

MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA
DRAFT Minutes of Annual General Meeting
Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario
January 18, 2025

Present: 24

Aileen Friesen, University of Winnipeg
Alf Redekopp, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Andrew Klassen Brown, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society & MCC
Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg
Brian Froese, Canadian Mennonite University
Bruce Guenther (by Zoom), Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Executive member
Carina Gallardo, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies
Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Church Canada
Dave Neufeldt, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
David G. Neufeld, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
David Y. Neufeld, Institute of Anabaptist Studies
Ed Krahn (by Zoom), Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Graeme Unrau, Mennonite Heritage Archives & Mennonite Church Canada
Graham Schellenberg, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Jeremy Wiebe, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Treasurer
John Redekopp, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Katie Harder, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
Linda Klassen, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Secretary
Lucille Marr, Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec
Richard Thiessen, Mennonite Heritage Museum
Robert Goertzen (by Zoom), Mennonite Heritage Village
Sara Dyck, Mennonite Heritage Archives

1. Welcome – Conrad Stoesz opened the meeting at 9:00 am.

2. Approval of agenda – the agenda was approved as presented.

3. Devotional – Brian Froese. 1 Thes 5:21 “but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.” As historians, we examine the historical record, we sift through the material, choosing what to remember and what to forget and ask the question “but was it so?” “We are in the memory business and we test and hold fast, as best we can, to what is true”. Brian led in prayer.

4. Minutes – Linda Klassen read the minutes from January 20, 2024. There were a few corrections noted:

a. Item 14 should read 16 denominations, not 35.

b. GAMEO – should read: “Laureen met with Elizabeth Miller. She is the new general editor replacing John Roth.”

c. 11a should read “Laureen received funds to conserve the 1531 Froschauer Bible from the Reesor family, the original owners of the Bible.” The Bible was not received last year, it was already in MAO’s possession.

d. Jeremy will forward some minor edits by email.

MOTION to accept the minutes with these corrections: Linda Klassen, S: Jake Buhler, CARRIED

5. Business arising – there was no new business.

6. Ratification of committees for 2024 M: Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, S: Andrew Klassen Brown.

- a. 1922 Migration Commemoration Committee: Jeremy Wiebe (co-chair), Andrea Klassen (co-chair), Dick Braun, Leonard Doell, Aileen Friesen, Conrad Stoesz.
- b. A People of Diversity Committee (book project): Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (chair), Jeremy Wiebe, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Brian Froese, Lucille Marr, Conrad Stoesz, Bruce Guenther.
- c. Archives Committee: Laureen Harder-Gissing (chair) MHSO, Conrad Stoesz, MHA, Carina Gallardo, CMBS, Jake Buhler, MHSS Dave Neufeldt, MHSA, Linda Klassen, MHSBC.
- d. Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites: Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (chair) Brian Froese, Lucille Marr, Leonard Doell, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Jeremy Wiebe, Bruce Guenther, Ruth Plett.
- e. MAID Management Committee: Conrad Stoesz (chair) Laureen Harder-Gissing, Alf Redekopp, Hannah Keeney, John Thiesen,
- f. MHSC GAMEO Committee: Laureen Harder-Gissing (chair), Bert Friesen, Richard Thiessen (rep for the Gameo meeting in spring), Aileen Friesen, Alf Redekopp.

7. President’s Report – Conrad Stoesz. There was a meeting of 77 men in Moscow from Jan 13-18, 1925, which became known as the Second Martyrs Synod. It was a call for unity. Barriers are getting thicker and taller between our groups. Marking anniversaries, workshops, lectures, museum visits, etc., bond us together. Thank you for what you are doing in your space to contribute to the Mennonite community.

8. Reports from Provincial Societies

a. Quebec – Lucille Marr. She has missed some previous meetings and the society used these cost savings for translation projects. The archive is being kept up to date. MCC Quebec is involved with the Society. A challenge is the inability to attract new members. She requested prayer for on-the-ground support. Lucille expressed great appreciation for MHSC’s support; their absence at meetings is not a lack of interest.

b. Ontario – David G. Neufeld reported that MHSO has been in “anniversary season” for several years. The year 2024 marked 100 years since the Russlander came to Ontario. They hosted a bus tour and a Sangerfest to mark the occasion. A highlight of their year was the unveiling and installation of a plaque at the Montreal River Alternative Service work camp, which was well attended. The Fretz Special Project fund provided financial support for Clair Fuller’s book *Hidden in Plain sight: Sam Goudie and the Ontario*

Mennonite Brethren Church. Challenges include how to grow their membership, finances, and how to fund their organization.

c. Manitoba - Andrew Klassen Brown. In 2024, Manitoba celebrated the 150th anniversary of Mennonites arriving in Manitoba with two historical bus tours of the former East & West Reserves. They collaborated on the film *Where the Cottonwoods Grow* which has resonated with audiences at a number of screenings in the province. The Society published Ralph Friesen's book, *Prosperity Ever—Depression Never: Steinbach in the 1930s*. There are challenges with the composition of their board, especially as Conrad Stoesz will be stepping down.

d. Saskatchewan – John Redekopp & Jake Buhler– With the help of a board member, MHSS raised more funds this year than they have previously. They see themselves as “Specialists in generality, not academics nor writers but we tell our story. Not archivists but we file our stories”. MHSS has positive relations with their First Nations neighbours. Stony Knoll and the documentary *Custodians* are fine examples of this and they continue to work together to make that part of our story. There have been challenges with their lease but they were able to extend it to 2032.

Aileen commended MHSS for all the work they've done. She has used some of their resources in her classes.

Q: How do you feel about the future of your society? Is there a succession plan?

A: We depend of volunteers who are aging. There is some interest from younger people but no involvement yet.

It was suggested that maybe MHSC can assist in creating projects to bring in new volunteers.

e. Alberta – Katie Harder – MHSA held two very successful conferences in 2024. The spring conference in La Crete was very successful. Many Mennonite groups of different backgrounds were in attendance. The fall conference at the Hutterite colony also turned out well. No theological questions were allowed but several young men from the colony went ahead and shared their personal beliefs about their faith. *The MHSA Chronicle* is very well received. They are trying to include Holdeman and Hutterite stories. The society has a membership of 165. Some challenges are that they only have three volunteers and are open one day per week. Ted Regehr is concerned about whether they will be able to sustain their society. They need to find a way to replace their archivist and to attract younger people. Ted Regehr donated his material and has accessioned it himself. Dave reported that they have an ongoing challenge to find people who want to work in the archives.

f. British Columbia – Richard Thiessen – Mary Ann Quiring retired in January after many years of service and it was a big challenge to replace her. They found two half-time time people who have injected youthful energy into their operations. There is good progress in publishing *The History of Mennonites in BC* with Bruce Gunther as editor. The focus tends to be on the Fraser Valley Mennonites while not paying attention to other groups in northern BC. They have support for the book from the Plett Foundation. A challenge is that renewal is required at the board level, as the number of board members is down. They need to recruit younger people.

9. MHSC Award of Excellence at 10:15am – This year MHSC presented two Awards of Excellence. Conrad read citations for both recipients and presented the awards.

Linda Huebert Hecht was cited “for her contributions in research, writing and archival preservation.” Through her work, she has furthered understanding of the histories of Mennonites in Canada and of Anabaptist women.”

Fred Lichti received his award “for his dedication to Amish history in Canada.” Through his volunteerism and work as a pastor, he has represented this history to numerous Amish, Mennonite and public audiences. He is known as an instigator of, and collaborator on, historical projects. Both recipients thanked the Society for this recognition and spoke of the relationships they had built while working on these projects.

10. Committee Reports

a. 1922 Migration Commemoration committee – Jeremy Wiebe reported that this committee was created to commemorate migration of Canadian Mennonites to Latin America. The *Leaving Canada* exhibit was created to travel across the country for two years, 2023 and 2024. The exhibit was hosted in nine communities. All the 2024 hosts held special events around the opening of the exhibit. Some exhibits were supplemented with a doll collection and a baptismal dress. Between 500 – 2000 visitors submitted response forms. The Association of Manitoba Archives gave an award for the exhibit. It is now back in Steinbach and the work of this committee is considered to be completed.

b. A People of Diversity – Ben Nobbs-Thiessen reported that this committee exists to assist and support in the production of the *Mennonites in Canada* book, which is being written by Brian Froese and Laureen Harder-Gissing. They appreciate the support and accountability of the committee.

MOTION to dissolve the 1922 Migration Commemoration committee: Jeremy Wiebe S: Alf Redekopp, CARRIED

Conrad thanked Jeremy and the committee for its work.

c. Archives committee – Laureen Harder-Gissing reported that this is a place where we can get together and support each other, share ideas and helpful advice. The MAID financial plan was affirmed by the Archives committee. No major new ideas or initiatives arose but there was some good discussion.

d. Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites – Ben Nobbs-Thiessen reported that this committee supports authors. There are possibilities to expand the program. DVCM IV wrapped up and the funds were dispersed. Ruth Plett will apply for a DVCM V grant for three years to fund three specific projects. The 2024 fall conference *Mennonites and the justice system—as martyrs, perpetrators, enforcers, and advocates*. The second year will support a publication subvention for *A People of Diversity* and the third year will fund a conference on Mennonites leaving for Paraguay. They look forward to DVCM VI. A challenge for DVCM is that conferences are only held in Winnipeg. They have offered other societies to use DVCM for their own conferences. It would be nice to host outside of Winnipeg

e. Genealogy – Richard Thiessen. The Genealogy committee has concluded because their goals have been fulfilled by the GRANDMA project. Going forward, mennonitegenealogy.com, the GRANDMA

project & DNA will all fall under GRANDMA. Richard will continue to report on the committee even though they aren't part of MHSC.

f. MAID Management – Conrad Stoesz. The busiest part of project is partners uploading things. Alf Redekopp is part of the Metadata sub-committee and has been cleaning up the 70,000 access points in MAID. The committee added two new partners from Paraguay: Asociacion Colonia Neuland Departamento de Cultura and Archivo de la Colonia Fernheim, for total of 17. MAID was featured in the Canadian archival journal "Archivaria". MAID is one of our success stories.

Q: Will MAID continue to expand with archival descriptions?

A: This is up to each institution. MHA is using it for archival descriptions. American partners are using it for archival descriptions more than for photos.

g. MHSC GAMEO – Lauren Harder-Gissing. The committee met last week. Jon Isaak has retired as chair and Aileen Friesen has taken on that role. Lauren went to Goshen for GAMEO meetings in May 2024. Committees in Ontario, Manitoba and BC reported contributing articles. Hutterite groups are becoming more enthusiastic about contributing to GAMEO. The Dictionary of African Christian Biography is gaining momentum. GAMEO was initiated in Ontario but we all have an obligation to it, to find new communities and organizations to contribute articles.

h. Russlaender Centenary – Aileen Friesen. No report was submitted. They received a Commemorate Canada grant of \$65,000. The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies received \$30,000 and then gave it to Andrew Wall for his documentary, which will be ready in February and released in May. We need events in multiple provinces to promote the film. It will have French subtitles, which was part of the obligation for the grant. Does anyone have any footage that they can contribute? The film will be released on CTMS's Youtube channel. There are grants available for films with national relevance, something MHSC could take advantage of that for future projects.

i. Website Committee – Andrew Klassen Brown. There have only been minor updates and additions to the website this year. The committee is always happy to update or add information about MHSC and its projects.

j. Unnamed Committee – Aileen Friesen. There haven't been any meetings yet, but interactions in the last few days have inspired them to reach into other communities who can tell their own histories. Is there money to put towards the committee? Do we need to fundraise? Could we connect with First Hmong Mennonite Church to create a history project, so they can share their history with us?

11. Institutional Reports

a. Mennonite Archives of Ontario / Mennonite Church Eastern Canada – The Tavistock "Wie Geht's" oral history project was accessioned last year. Mark Lauden has been a good contact and appreciates MAO's holdings. *The Canadian Mennonite* digitization project is almost ready to upload. Lauren is going on sabbatical from February to August 2025 and will have limited availability.

b. Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies / Canadian Conference of Mennonite

Brethren Churches – Carina Galloradio. Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies scanned and uploaded 1,476 photos on MAID. A challenge is volunteers; they lost two valued volunteers this year.

c. Mennonite Heritage Archives / Mennonite Church Canada – Graeme Unruh. A highlight for Mennonite Heritage Archives is that their digital materials have been uploaded onto the Islanddora platform. They have a number of volunteers in their 20's and 30's who are giving MHA a lot of time. Challenges include the capacity to respond to requests, processing materials and the technical ability to troubleshoot the digital collections.

d. Canadian Mennonite University – Brian Froese. In October 2024 Dr. Paul Doerksen and Dr. Andrew Dyck became co-chairs of the P.M. Friesen Chair in Biblical and Theological Studies. Regarding history – this is their year to shine. There is a new CMU history book project that Brian will write. Sara Dyck will join him as an assistant after the MHSC meetings. Getting done in a timely manner is a challenge. There are changes coming as the generation that is doing Mennonite things at the university is retiring.

e. Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies at Conrad Grebel – David Y. Neufeld reported that last night's Bechtel lecture was lots of work, but energizing as well. A highlight last year were the awards given to Melissa Hughes and Julia Nicolaisen. Another accomplishment was the publication of a GAMEO article on Brubacher House. Some challenges are time and energy. Higher education in Ontario is in disarray and things feel a bit unstable. There is the possibility of moving Mennonite Studies into a diploma program. The Conrad Grebel administration continues to support Mennonite studies.

Q: Is it possible to have speakers come to other locations?

A: Digital forms of lectures are available but in-person options can be explored.

Not all provinces have access to speakers/lectures given at universities /institutions – can we explore how to share knowledge with smaller centres?

f. Chair in Mennonite Studies – Ben Nobbs-Thiessen. They successfully hosted the 150th anniversary of the Mennonite migration to Manitoba with a robust conference, "Subjects, Settlers, Citizens: The 1870's Mennonites in Historical Context". Elder Dave Scott gave the keynote address. They look forward to *Global Mennonites and the Justice System since 1525: Martyrs, Perpetrators, Enforcers, and Advocates* in October 2025 and are still accepting submissions for the conference. Enrollment in undergrad classes is still strong. Higher education is in a bit of flux and some other programs have been cut. They are looking for new space as the "clown car" office that is shared by several people is challenging.

g. D.F. Plett Foundation – Aileen Friesen reported that everything is going well and encouraged people to apply for grants. Mandates are limited but funds are available. Fellowships are also available for MA, Ph.D. and post-doctoral students. The program accepts ex-patriot students. *Preservings* is accepting contributions and older issues are available online.

Funds were received from the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies for projects related to Russian history, in particular, digitizing documents in Ukraine in order to preserve them. Efforts are being made with documents from Imperial Russia to the 1920's. The *Children of the Ruslaender* project is beginning.

h. Mennonite Museum Society – Richard Thiessen. Mennonite Heritage Museum had a good year and the number of visitors was also good. Programming efforts included book launches and movie matinees. Challenges come from funding cuts that caused adjustments in staffing and hours. Richard is retiring in February 2025.

i. Mennonite Heritage Village – Robert Goertzen is the new interim executive director for Mennonite Heritage Village. There were two anniversaries this year. The first was MHV's 60th anniversary which was celebrated with a spring gala. Ed Schreyer spoke about the beginnings of the museum. Kevin Chief spoke on the importance of remembering our stories and keeping them for future generations. In December, they held a celebration featuring four long-term volunteers who have spent several decades supporting the museum.

The second celebration was the 150th anniversary of Mennonites arriving in Manitoba. The exhibit *Mennonite Reflections: Arriving in Manitoba 150 Years Ago* will be on display for most of 2025. The Pioneer Days Festival highlighted the role that Metis played in the arrival of the Mennonites. This was appreciated by both Metis and the local community. Andrea Klassen has been on maternity leave since March 2024. Her position has not been filled but our new 0.6 FTE Assistant Curator is managing the department under limited time constraints. They are currently looking for a development coordinator and also a program manager. Other challenges are remaining relevant to the changing community and looking for fruitful collaborations with other Mennonite organizations in order to develop relationships and support each other.

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j. Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) – There was no report.

k. Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) – There was no report.

12. Change in Agenda: The executive committee decided to add a “Blue-sky” session prior to the budget review to generate discussion and explore new ideas. The opening question was: “Think about the activities of the past few days – (City Tour, meeting with First Hmong Mennonite Church, 500th Anniversary Commemoration Service, MOA Archive tour, Brubacher House tour, Bechtel Lecture) and share which was the most meaningful to you. Each member around the table shared their thoughts. The answers are summarized below.

The majority of members noted our time with the First Hmong Mennonite congregation. They appreciated the testimonies of “Why I am Mennonite” and the fact that there are other stories that need to be told. The 500th Anniversary service at Kitchener-Waterloo United Mennonite Church was a meaningful time for many, especially the “remembering my baptism” time. Brubacher House was an

enjoyable event as it brought to mind family stories and produced lots of spontaneous conversation. The archive tour, especially viewing the Froschauer Bible, was another special moment. As always, the conversations and laughter were good bonding times.

Conclusions of our gathering were:

- a. a call to extend the reach of what we're doing locally and provincially.
- b. a call for a conference specifically on our diverse histories.
- c. We've done a lot recently with anniversaries and commemorations. Maybe we need to pause, relax, and not have any ideas right now.
- d. Dr. Walter Klaassen passed away recently and there will be no service. He was central to Conrad Grebel University College. MHSS wants to do something to pay tribute, but the family is not interested. They will work on a tribute.

13. Review of financial statements – Jeremy Wiebe noted that a change made since yesterday's meeting on the Statement of Operations is that the GST/HST PSB rebate was adjusted to \$5,238.63 (a minor change).

The Statement of Financial Position is fund-based accounting. Jeremy clarified a few lines.

The Statement of Operations is also fund based. Jeremy explained these statements as well.

Two changes include moving the photo "income" and "donations" off the books. As this more accurately reflects what is happening. Recording of GST/HST PSB rebate has been adjusted to best represent our activities as an organization.

Motion to accept the financial statements as presented: Jeremy Wiebe, S: Graham Schellenberg CARRIED.

Budget – Jeremy highlighted a few points on the budget:

- a. Member fees have been unchanged for a while now;
- b. Donations to MHSC include DVCM V, a bequest and several small donations;
- c. We expect to bill societies \$3,000 in travel costs. This year's meetings are expected to cost about \$14,000 before reimbursement;
- d. We intend to use up all of what's in the Russlaender fund so that its at zero at the end of the year;
- e. The budget shows a deficit of \$9,183.73, produced by the Russlaender 100 payout. The operating fund is not working with a deficit.

MOTION to pass the budget: Jeremy Wiebe, S: Alf Redekopp CARRIED

MOTION to appoint Hans Werner as auditor for 2025: Jeremy Wiebe, S: Brian Froese CARRIED

14. Nominations committee – Richard Thiessen and Jon Isaak were the committee for 2024. All current executive members have agreed to serve for another year.

1. President – Conrad Stoesz
2. Vice President: Laureen Harder-Gissing

3. Secretary Linda Klassen
4. Treasurer Jeremy Wiebe
5. Fifth Member Bruce Guenther

MOTION: that nominations cease and to accept the slate as presented: Richard Thiessen, S: Dave Neufeldt, CARRIED

We will need another person on the nominations committee. David Y Neufeld volunteered.

Nominations declared closed. All members were elected by acclimation.

15. Other business

Harvey Dyck has passed away. Can we write a small tribute to him and to Dr. Walter Klaassen, to record their contributions?

MOTION to write tributes for Harvey Dyck and Walter Klaassen: Ailene Friesen, S: Alf Redekopp CARRIED

16. Next meeting and meeting schedule – Conrad. Next year's meetings will be held in Winnipeg. The exact dates are to be determined, as they are waiting for a response regarding timing of the Friesen lectures. Abbotsford, BC will host in 2027.

We express our thanks to Laureen and MHSO for all their hard work in hosting us.

16. Adjournment: 2:35 pm

Minutes respectfully submitted
By Linda Klassen