist – Mennonite Encyclopedia." There is a strong interest in retaining the name "Mennonite." The details of the administrative and editorial structures of the expanded encyclopedia are yet to be worked out. The current editorial board membership is confirmed.

b) Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM):

Chair's Report by Roy Loewen was reviewed. The final conference of the DVCM program is to be start on 30 September 2005 with the title of "Mennonites and Refugees: A 25 Year Retrospective."

The motion passed at the Board meeting to enter into negotiations with MCCC to seek funding for a DVCM II also received general agreement and support at this meeting. DVCM II would seek to develop the themes of: (1) Mennonites and Environment issues; (2) History of Money; (3) History of Mennonite Mental Health; and (4) the Mennonite family and sexuality.

Marlene Epp reported briefly on her ongoing writing project on Mennonite Women in Canada and stated that all chapters are at least half completed and some only needing editorial work. She will begin her sabbatical in July and then have the time to devote to writing. Marlene has a translation of a midwife's diary for the years 1909-1941 and worked on a paper on midwife and funeral workers.

c) Mennonites in Canada (MIC) Overarching Volume.

Ted Regehr was not present to report.

Ted Friesen's written report on sales of our publication Mennonites in Canada was discussed at the Board meeting. The Board's action to hire a student to search library catalogues and to promote sales to those libraries with incomplete sets met with general approval at this General meeting.

John Sharp related several outstanding events in the wider arena of Mennonite history including the remarkable reconciliation conference between Mennonites and the Reformed Church in Zurich, Switzerland. There is now a marker at the Limmat River where Felix Manz was drowned. Recently published is the John Ruth festschrift, The Measure of My Days.

9. Global Mennonite History Project Request:

Sam Steiner reported on the Board motion that we contribute \$5,000 per year for a three year period to complete this writing project. Walter asked about the word “Mennonite” in the name and what about including “Brethren in Christ?” Sam replied that the name has been fixed in 1997 as: “Global Mennonite History Project.” Roy reported that he expects to have his part of the North American volume completed by the end of 2006.

Paul Toews reported on a writing project by Andrei Savin about the Mennonites emigration in the 1890’s to Siberia. Peter Penner explained how his connection with Rotary International got him to Siberia and connected him with the German speaking Savin at the beginning of this interest in Siberian Mennonites. Judith expressed a desire to have this volume in English and asked Paul if a person could be suggested to translate the work.

Abe reported on the celebrations in Ukraine marking the 200th anniversary of Mennonites in the Molotchnia area. All who participated were very impressed by the local people, their interest in history and in the dedication of monuments. Thirty-nine papers were presented at the conference in the Lichtenau, Ukraine, train station which was the point of departure for most Mennonites in these colonies.

10. Institutional Member Reports

a) Mennonite Archives of Ontario and MCEC - Sam Steiner reviewed some features of his report and reported that soon the full text of Ezra Eby’s late nineteenth century account of the families who settled Waterloo County, A biographical history of early settlers and their descendants in Waterloo Township, will be on the web site (<http://ebybook.region.waterloo.on.ca/>).

b) Mennonite Heritage Centre and MC Canada – In addition to reviewing his report Alf Redekopp reported on renovations to the vault that have improved service and increased storage space.

c) Centre for MB Studies and MB Historical Commission – Conrad Stoesz reported the change in staff with the loss of Heinrich Loewen, the assistance provided by Abe and a search for a new director that is ongoing.

d) Evangelical Mennonite Church Archives and EMC – Henry Fast reviewed his report. He indicated that the EMC Archives has a project of trying to identify some old photographs, and are continuing to index newspapers.

e) Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCCC) - Walter Franz highlighted a number of items from his report related to the DVCM projects. On other matters Walter notes that a

materials resource centre has opened in Vancouver. Bill Janzen has sent a letter to Prime Minister Martin expressing our concern over ballistic missiles and asking that Canada not participate in the USA based missile defense scheme. A bilingual book was published last year as part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of MCCC's work in Eastern Canada.

f) Chair in Mennonite Studies - Roy Loewen summarized a number of items in his report. He has begun a survey of Low German speaking Mennonites in America and visited Mennonites in Bolivia and Paraguay and by 2005 will have a research team in place. Most of his energies next year will be devoted to writing the North American volume in the Global Mennonite History project. He commented on the efforts by some Dutch Canadians to establish a Chair of Dutch Canadian Studies at the University of Winnipeg. As editor of the Journal of Mennonite Studies Roy acknowledged Abe's long and able service as Book Review Editor. Roy also noted that 100 students have enrolled in his Mennonite Studies class this year.

11. Financial Statement:

Laureen Harder Gissing presented the financial statement for 2004

(M/S/C (L. Harder-Gissing/A. Redekopp) - That the audited financial statement be accepted.

12. Budget 2004/2005:

Laureen Harder Gissing presented the budget and reviewed the items line by line. The cost of designing a certificate for newly designated historian award is covered under "Office Expenses." The funds under "DVCM – Mennonite Women in Canada, honorarium" is to be paid out when the project is complete. The \$500 line for "Mennonites in Canada - promotion" is to promote sales.

(M/S/C) (L. Harder Gissing/A. Redekopp) – That the budget be accepted as presented.

(M/S/C) (L. Harder Gissing/L. Marr) –That with the change of Treasurer to a different province the signing authority be changed to now be: the new Treasurer, the President and David Giesbrecht.

13. Report from Nominations Committee and Elections

Dave gave the report of the committee nominating Ken Reddig for President, Sam Steiner for Vice President, Lucille Marr for Secretary, Richard Thiessen for Treasurer, and Roy Loewen for Member at large.

(M/S/C) (S. Steiner/A. Dueck) – That nominations close.

The nominees are appointed by acclamation.

14. Appointment of Auditor

(M/S/C) (L. Harder Gissing/B. Friesen) – That with the change of Treasurer to a different province the Executive, on the advice of the new Treasurer, be authorized to appoint a suitable auditor

15. Adjournment to end meeting and attend 2 p.m. address by Dr. Paul Toews