

MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA

9:00 AM- 3:15 PM, Saturday, 21 January 2012
The First Mennonite Church
Vineland, Ontario

- Present:** Sam Steiner, President, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Lucille Marr, Secretary, Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec
Richard Thiessen, Treasurer, Mennonite Historical Society of British
Columbia
Alf Redekopp, member at large, Mennonite Church Canada
Wesley Berg, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Bill Janzen, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Bert Friesen, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Conrad Stoesz, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Maurice Martin, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Richard Lougheed, Société d'histoire mennonite du Québec
Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
Leonard Chester, Brethren in Christ Historical Society
- Guests :** Hedy Sawadsky
Esther Epp Tiessen
- Regrets :** Royden Loewen, Vice-President, Chair of Mennonite Studies,
University of Winnipeg

1. **Welcome & Introductions:** MHSC president Sam Steiner again welcomed those present, with warm greetings on behalf of the board to guests Esther Epp-Tiessen and Hedy Sawadsky.
2. **Devotional:** Sam then read Hebrews 12:1-3, reminding those gathered of our task as historians to preserve the stories of that great cloud of witnesses made up of those who have gone on before us.
3. **Minutes of the 21 January 2011 Annual Meeting:** The secretary highlighted significant points and moved that the minutes be accepted. **M/S/C Lucille Marr/Conrad Stoesz**
4. **Business arising from the minutes:** Maurice Martin pointed out that the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario is not actually affiliated with Conrad Grebel College and clarified that the black walnut represents the Swiss branch of Mennonites and the oak represents Russian Mennonites.
5. **Approval of the agenda**

6. Reports from the Provincial Societies

- a. **Quebec:** Richard Lougheed reported that the Quebec society has begun collecting for its archives. With Lauren Harder-Gissing's support, they have repatriated the Janet Martin papers. Significant papers from the collection have been photocopied for the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. The Quebec Society also houses a set of video interviews. Lauren responded to their question regarding preserving DVDs for the long term by pointing out that Archives Canada has a set of instructions on how to properly preserve videos. Finally Zacharie Leclair, the society's student researcher, gave an excellent report at the Quebec Mennonite Brethren's fiftieth anniversary celebration.
- b. **Ontario:** Maurice Martin reported that the Detweiler Meeting House and Brubacher House are important aspects of the Ontario society's work with their respective potential for tours and hymn sings. On another note, the J. Winfield Fretz Committee has evolved to become a publication committee. One project was to assist Jonathan Seiling in his research on Mennonites and the War of 1812.

Also noteworthy are the Archives building project, along with its upcoming 75th anniversary, and Linda Hubert Hecht's completion of the organization of the Frank H. Epp files. Other events included a celebration of Lorna Bergey with a collection of her writings published through the Pennsylvania Dutch Society and Lucille Marr's talk on Alice Snyder's work as an Mennonite Central Committee volunteer in post-war Germany at the spring annual meeting. The society is anticipating an upcoming drama that tells the story of Sam Steiner and his conscientious objection stance during the Vietnam War.

- c. **Manitoba:** Bert Friesen and Alf Redekop reported for the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. The interest in local history includes the Altona History Seekers and the Bergthal School Project. The latter is in process of planning to move the former Altbergtal school from its location west of town into Altona. Society members are looking at developing a museum.

The variety of groups and projects make this an active society. Other interests include a genealogical committee, an East/Mennonite Historical Committee, a newsletter and a new website developed by Bert Friesen. Alf encouraged people to take the time to read it through for information. With the multiple interests, Alf suggested that it will be necessary to make decisions about where the society should put its efforts.

- d. **Saskatchewan:** Jake Buhler reported that Victor Wiebe has resigned from the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan board, as well as associated committees. He will be finished at the society's archives by

March. The society is still looking for someone to replace him. Guest speakers this year included Conrad Stoesz, John Elias, and Jake and Barbara Ens. A significant project is the collection of stories on Mennonites and First Nations people, as the society works on a presentation for the June meeting of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee scheduled for Saskatoon.

- e. **Alberta:** Bill Janzen noted that this has been a year of transition. With Judith Rempel's passing, the society lost its archivist and coordinator at the same time. Volunteers are hard to come by and the executive works hard.

An essential task is finding the funding required for organizing archival materials. Despite the difficulties, the society hosted several speakers including Ted Regehr on the migration of Mexican Mennonites from Mexico in the 1960s. Another highlight was the launch of Tena Friesen's memoir. The society also publishes a newsletter, and is working on writing by-laws in preparation for applying to the province for society status.

- f. **British Columbia:** Richard Thiessen reported that a full 800 people receive the BC society's newsletter, and there is uniform good attendance at events and workshops. This year speakers included Colin Neufeldt on Mennonite exiles to Siberia. The society also showed three of Otto Klassen's films covering the period between 1914 and 1945.

The digitization and indexing projects continue as does the work on the InMagic data base. As the society's archives continue to expand, space has become an issue. The society will be negotiating this year as it works at appropriately housing its holdings.

The provincial reports ended with a round of discussion regarding sharing resources developed by individual societies.

BREAK

- 7. **President's Report & Report from the Board:** Sam Steiner gave his last report as President, noting that he has seen many changes over the decades since the late 1970s when he first became involved with the society. During this time, he has served in all four executive positions and is still open to sharing his broad experience with society business by continuing to serve on the board.

Highlights during his four years as president include the release of Marlene Epp's History of Mennonite Women in Canada, the first MHSC meeting in Quebec, the creation of a genealogical committee, re-instituting an archives committee,

another round of DVCM conferences including a history of Mennonite Central Canada, and continuing the Awards of Excellence.

8. **MHSC Award of Excellence:** The AGM approved giving the Award of Excellence to Alberta's Irene Klassen.
9. **MHSC Incorporation/Constitution Update:** As was discussed at the Board meeting, Richard Thiessen will be seeking legal advice as the society continues the process.

10. Project Reports

a. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)

a.i. Report of MHSC representative to GAMEO Canadian Editorial Committee: Bert Friesen reported that the Committee met Thursday evening and Friday morning. Brainstorming was mostly looking at templates, especially a new one designed to guide writers and to encourage them to submit material. Next year this committee plans to meet for only a half day or evening.

a.ii. Canadian Editorial Committee chair appointment
Motion: that Bert Friesen continue as chair person of the
Management Board for another year
M/S/C Alf Redekopp/Maurice Martin

a.iii. Action to remove fiscal responsibility from the GAMEO management board to Mennonite World Conference: Richard Thiessen submitted the Management Board's goal of having GAMEO under Mennonite World Conference jurisdiction, believing that the encyclopedia's work will be enhanced by coming under MWC, with a stronger position within the Mennonite world community. Furthering this goal is GAMEO's ability to receive content in a variety of languages.

The decision is to be made by Mennonite World Conference in May. If the decision is in favour of GAMEO coming under MWC, GAMEO will retain copyright, while its assets, worth about \$20,000 - are moved from MHSC to MWC.

Motion: to authorize the transfer of funds from Mennonite Historical Society of Canada to Mennonite World Conference
M/S/C Bert Friesen/Alf Redekopp

b. Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM): In light of his time out of the country doing research, Roy Loewen asked the Secretary to report. In brief, this sub-committee of the MHSC continues to be productive. The upcoming 2012 conference on "Mennonites and Human Rights: Grappling with State Power in the Past and Present" will be the eighth

DVCM academic-community education conference and the last in DVCM II.

The major project this year was the Mennonite Central Committee history book being written by Esther Epp Tiessen. Slated for the launch of DVCM III in 2013 is a conference on this important history. Intriguing possibilities are also in the works for DVCM 2014.

c. Genealogy Committee Report: Bert Friesen reported that half the funds have been raised for development of the new website. The committee is planning to raise the remainder in the coming year. This is an essential phase before the committee can get off the ground.

Bert expressed concern that he is the only one of the three original committee members left. Victor Wiebe and Laureen Harder Gissing have resigned. Bert volunteered to step into the chair. With Laureen having gotten the Ontario group on board, Sam Steiner has agreed to represent that province. The plan is to contact Cary Sweet, who has picked up responsibilities in this area in Alberta, to invite him to join the Genealogy Committee.

Motion: We recommend that the following individuals be appointed to the genealogy group:

Bert Friesen – chair

Sam Steiner

MHSA is requested to recommend another individual

This group has a mandate to set up the infrastructure for the MHSC genealogy project and raise the funds for this project.

M/S/C Bert Friesen/Laureen Harder Gissing

LUNCH BREAK (with photo)

d. Archivists Meeting Report: Richard Lougheed reported for the archivists, who have re-instated the archives sub-committee of the MHSC. Their conversation clarified the need that a number of provincial societies have for mission statements and policy manuals. This committee requests that a full day be scheduled next year so that they can further discuss and explore issues arising for local archives, in particular how to preserve photos.

They requested that \$1000 be put into the budget for the Archives sub-committee for travel expenses, including a special meeting projected for the task force to be held in Winnipeg before the next AGM.

It was suggested that smaller societies could appoint someone involved with the archives as one of their two representative at the AGM.

e. Global Mennonite History Project: The fifth and final volume of this series focuses on North America. It is scheduled for publication in May.

f. Mennonite Committee for Human Rights: Alf:Redekop reported on the committee's exhibit on right to food. It traveled from Winnipeg to Waterloo for the annual Assembly of Mennonite Church Canada and will be heading back west. An important function of the committee is ongoing attention to developments in the National Museum of Human Rights. Please see the Divergent Voices of Mennonite in Canada report for an outline of the planned conference.

g. MCC Canada History Project: Esther Epp Tiessen reported on her progress with the MCC Canada history book. She aims to have completed a draft and have a manuscript in hand by the end of the summer. Regarding the writing, she is aiming at a younger audience. The Project Reference Committee has encouraged her to critique and debunk myths. Although she plans to give a picture in time for some of the issues, the format is chronological. Please see her working outline attached.

Presently, Esther is exploring themes for a possible thesis. There are many different ways in which MCC Canada has thought of itself: MCC Canada has been searching for what is this MCC Canada? A search for identity? She is also working on the title. Possibilities include: Circles of Compassion; a Politics of Compassion; A Work of Compassion.

Discussion ensued regarding the format for the book. It was suggested that photos and sidebars appeal to young folks.

Bert Friesen suggested that extra materials not ending up in the book could well be used by GAMEO.

Regarding publication, Esther reported that Roy Loewen has been in conversation with Canadian Mennonite University press. CMU is interested, although they would need to see the manuscript and work out a contract; they would need also a subvention of \$3,000. Concerns were raised that a university press would delay the publication.

Other possibilities are Pandora Press or Herald Press.

h. *Mennonites in Canada*: No activity has been reported on this front.

i. *Mennonites in Canada*, Vols. 1-3

a. i. Inventory held & value: There are 99 copies left of volume I, the best seller of the three. Following a brief discussion on whether the society should reprint vol I, Richard Thiessen offered to survey university professors that use the book and ask what they see as their need. Would they like to continue to use *Mennonites in Canada* vol I or would a one-volume history of Canadian Mennonites be more useful? He will contact teachers of Mennonite history at the following institutions: Canadian Mennonite University, Fraser Valley University, Chair of Mennonite Studies at University of Winnipeg, Conrad Grebel University College. Richard will also contact Ted Regehr to enquire what he is planning or willing to do

Laureen Harder queried whether if Ted is no longer interested in the project, a multi-authored book should be considered.

Motion: That for bookkeeping purposes, the MHSC state the monetary value of these books to be nil.

Bert Friesen/Conrad Stoesz M/S/C

11. Institutional Reports

a. Mennonite Central Committee Canada: No report

b. Evangelical Mennonite Church Archives: No report

c. Brethren in Christ Archives: Leonard Chester, the Canadian representative of the North American Brethren in Christ Historical Society, divulged that due to urbanization and professionalization, a possible name change is in process. The denomination is looking for a more contemporary sounding name.

A possible move of the Canadian archives to the Niagara area is in the offing. Activities this year included several congregational anniversaries, publication of the fifty year commemorative book authored by Harvey Sider, and to remember conscientious objection during the War of 1812-14, placing a plaque at a significant spot for the denomination across from the Bertie Brethren in Christ church.

d. Mennonite Archives of Ontario & MCEC: This is a busy and significant time for the MAO. Archivist/Librarian Laureen Harder Gissing reported on the building project. Five million of the eight million dollar budget has been raised. One-quarter of the new space will be archives, thus doubling the current quarters. A gallery and designated reading room will grace the premises, allowing for more space to hold events. The Archives Room will be named for Lorraine Roth, the Archivist office for Lorna Bergey, and the processing room for Richard and Shirley Schiedel processing room. Naming space is thought to facilitate fund raising.

e. Chair in Mennonite Studies: Sam Steiner reported in Roy Loewen's stead, noting that in the graduate program several theses were defended successfully this year.

f. Mennonite Heritage Village: No report

g. Mennonite Heritage Centre of Mennonite Church Canada: Archivist Alf Redekopp provided a sampling of the acquisitions made this year and a list of personnel and volunteers. He also listed several projects including a memoir writing workshop entitled “Creating Living Legacies” and a new MHC Gallery exhibition called “Along the Road to Freedom.” The latter will travel across Canada.

An elevator installation project is proving to be extremely time consuming.

He also reported on behalf of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives conversations regarding moving their archival materials from their current location in Steinbach to the Mennonite Centre in Winnipeg.

h. Centre for MB Studies/MB Historical Commission: Conrad Stoesz reported on behalf of the new director Jon Isaac who was unable to be at the annual meeting. The Mennonite Brethren centre will be collaborating with the Mennonite Heritage Centre on the “Creating Living Legacies Workshop.” With Jon's theological interests, among his activities will be collecting worship resources and resourcing church leaders with materials pertinent to life in the church.

i. Other: Sam suggested that the society consider inviting the Plett Foundation to become a member.

12. Financial Statements:

Motion: Richard Thiessen moved acceptance of the financial statement. It was unanimously accepted.

13. Budget:

Motion: that a genealogy line be added with \$!0,000 in and out. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/Bert Friesen

14. Appointment of an auditor:

Motion: That Rodney Ewert be reappointed as auditor. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/Conrad Stoesz

Motion: That a letter of appreciation be sent to the society's volunteer auditor. M/S/C/ Jake Buhler/ Maurice Martin

Motion: That the meeting thank Richard Thiessen for keeping the society's books. M/S/C Jake Buhler/ Bert Friesen

15. Report of the Nominations Committee and Elections:

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|-----------------|--------------|
| President: | Lucille Marr |
| Vice-President: | Roy Loewen |
| Secretary: | Alf Redekopp |

Treasurer: Richard Thiessen
Member at large: Maurice Martin

Motion: M/S/C Bert Friesen/Laureen Harder Gissing

16. Appointment of a Nominations Committee:

Motion: That Sam Steiner and Laureen Harder Gissing continue as the Nominations Committee for another year. M/S/C Richard Thiessen/Alf Redekopp

17. New business: Conrad Stoesz affirmed the society's appreciation of Sam Steiner's leadership of the society during these past 5 years.

Alf Redekop thanked Leonard Chester for his informative tour as well as the organizing committee and Vineland's The First Mennonite Church for its hospitality.

18. Next meetings

- a. Manitoba – 18-19 January 2013
- b. Manitoba – 17-18 January 2014
- c. British Columbia –16-17 January 2015

19. Adjournment:

Richard Lougheed moved/carried