

MINUTES of the ANNUAL MEETING

MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA

Saturday, 23 January 2010
9:00 AM- 3:30 PM

Mennonite Village Museum
Steinbach, Manitoba

Present: Sam Steiner, President, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Royden Loewen Vice-President, Chair of Mennonite Studies,
University of Winnipeg
Lucille Marr, Secretary, La Société Mennonite d'histoire du Québec
Richard Thiessen, Treasurer, Mennonite Historical Society of British
Columbia
Alf Redekopp, Mennonite Church Canada
Connie Braun, Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia
Wesley Berg, Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Jake Buhler, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Victor G. Wiebe, Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan
Bert Friesen, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Conrad Stoesz, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
Robert Goertzen, Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives
Lorne Kehler, Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives
Abe Dueck, Mennonite Brethren Church Canada
Barb Draper, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario
Laureen Harder-Gissing, Mennonite Church Eastern Canada
Richard Lougheed, La Société Mennonite d'histoire du Québec
Lawrence Kippenstein, Mennonite Heritage Village
Leonard Chester, Brethren in Christ Archives
Linda Huebert Hecht, GAMEO Editorial Committee

1. **Welcome & Introductions:** Lawrence Klippenstein welcomed the society to Mennonite Heritage Village, then each person around the table introduced him or herself.
2. **Devotional:** President Sam Steiner brought our thoughts to Haiti with a story from Rockway Mennonite, his home church in Kitchener, Ontario. A Rockway member, Betsy Wall, had flown with her daughter to Haiti with Foundation for International Development Assistance. Five people at the guest house where they were staying were killed in the earthquake. These included Yvonne Martin, a retired nurse from Elmira, Ontario, on her fourth or fifth medical trip there, a woman from Quebec, an American, and two staff people. The Walls arrived back in Canada on Tuesday of last week. Betsy was deeply moved by how these people, who had so little, felt God's presence in a time of extreme adversity. Sam closed by reading Psalm 27:1-10, a Psalm of David often read in difficult times, as a reminder that we can seek God in trying times.
3. **Minutes of the 22 January 2009 Annual Meeting:**

Motion of their acceptance. M/S/C Lucille/Bert.

- a. **Business arising from the minutes:** Sam read a letter from Ted Friesen, one of the society's founders who served on the executive for sometime between twenty-five and thirty years. Now nearly ninety years old, Ted expressed his appreciation of the society's work, affirming his continuing support and gave an update on the status of the remaining copies of the three volumes of *Mennonites in Canada*.

4. Approval of the agenda: approved as accepted by the board.

5. Reports from the Provincial Societies:

- a. **Quebec:** Lucille outlined the highlights bulleted in the Quebec report including Richard Lougheed's history of Mennonites in Quebec.

Roy pointed out the 19th century Mennonite landings in Quebec en route to Winnipeg.

- b. **Ontario:** Barb Draper highlighted Sam Steiner's work in progress – a history of Mennonites in Ontario, along with the Reesor play which has been well received. She also mentioned plans to index the Ontario Mennonite history newsletter.
- c. **Manitoba:** Conrad Stoesz reported that the local history society is one of the more active arms of the Manitoba society. The historic sites committee continues to work at photographing historic sites related to Mennonites in the province. Denis Braun's book on Settlers of the East Reserve, volume 4 in the East Reserve Historical Series, was published in 2010.
- d. **Saskatchewan:** Jake Buhler reported that the Saskatchewan archives received two interesting collections – one from Johan Driedger – a collection of court records and letters relaying his spiritual struggles.

Vic reported that Dyck Epp's copious materials have been donated to the Saskatchewan archive, which is currently bulging and overflowing; the society is in the process of renovating and developing an area that will triple the current space.

- e. **Alberta:** Wes Berg reported that in Alberta, it is business as usual with no outstanding events. The society's goal is to increase contributions to GAMEO.
- f. **British Columbia:** Richard Thiessen passed on greetings from John Conrad and David Giesbrecht, both of whom are unable to travel at

this time in their lives; he then introduced Connie Braun, a relatively new member of the BC Board. The society was hit hard by the unexpected death of Erica Suderman who had headed up their archives; Ben Braun, another board member, also passed away suddenly since the report was written. The report suggests an active society with a newsletter that goes out to 800 people. As noted in the report, indexing projects and the microfilm digitization project continue. It should be noted that their partner in the microfilm digitization project is the Mennonite Archives of Ontario rather than Conrad Grebel University College, as indicated in the written report. The society has increased its archival space.

6. President's Report & Report from the Board

President Sam Steiner recalled the society's initial vision of telling the story of Mennonites in Canada through a three-volume history. He noted that later projects – specifically, DVCM and GAMEO, both have matured, and asked: what do we need to pick up and work on to keep our vision going?

7. **MHSC Award of Excellence:** The Board announced that Lorraine Roth is the recipient of the award and that it has given the Ontario society the mandate to find an appropriate way to present it.
8. **MHSC Incorporation Update:**
 - a. **Action on Bylaw Changes:**
 - 17 a corrected name of Quebec society
 - 17c reference to Mennonite Foundation should read Mennonite Foundation of Canada
 - Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) should remove brackets in 4 places
 - Richard is following up with concerns raised by the board

Roy/Alf M/S/C

9. **MHSC Website Task Force report:** Bert stressed that the main benefit of having a genealogy website would be to have one base for management; a single site would also be more searchable, since it could link to pages of other genealogical web sites. The initial set up cost would be \$5,000 with an annual maintenance fee of \$200.00.

A lengthy discussion ensued with the following issues and suggestions emerging:

- BC, Saskatchewan and Manitoba support the vision of a single genealogical website.
- The Ontario society has serious questions about whether it is a driving question for that province's Mennonite and Brethren in Christ constituency.
- Alberta deferred making comment in the absence of Judith Rempel, that society's genealogical person

- Such a website will have little relevance for Quebec
- In sum, a weakness of the genealogy.com website is that it prioritizes the Dutch/Prussian/Russian side; to reflect our Canadian society the index would need to point to other resources to include the Swiss and others
- A suggestion arose to incorporate 20th century materials such as obituaries so that they will be available in 92 years when it can become available to the public. This is a way of incorporating newer Mennonites such as the Quebecois and various ethnic groups.
- Other significant primary source material that would make the site more representative of Ontario and Quebec are Lorraine Roth's source material, Ezra Eby, Eby revisited, the Swiss Anabaptist genealogical site, Bishop books, membership books, ministers' marriage books
- Further concerns emerged around how the work will be done, the long-term commitment required, and budget.

Motion: that a genealogy committee be established. Bert/Roy M/S/C with unanimous consent.

Victor and Bert volunteered to serve on such a committee; Laureen volunteered if the mandate is re-visited.

Motion: that the committee choose members, organize itself and come back next year with a clarified direction and proposal. Laureen, Bert and Victor were appointed. Richard/Conrad M/S/C with unanimous approval

Motion: that the society allocate \$1500 in the budget for a genealogy committee to meet face to face as they work out their proposal. Richard Thiessen/Wes Berg

Edited Motion: **that the society allocate \$2500 Carried**

10. Project Reports

a. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) report

i. Report of MHSC representative to GAMEO Management Board

Bert Friesen reported that the print volume has now been fully posted. Still to be completed is the cross referencing. GAMEO has decided to go to the regional model because in Canada it fits with the provinces. In the United States, in the absence of a national organization, several regions are being established.

An issue is the outdated nature of many of the articles in the print edition. The first area that GAMEO will aim to cover in its projected revisions is the theologically related articles. A committee of fifteen is being formed, with 3 members from each continent.

On going are editorial issues in terms of new content. The committee continues to form new templates.

The goal to become more global with regards to the Russian Mennonite story is moving forward with the culling from a donation of ten volumes of Manitoba biographies from Russian background.

- ii. **Canadian Editorial Committee chair appointment:** Major tasks are coming up with templates and testing editorial ideas. Soliciting material is being done at the regional level.

Richard Lougheed nominated Bert to continue in the role of chair of the management committee. **Alf /Conrad M/S/Carried**

b. Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM)

- i. ***Mennonite Women in Canada* report on sales:** Excellent, with 1,476 having been sold thus far. Reviews are positive, including the *Globe and Mail*.
- ii. **Upcoming Events:** Roy announced the October conference, “Mennonites, Melancholy and Mental Health” and asked for suggestions of contributors. He noted we should approach MCC about DVCM III with potential themes as early as next year .

Brainstorming brought out the following potential conference topics:

- Mennonites and Global Ethnicity
- Mennonites and Human Rights
- Mennonites and Food
- Mennonites and Jails
- Mennonites and Crime
- Mennonites and Media
- Mennonites and Photography
- Mennonites and Mutual Aid
- Mennonites and Missionary Activities
- Mennonites and Evangelism
- Mennonites and Politics
- Mennonites and Sports
- Mennonites and Disasters
- Mennonites and International Development
- Mennonites and Children
- Mennonites and Rites of Passage
- Mennonites and Worship

c. Global Mennonite History Project

- Volume I: Africa 2002
 - Volume II: Europe 2007
 - Volume III: South America forthcoming in 2010
 - Volume IV: Asia forthcoming possibly in 2011
 - Volume V: North America: forthcoming possibly by the end of 2011
- d. **Mennonite Committee for Human Rights:** Alf is the representative for the MHSC. The committee has been trying to keep in touch with the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, although more urgent is thinking about a Mennonite ethic of human rights and justice. The committee is planning an art exhibit on food which will feature the right of everyone to eat. The Food Grains bank is involved. On its part, the Canadian museum is seeking stories. A meeting between the Mennonite Human Rights Committee and the museum is in the offing and the former plans to offer stories of reconciliation and healing.

Lunch: Sam made a motion to thank those from the Heritage Village who hosted us and provided lunch.

- e. **MCC Canada History Project:** Roy reported that Lucille brought back the discussion in Ken's absence and that it is at the same place as last year at this point. He suggested that MCC Canada history could be the subject of a DVCM conference.

Action: Roy and Alf will contact Ken and revisit the matter

- f. **Mennonites in Canada – one volume report:** Sam reported that he was in touch with Ted Regehr and that there seems to be no additional activity. Ted has no objection to someone else picking it up.

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

- i. **Inventory held & value identified in the MHSC statement of financial position:** in 2009, 630 copies of volume 3 went out to the churches and 50 copies of volume 2.
- ii. **Inventory value write-down:** It was agreed to leave the stock as status quo for another year since it is costing us nothing to keep them.

11. Institutional Reports:

a. **Mennonite Central Committee Canada:** Lois Coleman, who was our rep from MCC Canada, is no longer there and Don Peters was unable to be here today.

b. **Evangelical Mennonite Church Archives:** Robert Goertzen introduced Lorne Kehler, who is also on the archives committee. Henry Fast continues to assist in translating materials from German into English. They have a solid photo data base thanks to the many collected by Dave Schellenberg. He also reported that the archives is still accepting

donations. The Evangelical Mennonite Church is gearing up for its 200th anniversary in 2012.

c. Brethren in Christ Archives: The Ontario archives participates in a North America wide historical society, although the Canadian office distributes all the literature to Canadian members. Three volumes focus on Canadian Brethren in Christ.

d. Mennonite Archives of Ontario & Mennonite Church Eastern Canada: Laureen spoke of the adventure of collecting materials. For instance, the archives recently received a cape dress. A highlight was the completion of the archiving of the Frank Epp collection. A celebration is in the offing.

e. Chair in Mennonite Studies: *Journal of Mennonite Studies* publishes proceedings of conferences. Roy thanked provincial societies for inviting members to subscribe. The Chair of Mennonite Studies provides scholarships of from \$10-15,000 for graduate students to commit to writing a history of Mennonites. It is working towards offering a major in Mennonite Studies, the first in the world.

f. Mennonite Heritage Village: Lawrence Klippenstein provided a report and copies of the *Village Review*.

g. Mennonite Heritage Centre of Mennonite Church Canada: Alf reported on acquisitions of 2009, publications, projects and activities. The project of scanning genealogy cards is nearly completed. An important task is mentoring students interested in an archival career.

h. Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies/Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission: Conrad reported on a variety of projects including books launches. He asked for reactions to the possibility of offering a film festival featuring Otto Klassen's work with showings in the various provinces in a cost/profit sharing agreement. The folks from British Columbia noted that they would be open to talking about the possibility. The Ontario people noted that their society had shown one with good feedback. They suggested that other possibilities would be films featuring Ontario such as "Trail of the Conestoga."

Abe Dueck's report from the Historical Commission was also received.

12. Financial Statement: Richard Thiessen went over this statement, which includes GAMEO, in detail; GAMEO expenses are primarily for use on our website. MHSC does a financial review as opposed to an audit. As a corporation, there should be an audit but it is too expensive.

M/S/C Richard T/Conrad/Carried

Roy affirmed the work of GAMEO; echoed by the board

13. Membership fees discussion/action: no further discussion beyond the board table.

14. Budget: for 2010

- add Mennonites in Siberia: \$500
- Genealogical Committee: \$2500
- Gameo: \$1000 instead of \$300.00

15. **Appointment of an auditor:** The society agreed to appoint Rod Ewert to again review the books. We are grateful that he does it gratis.

16. **Report of the Nominations Committee and Elections:** Laureen reported for herself and Maurice Martin:

Sam Steiner: President
 Roy Loewen: Vice-President
 Lucille Marr: Secretary
 Richard Thiessen: Treasurer
 Alf Redekopp: member at large

Motion that nominations cease; Jake/Laureen M/S/C

17. **Appointment of a Nominations Committee**

Lucille nominated Laureen
 Richard nominated Victor

Motion to appoint Laureen and Victor Alfred/Robert M/S/C

18. **Visioning:**

a. Sam opened up the question of the society creating an interactive web site instead of proceeding with the one-volume Mennonite history.

• **Pros:**

- exposure is wider with website
- Manitoba education system has thought of doing a series of DVDs on certain themes – if we did something on immigration it might be picked up by the school system
- kids are into interactive websites now – social networking

• **Cons:**

- chances are a book will outlast a website
- constructing a website is expensive
- websites now need to provide for two way conversation
- ongoing expense, i.e. \$25,000/year for the CO website
- more emailing with students

b) **Archives committee:** The old one disappeared with the focus

on GAMEO. Would it make sense to revive it? Laureen and Conrad supported the idea.

Action: in 2011 if archivists wish to get together a day ahead, such a meeting could be included in the planning of the AGM.

Note: Budget carried based on no new expenses

19. New business: none

20. Next meetings

a. Saskatchewan – 21-22 January 2011: Sam suggests starting Thursday evening with GAMEO; archivists could meet on Thursday afternoon.

Action: The 2011 meeting should begin Thursday afternoon

b. Manitoba – 20-21 January 2012

c. Ontario -- 2013

21. **Adjournment:** Jake initiated a thank you to the Manitoba society for hosting these meetings, especially Conrad for organizing and Royden for hosting the reception on Friday evening. Jake also extended thanks to Sam for chairing, Richard for the finances – and everyone else including the Secretary.

A motion to adjourn: Victor/Richard L M/S/C