

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting**  
**Mennonite Historical Society of Canada**  
Saturday January 15, 2022  
Virtual meeting

Present:

Dick Braun (Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan)  
Jake Buhler (MHS Saskatchewan)  
Barb Draper (Secretary, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada)  
Gary Dyck (Mennonite Heritage Museum)  
Aileen Friesen (Plett Foundation) *joined after lunch*  
Bert Friesen (guest/ Genealogy committee)  
Brian Froese (Canadian Mennonite University)  
Robert Goertzen (guest/Mennonite Heritage Village)  
Bruce Guenther (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches)  
Katie Harder (guest/Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta)  
Laureen Harder-Gissing (Mennonite Church Eastern Canada)  
Jon Isaak (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches)  
Andrea Klassen (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society)  
Andrew Klassen Brown (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society)  
Linda Klassen (Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.)  
Lucille Marr (Société d'histoire Mennonite du Québec) *joined after lunch*  
Ken Matis (Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta)  
David Neufeld (Institute of Anabaptist Mennonite Studies)  
Dave Neufeldt (Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta)  
Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies)  
Henry Paetkau (Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario)  
Kayliegh Penner (guest/Mennonite Heritage Village)  
John Reddekopp (Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan) *joined after lunch*  
Conrad Stoesz (Mennonite Church Canada)  
Harold Thiessen (Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario)  
Richard Thiessen (Mennonite Museum Society)  
Jeremy Wiebe (treasurer, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada)  
Selenna Wolfe (Mennonite Church Canada)

1. After some informal chatting, Conrad called the meeting to order and introduced the executive committee: Conrad Stoesz (president), Laureen Harder-Gissing, Barb Draper, Jeremy Wiebe, Bruce Guenther.
2. **Devotional:** Referring to Matthew 19 where Jesus said let the children come because the kingdom belongs to “such as these,” Jake Buhler talked about Maria Guenther who died in 1919 of the Spanish flu at age 15. The Old Colony minister who came to see her said, “She taught me more than what I could say to comfort her.” She is buried in an unmarked grave, but Jake has some artefacts from her life. Maria Pauls was 11 when tuberculosis and Spanish flu came to her village in South Russia. She was orphaned and lived with her grandparents. In 1925, at age 17 she and her 11-year-old brother travelled alone to Saskatchewan. We gather the stories of our people to remember them.  
Jake led in prayer.

3. Barb reviewed the minutes of the last meeting held virtually last year.

**M/S/Carried (Barb Draper, Andrea Klassen)** To accept the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Historical Society of Canada held January 16, 2021.

4. Roll call: Lauren Harder-Gissing reviewed the representatives for the member organizations. (See list of those present.)

5. Ratification of the committees of MHSC:

- a. **Canadian Mennonite Emigration Centenary Committee:** Jeremy Wiebe (co-chair) Andrea Klassen (co-chair), Conrad Stoesz, Aileen Friesen, Dick Braun, Leonard Doell
- b. **A People of Diversity** book project: Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (chair), Jeremy Wiebe, Lauren Harder-Gissing, Brian Froese, Lucille Marr, Conrad Stoesz, Bruce Guenther
- c. **Archives Committee:** Lauren Harder-Gissing (chair), Conrad Stoesz, Jon Isaak, Dick Braun, Ted Regehr, Linda Klassen (plus possible Quebec rep)
- d. **Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites:** Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (chair), Jeremy Wiebe, Brian Froese, Lauren 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, Lauren Harder-Gissing, Hannah Keeney, John Thiesen.
- g. **MHSC Gameo committee:** Lauren Harder-Gissing (chair), Bert Friesen, Richard Thiessen, Aileen Friesen, Alf Redekopp
- h. **Russlaender Centenary Committee:** Henry Paetkau (chair), Ingrid Riesen Moehlmann (vice-chair and chair, railroad re-enactment sub-committee), Harold Thiessen, Luke Martin, Aileen Friesen, Darryl Loewen, Jake Buhler, Katie Harder, Cheryl Isaac, Richard Thiessen, Gary Friesen.
- i. **Website Committee:** Andrew Klassen Brown (chair), Selenna Wolfe, Jeremy Wiebe.

**M/S/Carried (Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Jon Isaak) to ratify the committees of MHSC as presented.**

6. **President's Report:** Conrad Stoesz commented that the reports and decisions made at our meetings are like the stones and bricks of a wall, but what keeps it together is the mortar which is like the relationships we develop when we meet in person. There are significant centenary commemorations in the years ahead and the work we do as historical organizations is important to keep the public informed. Hopefully this will help to increase support for our endeavors. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the MHSC will be in 2024.

Lauren pointed out that 2022 or 2023 is also the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Amish coming to Canada.

7. **Break-out groups** for reporting from provincial historical societies, archives, museums and academic institutions. Print reports were available beforehand. After 45 minutes meeting as three groups, we came back to hear summaries of these reports.

- a. Group one was made up of representatives of provincial societies. The pandemic has forced them to have virtual meetings which have limitations, but they are helpful in allowing people in far-flung geographical areas to participate. People are becoming more accustomed to technology. In some provinces bringing together a broad range of different Mennonite communities is a real challenge. Another common challenge is recruiting younger members.

- b. Group two included museums and archives. The archives were able to do public events working with Tourmagination. The pandemic has forced collaboration and GAMEO and MAID have benefited from being virtual platforms. Museums have suffered from a loss of visitors and rentals but have been forced to consider new ideas. A concern for archives is a decrease in connection between archives and congregations including the loss of printed bulletins.
- c. Group three included academic institutions and genealogy and GAMEO projects. Lectures and research projects were influenced by the pandemic and some projects stalled due to an inability to travel or do personal visits. Putting virtual events online makes them available to more people. This seems to be a time of major changes in staff.
- d. Discussion:
  - i) A general theme from all the break-out groups is that the pandemic has forced us to spend time and resources on technology and infrastructure.
  - ii) In reading the reports of member organization of MHSC, we are not only collecting material, but also speaking to contemporary issues.
  - iii) Different kinds of Mennonites in Canada have responded differently regarding vaccinations. Is anyone compiling or researching this story? Lauren cautioned us that we think carefully about documenting this kind of social movement so that we are not commodifying people's responses or experiences. She quoted a blogpost statement: "My trauma is not for the benefit of your archives."
  - iv) When the pandemic is over and we can meet in person, will everyone take the trouble to do so, or will they expect a mix of in-person and virtual? Many people spoke in favour of meeting personally, but we recognized that committee meetings will need to have a virtual option. There was less appetite for offering a virtual option for the Board and AGM meetings.

Break for lunch

- 8. Conrad recognized some people for whom it is their first meeting with MHSC. David Neufeld is the associate director of IAMS and has been teaching at Grebel since 2019. Kayliegh Penner is working at Mennonite Heritage Village. Robert Goertzen has not participated with MHSC for many years. He is the program manager at Mennonite Heritage Village. Katie Harder met with the group in Calgary; she is the vice-chair of MHSA.
- 9. **New digital projects:**
  - a. Mennonite Heritage Archives has seen a large increase in requests for digital content. They are developing a new platform to host digitized content and are starting with digitizing community newspapers.
  - b. Mennonite Heritage Village is working on an online program of collections management software for museums in Manitoba. The pandemic has encouraged web-based records.
  - c. Richard Thiessen reported that they are working on digitizing obituaries. Fewer people are publishing obituaries in local papers due to expense, but they are mining funeral home websites from across Canada for obituaries and saving them as pdf documents.
- 10. MHSC Committee reports:
  - a. **A People of Diversity:** This committee was created to assist in the publication of Mennonites in Canada: A People of Diversity 1970-2000. Ben Nobbs-Thiessen has taken over the role of

chair. The DVCM committee had a surplus of \$5,000 which will go to this project, increasing the funding to \$29,000. This will be distributed as grants to the institutions Lauren Harder-Gissing and Brian Froese work for so that they can apply to be reimbursed for their expenses. Themes and sub-themes have been identified and research is beginning. Lauren is planning to work primarily on Indigenous relations for the coming year. The committee could use an additional member. If someone is interested in joining, please contact Ben Nobbs-Thiessen.

- b. **Website committee:** The task force chose a WordPress platform which involved minor costs. Selenna slightly changed the logo but tried to keep the colours the same as the old website. Thank you to Selenna, Jeremy and Andrew for your work.
- c. **Russlaender Centenary Committee:** Henry Paetkau thanked the website committee for getting the new website up in time to promote Russlaender Centenary webinars. The train trek will have a three-week time frame. Registrations are coming in and they are hoping for a minimum of 40 people for each of three segments. It is fairly expensive. A highlight of the first segment is a gala dinner in Montreal where Aileen and Peter Harder will speak. The provincial societies are working hard on planning for events in their locations. There are also plans to have lectures and singing on the train. There is some discussion about having a Niagara Mennonite history buff make a wine in remembrance of the Russlaender migration. The Russlaender Centenary Committee is requesting \$2,000 from MHSC to help pay for publicity.

Discussion: This is one of the largest events this society is putting on and a great deal of labour has gone into it. It would be good for us to support it. We cannot rely on the provincial societies to give this project the promotion it needs and now is the time. We do have funds although it means we have less for any future projects. There was a suggestion that the committee also research the possibility of public service announcements.

**Moved/Seconded (Henry Paetkau, Aileen Friesen)** To provide \$2,000 to the Russlaender Centenary Committee to help with publicity costs.

**Amended/Seconded/Carried (Aileen Friesen/Richard Thiessen)** To change the amount to \$5,000.

**Amended Motion:** To provide \$5,000 to the Russlaender Centenary Committee to help with publicity costs. **Carried.**

- d. **Canadian Mennonite Emigration Centenary Committee:** Jeremy Wiebe (chair)  
This project is supported by the Plett Foundation, Mennonite Heritage Village and MHSC. The exhibit will be at the MHV May to Nov. 2022 and then a smaller version will travel. The exhibit has three themes: Leaving Canada (migration to Mexico), Parting ways (why they left); Life in Mexico (legacy). Migrations back to Canada will also be covered to make it relevant to all parts of Canada. The target audience is small to medium-sized facilities with links to the Low German Mennonite story. So far six locations across Canada have expressed interest, but the committee is hoping for more. They have decided not to do a book.
- e. **Archives Committee:** Lauren Harder-Gissing (chair)  
This is a support group for archivists across the country. Last year Jon Isaak suggested a simple way to digitize cassette tapes and many archives worked at that. They reviewed and accepted the MAID budget and recommend that budget to the historical society.
- f. **Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites:** Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (chair)

Because the MCC@100 conference was virtual, not all funds were used and will be transferred to the APOD project. MCC@100 was a good success with 500 people registered. The Indigenous conference is slated for May 2022 and soon it must be decided if it can be in person. Plans are continuing for a conference in 2024 regarding Mennonites, justice, the law and prisons.

g. **Genealogy Committee:** Bert Friesen (chair)

This project is working at becoming global which has implications of working with other organizations and rapidly changing technology. Progress has slowed due to the pandemic. Discussion: A group in Germany has uploaded the *Mennonitsche Rundschau* online. This makes Bert's index of that publication extra valuable. There was also discussion about the value of this committee having a stand-alone website.

h. **MAID management:** Conrad Stoesz (chair)

MAID welcomed its 15<sup>th</sup> partner, an archive in Paraguay. A committee is working to harmonize the metadata. It will be interesting to see how MAID adapts to having German material.

i. **MHSC Gameo:** Lauren Harder-Gissing (chair)

The larger Gameo management board plans to meet in person in May. Because of concern about the need to update topical records and to keep congregational information up to date, the MHSC Gameo committee is proposing that the Canadian arm of Gameo be connected to an institution that might help provide relevant content. The report has a long list of additional articles uploaded in the past couple years. Thank you to the volunteers who work at this.

11. **Review of financial statements:** Jeremy Wiebe (treasurer)

At the end of the year the operating fund stands at over \$23,000. The MAID project fund has \$32,637. Our annual meeting expenses have been much less than anticipated due to lack of travel. Hans Werner has reviewed these statements although he did not review the bank balances. For next year Jeremy will include the budgeted amount in the financial statement and will have the reviewer also see the bank statements.

**M/S/Carried (Jeremy Wiebe, Bruce Guenther)** To accept these financial statements for the year ended Oct. 31, 2021 as presented.

12. **Budget for 2022:** Jeremy Wiebe

The \$5,000 we allocated for the Canadian Mennonite Emigration Centenary Committee was not spent in 2021. We have also allocated \$5,000 to the Russlaender Centenary Committee. The costs for next year's meeting is hard to predict, but it will be significant. Jeremy has budgeted \$15,000 which may be a bit high.

**M/S/Carried (Jeremy Wiebe, Andrea Klassen)** To adopt the budget for 2022 as presented.

**M/S/Carried (Jeremy Wiebe, Bruce Guenther)** To appoint Hans Werner for our reviewer for the coming year.

13. **Nominations committee** report: Jon Isaak chaired this part of the meeting and presented the following slate for the MHSC Executive Committee: Conrad Stoesz, president; Lauren Harder-

Gissing, vice-president; Barb Draper, recording secretary; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Bruce Guenther, fifth member. There are no term limits, and the entire slate needs to be elected each year.

**M/S/Carried (Jon Isaak, Jake Buhler)** That nominations for the slate of MHSC executive committee cease.

Jon Isaak is willing to continue on the nominations committee. Richard Thiessen volunteered to serve for the coming year.

**M/S/Carried (Henry Paetkau, Jake Buhler)** That nominations for the Nominating Committee cease.

14. **Next meeting:** At the board meeting we agreed to the following schedule for MHSC meetings:

- a. 2023 – in Saskatchewan (Jan. 20-21)
- b. 2024 – in Ontario
- c. 2024 – in Manitoba.

Discussion regarding changing the time of year we meet next year. There were no good options for another time, so we will probably stay with January.

15. Conrad thanked many people for their roles in making these meetings happen.  
We adjourned at 4:18 p.m. CT.