

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

Sat. January 16, 2021

Virtual meeting

Present:

Dave Neufeldt, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta  
Ken Matis, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta  
Linda Klassen, Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.  
Cheryl Isaac, Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.  
Andrea Klassen, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society  
Andrew Klassen Brown, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society  
Henry Paetkau, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario  
Barb Draper, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, MHSC Secretary  
John Reddekopp, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan  
Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan  
Richard Loughheed, Société d'histoire Mennonite du Québec  
Lucille Marr, Société d'histoire Mennonite du Québec  
Jon Isaak, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches  
Bruce Guenther, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches  
Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Church Canada, MHSC Vice-president  
Selenna Wolfe, Mennonite Church Canada  
Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, MHSC President  
Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies  
Aileen Friesen, D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation  
Marlene Epp, Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies  
Richard Thiessen, Mennonite Museum Society  
Gary Dyck, Mennonite Heritage Village  
Brian Froese, Canadian Mennonite University  
Jeremy Wiebe, MHSC Treasurer  
Royden Loewen, A People of Diversity project chair, guest  
Bert Friesen, Genealogy Committee chair, guest  
Henry Paetkau, Russlaender Centenary Committee chair, guest  
Ingrid Moehlmann, Railroad re-enactment subcommittee chair, guest  
Harold Thiessen, guest  
Zachary Leclair, guest  
Alf Redekopp, guest  
Sam Steiner, guest

1. Laureen Harder-Gissing, president, welcomed everyone and led introductions. She reflected on ceremonies of Indigenous people and that for us as well, ceremonies affirm our ties with each other.
2. Devotional: Jon Isaak reminded us of the sacred trust we have as historians to link the past to the future. As Joseph was preparing to die in Egypt (Genesis 50), he made the Israelites promise to take his bones with them when they left. Our sacred trust as Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is to carry forward the bones; as we look to the past, we can inform the future.

3. Jeremy Wiebe reviewed Zoom etiquette, how we will vote and how to raise a question by using the chat function or waving a hand.  
Laureen noted that the meeting is being recorded as this is a good opportunity to archive an example of what we do in our meetings.
4. We reviewed the minutes of the last annual general meeting at Camp Peniel last January. **M/S/Carried** (Barb Draper, Jon Isaak) to accept the minutes of Jan. 18, 2020 with the correction in 6-f that the B.C. archives dealt with a privacy issue with a donation of school records from Mennonite Educational Institute.
5. We approved the agenda by consensus with the addition that the executive will bring a proposal regarding the MHSC website under new projects.
6. We reviewed the names of the various MHSC committees:
  - a) Canadian Mennonite Migration Commemoration Committee: Jeremy Wiebe (chair), Conrad Stoesz, Aileen Friesen, Andrea Klassen, 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, Ben Nobbs-Thiessen.
  - 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), Dick Braun (Sask.), Ted Regehr (Alta.), Linda Klassen (B.C.).
  - d) Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites: Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Jeremy Wiebe, Brian Froese, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Lucille Marr, Leonard Doell, Ruth Plett, Bruce Guenther.
  - e) Genealogy Committee: Bert Friesen (chair), Glenn Penner, Richard Thiessen
  - f) MAID management: Conrad Stoesz (chair), Alf Redekopp, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Hannah Keeney, John Thiesen.
  - g) MHSC GAMEO Committee: Bert Friesen (chair), Richard Thiessen, Aileen Friesen, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Alf Redekopp.
  - 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, Katie Harder, Cheryl Isaac, Richard Thiessen.

**M/S/Carried** (Barb Draper, Jeremy Wiebe) to approve this roster of committees.
7. President's report:
  - a) Laureen mentioned that a highlight of the year for her was the digitization of Volumes I and II of the Mennonites in Canada series. They are now posted on the Milton Good Library website (Conrad Grebel University College).
  - b) Humanitas of B.C. had been a member of MHSC but decided not to continue their membership at this time.
  - c) Because the MHSC Award of Excellence is a celebratory moment that benefits from being in person, the executive decided not to do this award this year.
8. Provincial Society and Institution Reports Roundtable:  
We were divided into five breakout groups; each group gave a brief report.

- a) Highlights from group 1: The B.C. historical society completed its 11-year project of digitizing the Einwandererzentralstelle (EWZ-50) microfilm collection. The Mennonite Heritage Museum erected a new housebarn. The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies redesigned its website as well as publishing *Preservings* and the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* while the directors each published new books.
- b) Group 2: The Manitoba society helped publish a book of photographs, has plans for unveiling a plaque at the immigration sheds and helped release the *Volendam* documentary. Canadian Mennonite University will offer a new course on Mennonites in Canada since 1970. The B.C. society found a phone-a-thon led to good donations and good connections. The Ontario society had to postpone its Montreal River plaque project.
- c) Group 3: The Alberta society was disappointed to postpone its meeting in LaCrete. The Mennonite Heritage Archives has been involved with Mennonite History Today, a website collecting Anabaptist COVID-19 stories. The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies did more digitizing. The Saskatchewan society is planning to do a docu-drama.
- d) Group 4: The Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies postponed a book launch and lecture series and is adapting to online gatherings. Mennonite Heritage Village is adopting online and social media promotions. The Saskatchewan society found it challenging to maintain the archives because Bethany Manor was under lockdown.
- e) Group 5: The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies and the Plett Foundation have a visiting scholar program for searching archives. Anyone is free to apply. The Plett Foundation has joined Gameo as a partner. Richard Lougheed's book on Mennonites in Quebec will soon be published in English and French.

Break for lunch

#### 9. Committee Reports:

- a) A People of Diversity: Royden Loewen reported on the APOD book project. While the pandemic has interrupted the research plans, Laureen Harder-Gissing and Brian Froese have begun their work. Hopefully there can be a potential outline for the book by June. In response to a question about the response of their institutions because of the time this writing will require, Laureen and Brian said CGUC and CMU view this project favourably.
- b) Russlaender Centenary Committee: Henry Paetkau reported that they have developed a vision statement for the train trek which is the centrepiece of the commemoration. They are coordinating with the provincial societies who are planning activities for the various stops. Ingrid Moehlmann, chair of the Railroad Re-enactment subcommittee, reported that they are working with Marina Unger to develop an itinerary. Tourmagination helped conduct a survey to gauge interest and Tourmagination is ready to move forward. They will require a down payment from participants two years in advance, but it is challenging to determine a price this far in advance. The sub-committee also met with Art DeFehr to discuss how CPR could be involved. Ingrid expressed some concern about the need for more publicity.
- c) Canadian Mennonite Emigration Commemoration Committee: Jeremy Wiebe reported that they are working on a travelling exhibit, a coffee table book and articles for an issue of *Preservings*. Since Mennonite Heritage Village is working on an exhibit showcasing the emigration of Mennonites to Mexico starting in 1922, this committee is partnering with them to have the exhibit travel to other provinces, from B.C. to Ontario. The plan is

to tell the story within the theme of the conflict of religious rights and obligations of citizenship. The CMECC committee is asking MHSC for \$5,000 to go toward the development phase of the project. They anticipate other sources of funding for the travelling phase. This grant would come from the general discretionary fund of MHSC. In the discussion there was good support for this travelling exhibit, but there were questions about details of the funding. This exhibit would give greater exposure for the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada as a partner in this project, and it would also build stronger connections with Low German-speaking Mennonites in Canada.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe/ John Reddekopp) That MHSC grant \$5,000 to the Canadian Mennonite Emigration Commemoration Committee to help defray the costs of developing this traveling exhibit in partnership with the Mennonite Heritage Village.

- d) Archives Committee: Laureen Harder-Gissing reported that they approved the MAID budget and heard from Mennonite archives across the country. A major focus of their discussion was the concern about the tsunami of digital records that will be coming and want to have a major conversation about this before it happens.
- e) Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites Committee: Ben Nobbs-Thiessen reported that the MCC at 100 conference was originally scheduled for October 2020 but has been rescheduled to Sept. 30 - Oct. 2, 2021. The Mennonite-Indigenous Relations conference has been re-scheduled to May 2022. There are plans underway for 2024 for a conference with a theme of Mennonites and law enforcement, including prison visitation.
- f) Genealogy Committee: Bert Friesen reported that due to the pandemic, a beta-testing website has been delayed. Most of their material comes from archives or organizations (ex. Church of Latter-Day Saints). Volunteers at Weierhof archives in Germany scanned many Prussian Mennonite Church records and they were available online, but subsequently Weierhof made an agreement with a Protestant church group and now they charge a fee. This raises the question of who owns those records. Are there digital rights to the scans? Will the genealogy committee be stepping on other people's toes by making them available? Should this be discussed with the Weierhof archives? If the Prussian church records are not on this site, a large part of our history will be missing.

We decided to ask the MHSC executive, archivists and genealogy committee to continue this discussion.

- g) MAID Management Committee: Conrad Stoesz reported that last year they discussed getting a cake to celebrate 100,000 records, but this year they doubled that number. Five new members joined MAID: Mennonite Church USA; Goshen College; Mennonite Library and Archives (Bethel College); Mennonite Central Committee (Canada and U.S); and Pacific Northwest Historical Society. Conrad reminded us that this organization grew out of meetings like this one. It is now officially named Mennonite Archival Information Database.
- h) Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online Committee: Bert Friesen reported that the site had a very high bounce rate probably due to Chinese or Russians hackers. Some conservative Mennonite groups who do not use the internet appreciate having the GAMEO content on DVD. GAMEO continues to work at including Mennonite groups from the Global South. They tend to translate anything into English and there seems to be the perception that English is the proper language for the internet. GAMEO is one of the

top five religious internet sites. We thanked Bert for his many years of chairing the management board of GAMEO. Bert said he has been involved for 33 years.

10. New projects:

The MHSC executive proposes that our society put effort into our website as the old one is technologically moribund and in need of a content review. We recommend:

- Forming a website committee to work under the supervision of the executive over the coming year.
- Providing up to \$2,000 as an initial allotment to the committee.
- Instructing the committee to examine a number of platform options and provide the executive with a recommendation.
- Instructing the committee to review content of the current website and make recommendations for what should be migrated or expanded.
- Asking the committee to keep in mind that MHSC has fairly modest means and requirements for the site.

**M/S/Carried** (Conrad Stoesz, Dave Neufeldt) To accept this recommendation regarding upgrading the website for the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada; the committee shall consist of Jeremy Wiebe, Selenna Wolfe and Andrew Klassen Brown.

11. Review of financial statements:

Statement of financial position: Jeremy Wiebe reported that there are two columns for 2020. 2020AR includes the accounts receivable, the money still expected to arrive after the year end of October 31. We ended the year with over \$15,000 in the general account. The total of all accounts is \$66,699 but most of those funds are allocated.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe, Selenna Wolfe) To accept the statement of financial position as presented.

There was some discussion about the need to have so many separate accounts which makes it more work. We encourage Jeremy to reduce the number of accounts if he thinks it would make things simpler. The MAID reserve funds should be kept separate as this is more complicated with U.S. partners.

12. Statement of Operations: Jeremy Wiebe reported that our income and expenses of 2020 were about what we expected. The big difference is the \$10,000 income from new MAID partner fees which we did not know about last year. Our total income was \$39,464. The annual meeting costs were close to what was budgeted. Travel to the meeting at Camp Peniel was expensive, but the experience was really appreciated, and we covered the costs. Because the DVCM conference was postponed, that \$8,000 was not spent, but it remains designated.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe/ Andrea Klassen) To accept the statement of operations for 2020 as presented.

13. Budget for 2021: Jeremy Wiebe presented the 2021 budget. DVCM is expecting another \$8,000 from MCC. The MAID Paypal revenue is from photo sales; the money belongs to MAID. The income expected for 2021 is \$27,800.

The annual meeting expenses will probably be the lowest ever since we are meeting by Zoom. There is \$2,200 budgeted for the website which includes the \$2,000 we approved and the regular website cost of \$200. In response to a question about MAID

assets, Lauren responded that their policy requires assets to cover operations for a year as a contingency fund. The rest can be used for MAID upgrades.

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe, Conrad Stoesz) To accept the 2021 budget as presented.

14. Appointment of reviewer:

**M/S/Carried** (Jeremy Wiebe, Bruce Guenther) To appoint Hans Werner to review our financial books for 2021.

15. Nominating Committee Report:

**M/S/Carried** (Jon Isaak, Cheryl Isaac) That nominations cease and that the slate of Conrad Stoesz as president, Lauren Harder-Gissing as vice-president, Barb Draper as recording secretary, Jeremy Wiebe as treasurer and Bruce Guenther as fifth member be accepted.

16. Nominating Committee for 2021:

**M/S/Carried** (Richard Thiessen, Conrad Stoesz) To appoint Jon Isaak and Richard Lougheed as the nominating committee for 2021.

17. Thank you to Lauren for her leadership, especially for shepherding us through this Zoom meeting.

18. Next meetings:

Saskatchewan will host our meetings next January if the pandemic allows it. The executive will be in touch later in the year to begin making plans.

2022 – Jan. 13-15 – Saskatchewan

2023 – Manitoba

2024 – Ontario

Adjourned

*Minutes recorded by Barb Draper*