

MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:

**Mennonite Historical Society of Canada
9:00 am, Saturday, 3 December 2005**

**Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada
1310 Taylor Ave. (204) 669-6575
Winnipeg, MB**

Present: Ken Reddig (President; Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies)
Sam Steiner (Vice-President; Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario)
Lucille Marr (Secretary; La Société historique mennonite du Québec)
Richard Thiessen (Treasurer, Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia)
Royden Loewen (Member at large; Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of
Winnipeg)
Victor Wiebe (Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan)
Henry Fast (Evangelical Mennonite Conference)
Bert Friesen (GAMEO)
David Giesbrecht (Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia)
Abe Dueck (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches)
Judith Rempel (Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta)
Anna Ens (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society)
Gilbert Brandt (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society)
Alf Redekopp (Mennonite Church Canada)
Peter Penner ((Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta/GAMEO)
Don Peters (MCC Canada)
Maurice Martin (Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario)
Ted Friesen (Mennonite Church Canada)
John Sharp (GAMEO/Hesston College)
David Rempel Smucker (GAMEO)
David Pankratz (Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta)

1. **Welcome:** Ken welcomed members to the new Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada. After a round table of introductions, Ken gave a warm welcome to Ted Friesen, a founder of the MHSC established 40 years ago.
2. **Devotional:** Ted shared with us some thoughts on the history of the society, recalling how in 1966, on a train to Saskatoon for the third meeting of MCC Canada, he discussed with Frank Epp and J.W. Fretz the idea of a national society. The new society appointed Frank Epp as editor of the history project. Volume 1 of Mennonites in Canada was published in 1974 and volume 2 in 1982. Frank passed away in 1986, while working on

the 3rd volume. Ted Regehr completed volume 3 and it was published in 1996. Publication was made possible by grants through the federal government, the Social Sciences Research Council and MCC. The organization also published Sam Steiner's biography of Jacob Y. Shantz and Frank Epp's *Your Neighbour as Yourself*. It also has provided a link between provincial societies. New programs include Divergent Voices of Mennonites in Canada and the Mennonite Encyclopedia on-line. A major goal of the society has been to lift up values to give Mennonites respect in the larger society. Ted ended his talk by leading the meeting in a prayer of commitment, pointing us to the vision of its founders.

3. **Minutes of the 4 December 2004 Annual Meeting:** Lucille summarized the minutes and they were accepted with Roy's note that #10 should read "in the Americas", not "American." M/S/C (Victor/Lucille)

4. **Business arising from the minutes:** No business arising.

5. **Approval of the agenda:** Ken welcomed Don Peters as the top executive of MCC Canada. This is perhaps the first time an executive director has sat in on these meetings.

6. **Reports from the Provincial Societies:**

1. **Quebec:** Lucille reported on MCC Quebec's willingness to sponsor a Société historique mennonite du Québec and the Maison de l'Amitié research project. Ken encouraged her to relay to MCC Quebec's director Jean-Victor Brosseau and others the MHSC's strong support. He asked that we let him know when the launch event is happening because some from the MHSC would like to come to support the event.

2. **Ontario:** Sam reported that Winfield Fretz was remembered in a memorial service at Conrad Grebel College. He passed out *Ontario Mennonite History*, the Society's newsletter, featuring his article "Remembering J. Winfield Fretz."

Sam also reported on several meetings including the planting of a Black Walnut tree in memory of the German Land Company's purchase, a meeting on Mennonite hymnody, and the Ontario's society's participation in German pioneer days in Kitchener with a keynote address by Marlene Epp. The German society also invited two from the Six Nations Reservation who reflected on their history.

The Ontario Mennonite Historical Society also put together a DVD presentation for the Brubacher House. Sam concluded his report by welcoming Maurice Martin, who is Secretary of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. There are now three members of the MHSC board from Swiss Mennonite background.

3. **Manitoba:** Gilbert reported that Roots Day sponsored through the genealogy committee was a popular event, teaching people about how to do genealogy. The DNA project is also interesting to many. Meetings took place in the McGregor area as well as Morden in the attempt to draw in the broader Manitoba community.

A Conscientious Objector website was launched through the Heritage Centre with the Manitoba Historical Society providing some of the funding. The society hired Sara Schueb, a summer student, to compile documents. Future plans include continuing to look at the Human Rights Museum and using the Plett award to get students researching. The goal is to get the awareness of the society out there to the ordinary person.

4. **Saskatchewan:** Victor reported that Leonard Doell has stepped down and Leonard Buhler was made president. There is a large membership throughout the province. The major focus in the society is on the archives. The society does not keep artifacts; these go to local museums. Alan Guenther has been employed to process materials. Menno Wiebe and Wayne Dueck were guest speakers at the annual meeting. Leonard continues to work with conservative Mennonites who are not involved with the society. An active group of volunteers contribute their time and resources to the continued success of the society. Genealogy tends to be the primary focus for most members.

At this point John Sharp excused himself and he was thanked for his leadership in the Encyclopedia project.

5. **Alberta:** Judith Rempel presented a lengthy written report with the comments that the context is tough with the great geographic distance between major centres in the province. Out of 22,000 Mennonites there is only a membership of 100. At the centre, the shelves are full. The challenges for Alberta are those of a small, scattered group with few volunteers and limited resources.

Events included a workshop on the DNA project and genealogy meetings. Projects include Alberta biographies, transcribing the 1906 Census of Canada, indexing, a maps collection, passenger lists and Alberta congregational church registers. Recently the archives acquired 10 boxes from Edmonton's Faith Mennonite that had disbanded some years ago.

She introduced Dave Pankratz, the other board member representing Alberta.

6. **British Columbia:** David Giesbrecht reported that its been a good year for the BC Historical society, despite the transition with their long-time volunteer archivist stepping down. The society has a good volunteer base with 750 members, the primary interest being geneological information. The society

sponsors 3 or 4 public events each year. This year lectures by Dr. Bruce Guenther and Dr. John Ruth were well attended as was the cemetery tour, genealogy workshop and annual concert.

This part of the reporting concluded with Ken's reminder to the provincial societies that we are foundational to the MHSC.

7. President's Report and Report from the Board: Sam Steiner took the chair for the president's report. Beginning with questions addressing our mission, Ken Reddig underlined his appreciation for the Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.

He also reported briefly on the request from the German-Canadian Congress that Mennonites support their submission for funding under the ACE (Acknowledge, Commemorate and Educate) program. With the question, do we wish to cooperate with the GCC in their submission, he presented the executive's recommendation and the board's mixed reaction. Further discussion left Ken with the mandate to stay in conversation with both the German Congress and the Federal multicultural department that was offering the funds.

At this point, Ken invited Roy Loewen to read the board's recommendation regarding the Plett award.

Recommendation: That our society grant an award named "The MHSC Award of Excellence" to a person who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research, writing, organization or the dissemination of Mennonite historical knowledge. Constituent members of the society are invited to nominate persons for this award by forwarding a one page citation of that person to the MHSC executive by October 1 of each year. The executive will then select the award winner and present the winner's name to the board for its approval with announcement of the winner at the following AGM. A news release, an entry on the MHSC website, and the presentation of the parchment to the winner will follow. M/S/C (Roy Loewen/Judith Rempel)

Following some discussion, Ken presented the 2005 Award of Excellence to Ted Friesen.

The report ended with a positive mention of the "Mennonite Hosts and Refugee Newcomers" conference hosted by our DVCM committee September 30-October 1 and the good news that the MCC board has approved DVCM II. Ken also proposed a history of MCC Canada project designated to celebrate 50 years in 2013. Don Peters affirmed the idea in principle. Finally, Ken acknowledged Abe Dueck and David Giesbrecht's role on the nominating committee.

8. Project Reports:

8. **DVCM:** DVCM continues the long-term relationship between the society and MCC. A fall conference focusing on Mennonite relations with the Boat People

and other refugee groups, was the fourth and final stage of DVCM I. This project had included previous conferences on Mennonite-Aboriginal Relations, Gender relations among Mennonites in Canada, and the Return of the Kanadier. All conference proceedings have been published in issues of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, the last to come out in spring 2006.

MCC Canada has agreed to sponsor DVCM II. Topics will include Conscientious Objection, Mennonites and the Environment, Mennonites and Money, History of Mennonite Relations and Sexuality and Mennonites and Mental Health. A Readers' Committee meeting is in the planning, hopefully to be held at York University during professional meetings in early June 2006, or in Saskatoon in 2007.

In addition, Marlene Epp's book on Mennonite Women in Canada is moving along.

Members of DVCM at present are Lucille Marr, Leonard Doell, Marlene Epp, Roy Loewen, Ken Reddig and Janis Thiessen. Lois Coleman Neufeld will be invited to represent MCCC.

9. **CMEO:** From his position still in the chair, Sam Steiner asked Bert Friesen to report on the new Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GÂMEO), a partnership of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, and the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee. The board received detailed reports which they were encouraged to read if they had not already. Pointing out that GAMEO ranks among top usage of religious encyclopedias on-line, Bert urged members to publicize this expanded on-line Mennonite Encyclopedia. Sam confirmed that putting the 5-volume Mennonite Encyclopedia on-line is in the works. A decision needs to be made regarding also preparing a non-online version such as a CD which conservative groups who avoid the web could use.

At this point, Roy took the chair to field questions. After a brief discussion, Ken took the chair. Bert proposed to move we accept those recommendations in the documents presented. **Gameo had asked each partner to approve its vision statement. The MHSC passed this motion.**

10. **Mennonites in Canada overarching volume:** There was no report from Ted Regehr, only some speculations as to why the volume is still not completed. Ted Friesen suggested it may be because Ted is reluctant to complete this with the slow sales of *Mennonites in Canada*, Vol. III.
11. **Global Mennonite History:** Roy reported that he and Steve Nolt agreed to co-

author this volume and thanked the society for their contribution of \$15,000 over three years. Roy has developed a course on themes in North American Mennonite History where he had students read as widely as possible in the literature. In the past year Roy has travelled to Fresno to look at archival materials there, as well as visiting three congregations in Eastern Canada and the United States. This included the Mennonite Brethren Church in Montreal where he also took in an MCC planning meeting, Boston Mennonite Fellowship where he interviewed Gordon Kauffman, and the Kleingemeinde congregation in Northfield, Nova Scotia.

In 2006, Roy has a course release from University of Winnipeg to provide writing time. He expects writing to go into 2007. The manuscript will be about 300 pages and will possibly require a reading committee once there is a manuscript. He concluded his report by expressing that he welcomes counsel.

12. **Marlene Epp project:** Ken read Marlene's brief report. Roy added that institutional pressures have deterred her from making much progress in recent years.

9. **Institutional Reports**

8. **Mennonite Central Committee Canada:** Apologizing for a schedule that did not allow him to write a report, Don Peters shared how these historical meetings were a new world for him. He sat in for Lois Coleman Neufeld, MCC Canada's director for national programs. Indeed, he is the first executive director to attend such a meeting. Presently he is involved with a set of exciting consultations across Canada that involve visioning and planning with all MCCs across Canada. The major issues fit well with the vision of the DVCM. High on the list of priorities are ecology and the environment, refugees and immigrants, and poverty reduction as outlined in the millennium goals of the United Nations. With Bill Janzen, Don met with federal government officials to discuss the latter's International Policy statement on foreign policy, diplomacy, defence and development. He acknowledged the unease about doing development in a system where it partners with defense.

With natural and man-made disasters, more of MCC's work focuses on relief than the administration would like. The desire is to do more advocacy work in policy making.

9. **Evangelical Mennonite Church Archives:** Henry Fast reported on a space problem. Eight books on Molotchna fire insurance are pegged to go to an archive that has space. Judith affirmed EMC for its generosity in sharing resources.
10. **Mennonite Archives of Ontario and MCEC:** Sam Steiner also acknowledged a

space problem. Two major photographic collections donated to the Archives during the past year were welcome additions, but compounded the space problem. He was happy to report that the Conrad Grebel College President Henry Paetkau had finally dropped by his office to talk about the issue.

11. **Chair in Mennonite Studies:** Roy expressed gratitude for nearly ten years in the Chair of Mennonite Studies. This includes teaching, research initiatives which include student assistants, DVCM sponsored symposia and the publication of *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. A new project, the D.F. Plett Foundation, is not formally part of the Chair, but Roy chose to take time to help get the foundation running. He invited people with projects related to the background and history of the Mennonites who immigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s to submit proposals.
12. **Mennonite Heritage Centre of MC Canada:** Alf Redekop reported, giving an inventory summary and a list of recent acquisitions. These include MHSC records. The Mennonite Historical Committee published *Der Bote Index* Vol. 5: 1992-2000 together with CMU press in 2005. The series of books on conference leaders continues to sell well. At the MHC Gallery, a call entitled “Why do you create?” saw over fifty artists submit.

Ken reported that his request to Steinbach’s Mennonite Heritage Village for a report brought no response. John Friesen, who is on the board of the village said the two major issues are finances and connecting with the community. Ted mentioned that it is the second most popular museum in Manitoba.

13. **Centre for MB Studies and MB Historical Commission:** Beginning with the caveat that he had written his report within a month of his tenure at the Centre, Ken reported that with the careful planning of Conrad Stoesz and Abe Dueck, the Centre had recently shifted its location to 1310 Taylor Avenue. The move has had the happy result of increased use by conference staff. Projects include a survey of pastors (former and present), regarding their career paths. A generous grant from the Federal Government has made possible the hiring of a researcher to move the historical library from the Dewey system to the Library of Congress. Other projects include telling the stories of non-English and German churches, brochures including a history of the Mennonite Brethren and continuing to publish *The Mennonite Historian*. He also made the board aware of *Profiles*, a bulletin insert published by the Mennonite Brethren Church Historical Commission.
10. **Financial Statement:** Richard presented the financial statement.

Ted Friesen reported that the stock of *Mennonites in Canada* Vol. 3 is moving slowly with the exception of sales for two classes, one at University of Winnipeg and the other at University of Waterloo.

Total sales: Vol. 1: 2500-3000; it has been reprinted 3 or 4 times with 387 copies left.
Vol. 2: 1500 with 781 unsold.
Vol. 3: 3000-3500; 1400 copies remain unsold.

The unsold books represent about \$29,000 worth of merchandise.

Ken thanked Ted on behalf of Friesen's publishers who have stored these volumes over the years.

Recommendation: That the MHSC AGM accepts the financial statement: M/S/C (Richard/Roy)

11. **Budget:** Richard presented the 2006 budget with SHM du Quebec added at \$200.00. A new item is the MHSC 40th anniversary booklet. Ted reported on the application to the Garret Lawrence fund for the Women's History book at \$1500.00.

Recommendation: That the budget be accepted as presented. M/S/C (Richard/Sam)

12. **Appointment of an auditor:** Richard found no-one willing to do the audit between year end in late October and the beginning of December. Discussion resulted in the conclusion that it is more difficult to change the fiscal year, which would require re-applying to Industry Canada, and lawyer's fees, than to change the time of our annual meeting.

Recommendation: As recommended by the executive, that the MHSC change its annual meeting to the third week in January, to begin January 2007. M/S/C (Richard/Victor)

The next annual meeting will be held January 19-20, 2007. Judith and Dave invited the meeting to Calgary.

Richard brought forward the name of John Pankratz of Pankratz and Friesen in Abbotsford, who is willing to audit the books. Richard will circulate the audited statement to the Board in PDF format.

13. **Report of the Nominations Committee and elections:** With the executive committee, Ken struck a Nominating Committee of Abe Dueck and Dave Giesbrecht. They contacted the same executive as 2005. All agreed to serve for another year.

Recommendation: Nomination of Officers for MHSC, 2005-2006

President: Ken Reddig

Vice President: Sam Steiner

Secretary: Lucille Marr

Treasurer: Richard Thiessen

Member at Large: Royden Loewen

M/S/C (Henry Fast/Ted Friesen)

14. **Appointment of a Nominations Committee:**
Recommendation: That Dave Giesbrecht and Abe Dueck serve as nominating committee again in 2006. M/S/C (Alf Redekop/Gilbert Brandt)

15. **Dreaming of Future Projects:**
 - a. **Conference in Siberia:** Roy pointed out how Ukrainian and Russian history are intertwined in developing the history of Mennonites who once lived there.
1999: Chortitza 99 Conference
2004: Molotchna 04 Conference
2009: Could be Siberian Conference

 - b. **Mennonites from Poland:** Victor encouraged members to remember these folks and to encourage study. Discussion and affirmation of the possibility of a conference on Prussia and Poland followed. Sam reminded us that it is important to relate any project we do to Canada.

 - c. **Other Mennonite Historical Societies:** Victor questioned whether we should invite other Mennonite Historical Societies to join us. Ken stressed that any other Mennonite Historical Society is welcome to connect with MHSC, but we won't take the initiative.

16. **New Business:** None

17. **Motion of Adjournment: M/S/C (Sam Steiner/Henry Fast)**