

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting  
Mennonite Historical Society of Canada**

Saturday, Jan. 18, 2020

Camp Peniel

Wentworth-nord, Quebec

Present:

1. Laureen Harder-Gissing, president, MCEC, Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies
2. Conrad Stoesz, vice president, Mennonite Church Canada
3. Barb Draper, secretary
4. Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer
5. Royden Loewen, Centre for Mennonite Transnational Studies
6. Selenna Wolf, Mennonite Church Canada
7. John Reddekopp, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
8. Brian Froese, Canadian Mennonite University
9. Cheryl Isaac, Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.
10. Linda Klassen, Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.
11. Henry Paetkau, Mennonite Historical Society of Ont.
12. Richard Thiessen, Mennonite Museum Society
13. Alf Redekopp, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
14. Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Sask.
15. Ted Regehr, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
16. Andrea Dyck, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
17. Lucille Marr, Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec
18. Gary Dyck, Mennonite Heritage Village
19. Richard Loughheed, Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec
20. Jon Isaak, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies
21. Alain Després, guest, Provincial coordinator of Mennonite Brethren churches of Quebec

1. Welcome and introductions: Laureen Harder-Gissing welcomed everyone and asked everyone to introduce themselves.
2. Devotional: Royden Loewen commented that the meaning of Camp “Peniel” is a place to meet God and invited everyone to consider how they have encountered God this weekend. Among the responses were the beauty of the nature and wildlife around us, and encounters between people. As a prayer, Royden read the poem, “I thank you God for most this amazing” by e. e. cummings.
3. The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed. Laureen pointed out the incorrect spelling of Marion Roes. **M/S/Carried** (Barb Draper, Alf Redekopp) to accept the minutes of Thursday, Nov. 15, 2018.
4. We reviewed the agenda and approved it by consensus.
5. Barb read the names of the various MHSC committees:
  - a) 1922 Migration commemoration committee: Jeremy Wiebe (chair), Conrad Stoesz, Aileen Friesen, Andrea Dyck, Dick Braun, Leonard Doell

- b) A People of Diversity committee: Royden Loewen (chair), Jeremy Wiebe, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Brian Froese, Lucille Marr, Conrad Stoesz, Marlene Epp, Bruce Guenther.
- c) Archives Committee: Richard Lougheed (Que), Laureen Harder-Gissing (Mennonite Archives of Ontario), Conrad Stoesz (Mennonite Heritage Archives), Jon Isaak (Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies), John Redekop (Sask), Ted Regehr (Alta.), Linda Klassen (B.C.)
- d) Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites: Jeremy Wiebe, Zacharie Leclair, Marlene Epp, Brian Froese, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Royden Loewen, Lucille Marr, Leonard Doell, Ruth Plett, Bruce Guenther
- e) Genealogy committee: Bert Friesen (chair), Glenn Penner, Richard Thiessen
- f) MAID management committee: Conrad Stoesz (chair), Alf Redekopp, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Hannah Keeney.
- g) MHSC Gameo: Bert Friesen (chair), Alf Redekopp, Richard Thiessen, Aileen Friesen
- h) Russlaender Centenary committee: Henry Paetkau (chair), Marlene Epp, Luke Martin Aileen Friesen, Roy Loewen, Ingrid Riesen Moehlmann (chair, railroad re-enactment sub-committee), Judie Dyck, Jake Buhler, Ted Regehr, Cheryl Isaac, Richard Thiessen, **M/S/Carried** (Barb Draper, Jeremy Wiebe) to accept the roster of MHSC committees.

6. Reports from the provincial historical societies:

- a) Société d'histoire Mennonite du Québec: Richard Lougheed  
Total membership for this 14-year-old society is four. The big project this year was arranging for this meeting. They have also done research for MCC's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Richard's book will hopefully be published in the next couple months; he plans to do a French version as well. There has been some frustration in updating Gameo articles. In response, Alf suggested contacting Sam Steiner or himself as Canadian editors who can help. Thanks were expressed to SHMQ for the wonderful hosting.
- b) Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario: Alf Redekopp  
The provincial plaque at Montreal River Harbour has finally been accepted. The Dettweiler meetinghouse, the only surviving stone meetinghouse, has a new roof. Janice Harper did a presentation on the Elmira Life and Work Program, a fuller version of her presentation at the APOD conference in 2018. MHSO updated its web page with a Canada Helps button. The supply of Marlene Epp's book on *Mennonites in Ontario* is almost out. Ted Regehr asked if there were plans to update Margaret Loewen Reimer's volume of statistics about Mennonite groups in Canada, commenting that it is a good reference.
- c) Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society: Andrea Dyck  
The MMHS is a federation of various committees. The EastMenn and WestMenn groups are most active, working to commemorate the immigrant sheds and the Post Road project. A film about the role of the Volendam in the migration of Mennonites to South America is slated to come out in the spring. Information about it can be found on the Refuge 31 Films website. Getting more Mennonite groups involved is always something to work at.
- d) Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan: Jake Buhler  
Ted Regehr spoke at the Sask AGM, reviewing the importance of commemorating the past and Victor Wiebe presented a paper about the Braun-Friesen trials. The MHSS website is getting up to 300 visits a day. A two-year joint project with the U of Sask and the society interviewed 25 key people in the province and downloaded it into readable print. MHSS posted 2,700 images to MAID over the last few years. MHSS has also been helping some of the landless Young Chipewyan Indigenous people trace their ancestry to

redress the loss of their land. John Reddekopp reported that their web master suggested trying to sell articles online in order to raise revenue and they are looking for advice.

e) Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta: Ted Regehr

This society is the smallest except for Quebec and is probably the most scattered in terms of geography. In 2019, the conference focused on Mennonite involvement in German Nazi activities in Poland and Ukraine. The second conference was a look at CO participation with Conrad Stoesz. In 2020, they are planning to have a history conference in LaCrete where there is historical museum and archives. The archives are in a period of transition; the society hopes to work with MCC Alberta to have an intern work there for the summer. Abe Janzen will be travelling to South America and taking some duplicate German books from the archives to Mennonite colonies who are interested in them.

Coffee break

f) Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia: Richard Thiessen

The historical society had an MCC IVEPer working in the museum and archives. It worked well and they plan to have another one next year. Among the speakers who came were Brian Forese, Marlene Epp and Paul Born and Matt Falk. The MHSBC continues to digitize *Der Bote* and *Die Mennonitsche Rundschau*. More photos are being posted in MAID as well as some maps. The local school, Mennonite Educational Institute is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and so their photos were posted, but then there were privacy issues and some had to be taken down. Recently the granddaughter of C. F. Klassen donated some items. A number of microfilms have been digitized, a collection of documents compiled by the German government during WWII to process all the ethnic Germans. The MHSBC will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022 and there are plans to write a history of Mennonites in B.C.

7. President's report: Laureen Harder-Gissing

Laureen commented that she enjoyed reading *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going* by Susan Beaumont. She found it a helpful spiritual way to think about change because we are in a time of transition.

8. Committee reports:

a) A People of Diversity: Royden Loewen. (This section of the report and discussion was chaired by Conrad Stoesz while Laureen Harder-Gissing and Brian Froese stepped out of the room.)

The MHSC board discussed the APOD proposals and passed three motions i) to write a history of Mennonites in Canada from 1972 to 2020, ii) to ask Brian Froese and Laureen Harder-Gissing to do the writing iii) to have MHSC donate \$2,000 for five years toward this project. After some informal discussion after the board meeting, Royden said he prefers not to prescribe what can happen in a five-year project, so he suggests the motion not include the statement that it is not a volume IV of Mennonite in Canada.

**M/S/Carried** (Royden Loewen, Jeremy Wiebe) That the MHSC endorse the writing of a monograph focused on the theme of diversity among Mennonites in Canada between 1970 and 2020.

**M/S/Carried** (Royden Loewen, Alf Redekopp) That MHSC endorse Laureen Harder-Gissing and Brian Froese as co-authors of the APOD volume.

**M/S/Carried** (Royden Loewen, Richard Thiessen) That MHSC allocate \$2,000 for five years in support of the APOD book in addition to the \$14,000 from the DVCM fund.

b) **Russlaender Centenary Report: Henry Paetkau**

This committee has reorganized with Henry Paetkau as chair and Ingrid as vice-chair, and Richard Thiessen as secretary. The committee is requesting that any finances that accrue for the nationwide project be processed through the MHSC society. The committee is not asking for any funding. There is lots of enthusiasm for the railroad project. It will begin in Quebec City with stops in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Kitchener-Waterloo. It will then proceed to Winnipeg via Toronto and on to Saskatoon, Edmonton and Abbotsford. The tentative schedule is two weeks from July 2 to July 16. Participants can purchase tickets for the entire trip, or for any segment. Conversations with Via Rail have been positive. Each provincial society will be responsible for the events happening in their province. Via Rail can accommodate 350 people. The cost for coach for the entire trip is \$965, sleeper accommodation will be much more. There will also be hotel costs at each stop. Plans are to work with MCC in promoting this event and to create a website. Benefactors will be approached to help youth participate. The idea is to approach this not as one event, but as a tour. The Paul Toews fellowship will support the project to some extent. The committee plans to meet again electronically in six months and again at the next annual meeting.

9. The Award of excellence was presented to Lucille Marr. Laureen Harder-Gissing read the citation which recognized Lucille's contribution in research, writing and teaching about Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada, her service to MHSC as past secretary and president, and her role in the founding and ongoing work in the Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec.

Lunch break

10. Committee reports continued:

c) **Russlaender Centenary continued: Henry Paetkau**

It is important to have a tagline for this event because information should go out soon. The train tour would probably be handled through a touring company. Plans are to link this with current newcomer programs, to raise funds for MCC present refugee support. The hope is to move it beyond an ethno-centric celebration. We want to be aware of the story in the boarder context. The hope is to have three lounge cars where there could be lectures or displays. This will not be a chartered train, but the hope is that almost all the tickets on each segment will be for this project. It is important for archives and museums to make visible material that relates to the Russlaender experience.

d) **Canadian Mennonite Migration Commemoration committee: Jeremy Wiebe**

This committee is in its preliminary stages. The primary goal is to commemorate the emigration of Mennonites to Mexico and Paraguay in 1922, to provide public education into how and why conservative Mennonites undertook the largest voluntary mass migration. The audience will mostly be Canadian, but the committee is considering how to include the Mennonites of Mexico and Paraguay. This history involves a sense of injustice. Three priorities are: i) an exhibit to tell the story of this migration with sites at the Mennonite Heritage Village and the Mennonite gallery, but to take it outside of Manitoba, perhaps it could involve a travelling exhibit to go to Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario over three

years. ii) There are plans for a book in a coffee table format, rich with photos that tell the story. iii) A special issue of *Preservings* in 2022, new releases and other media exposure. The MHV is committed to having an exhibit independent of our efforts and the Plett Foundation is proposing an exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. A conference of workers with Low German Mennonites in Ontario is planning a conference in 2021 that will include an academic component.

e) Archives committee: Laureen Harder-Gissing

The archives committee receives MAID budget requests and passes them along to the board. They are proposing a hold-the-line budget from the MAID partners; the money flows in and out of MHSC to pay for maintenance fees for the MAID website. The committee spent time talking about the joys and sorrows of archivists, about privacy, collection mandates and restrictions. The suggestion is that next year two hours be allocated for this meeting.

f) Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites: Royden Loewen

DVCM began in 2000 and has been renewed for the fourth time, most recently for five years. Yesterday the decision was made to distribute the \$40,000 five-year grant: \$10,000 for the history conference this fall, \$8,000 for the Indigenous conference in May 2021 and another \$8,000 for a conference in 2024 and the remaining \$14,000 for the APOD book. Suggested topics for 2024 are migration or perhaps Mennonites and prisons.

g) Genealogy committee: Bert Friesen sent his regrets, Richard Thiessen referred to the written report. It looks as though a Beta testing site should soon be available.

h) MAID management committee: Conrad Stoesz

MAID is a project of MHSC with nine partners, eight Canadian and one from the U.S. As of 2019 there are 100,000 records on the database. There is more discussion about collaborating with U.S organizations that would be a huge change and could raise questions of governance. The committee would value counsel on this. If anyone is having problems finding what they want, ask the committee members for a few pointers. There were many positive comments about the value of MAID.

i) MHSC GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online): Alf Redekopp

Other partners for GAMEO include MCC Canada, Mennonite World Conference, MCC U.S. and the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (ISGA) with finances run through ISGA. Gameo is in the process of moving to a dedicated server with the goal of having better search results and better security. The associate editors in Canada are Alf Redekopp and Sam Steiner.

11. Institutional reports:

a) Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies: Royden Loewen

CTMS is a collaboration between the Chair in Mennonite Studies and the Plett Foundation. Funds are growing for a Paul Toews professorship in Russian Mennonite studies. At a spring public lecture, Colin Neufeldt talked about Mennonite Soviets. The commitment to support Mennonite Heritage Archives (with MCC Canada and CMU) was renewed. CTMS is going through a period of transition as Aileen Friesen has replaced Hans Werner in 2018 and Andrea Dyck has moved on with Jeremy Wiebe replacing her. A Mennonite studies course was offered online, greatly increasing the number of students. Aileen Friesen and Royden Loewen received grants for research on 19<sup>th</sup> century migrations in Russia and how agricultural

customs have been transplanted. The Journal of Mennonite Studies volume will now be two 200-page volumes rather than one 400-page book to save significantly on postage. *Preservings* magazine is also going to two issues a year. Royden reported that he is retiring at the end of June as Chair of Mennonite Studies and so his tenure on MHSC will come to an end. "It's been grand," he said.

#### Coffee break

- b) Canadian Mennonite University: Brian Froese  
The History department offered one second-year Mennonite history course with more courses in the theology department. Brian Froese is working to complete a book on Mennonites in B.C. The John and Margaret Friesen lecture in 2019 dealt with 20th-century Anabaptism in Guatemala. CMU continues to administer the Mennonite Heritage Archives with other partners.
- c) Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies (at Conrad Grebel): Lauren Harder-Gissing  
David Y. Neufeld is the IAMS visiting professor for two years. IAMS will also be involved in hosting the Indigenous-Mennonite encounters history conference in 2021.
- d) Mennonite Museum Society: Richard Thiessen  
The museum society presents a variety of exhibits and events. Book launches bring in different groups as does the Christmas market. The movie matinees are popular. There was a good increase in visitors this year. A museum educator to make contact with schools was among the additions in staffing.
- e) Mennonite Heritage Village: Gary Dyck  
Gary passed around some photos from the museum including the rebuilt sawmill and the new sculpture of Dirk Willems. Because he is new to the board, Gary gave some of his background. He grew up in Steinbach, loving Mennonite history. He married into the EMC church and spent 18 years serving with a humanitarian organization in northwest China. The Russlaender exhibit will be up for the rest of the year with a potential mobile exhibit for the centennial. There will be a peace exhibit this year and probably one on Indigenous relations for next year. Income is 15% from admissions, 60% from fundraising and 40% from donations and government funding. Operations expenses are about \$700,000.
- f) Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies: Jon Isaak  
Jon works only three days a week and does the work himself; he has great volunteers. The Centre has a good collection of diaries and a good website. There are 32,000 files on MAID, but some have no images. Eighty books have been uploaded. Jon keeps the statistics for the church; the Mennonite Brethren church in Canada is not declining, but also not really growing.
- g) Mennonite Heritage Archives: Conrad Stoesz  
Conrad has been pleased with the new website. The archives has about 62 visitors a month on average and more than 100 requests for information each month. Selenna Wolf has been hired to work with the archives and gallery. A new radio project is five-minute stories for Golden West radio stations with the audio and photos on the website. The Facebook posts once or

twice a week are popular with 5-6,000 views. Promoting used books on Facebook also works well. When people ask for help, their names are added to the list for donation requests.

- h) Mennonite Archives of Ontario/Mennonite Church Eastern Canada: Laureen Harder-Gissing  
The library at Conrad Grebel is going through a major transition as the University of Waterloo is installing a new technical system. They are moving from a 3-library system to a 14-library system. This is requiring a great deal of work, but perhaps the Mennonite collection will get broader exposure.

12. Review of Financial statements: Jeremy Wiebe

- a) Statement of financial operations: The 2019 budget had a modest surplus of a little more than \$1,000, but it ended up being closer to \$20,000. We expected to cover some costs for this annual meeting in 2019, but the year ends in October and that didn't happen. We had budgeted \$4,000 for the DVCM grant but received \$8,000 to cover the first two years. There were more donations than expected.
- b) Statement of financial position: We have been accounting on an accrual basis for the past few years where accounts are logged on the day the invoice is created. If payment comes in late, it still appears in 2019 but in the breakdown of financial position the money appears on an accounts receivable line. At the end of the year we were still waiting for \$8,500 in membership fees. We ended the year with almost \$19,900 in the general account. The MAID project account has a healthy amount of \$16,000.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe, Conrad Stoesz) to accept the financial statements.

- c) Budget: Member fees are mostly the same except the Chair in Mennonite Studies and Plett Foundation will each give \$1,000. The costs of the annual meeting are an estimate, but it seems to be on target. DVCM will spend \$10,000 on the MCC at 100 conference this fall and \$2,000 will go to the APOD book. Our general account is doing well.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe, Jake Buhler) to use the money left in the MCC Canada History Project account for the APOD book.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe, Selenna Wolf) to accept the 2020 budget as presented.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe, Cheryl Isaac) to have Hans Werner review our financial books.

13. Nominations Committee: Richard Lougheed

The following are nominated for the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada for 2020:

President – Laureen Harder-Gissing

Vice President – Conrad Stoesz

Treasurer – Jeremy Wiebe

Secretary – Barb Draper

Member-at-large – Bruce Guenther

**M/S/Carried** (Jake Buhler, Andrea Dyck) that nominations cease.

Laureen pointed out that the president and VP need to be members of the board. The understanding is that Bruce Guenther would represent the MB conference.

**M/S/Carried** (Conrad Stoesz, Lucille Marr) To appoint Richard Lougheed and Jon Isaak as the nominations committee for 2020.

14. Next meeting: Jan. 15-16, 2021 in Manitoba; Jan. 13-15, 2022 in Saskatchewan.

15. Thanks were expressed to the Quebec society for hosting us so well. It was good to be here in this setting. Thank you also to the hardworking executive.

16. Adjourned.