

Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online Editorial Committee Meeting Minutes of Meeting

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg

Wednesday, November 28, 2001, 7-9 pm; Thursday, November 29, 2001, 9am-4pm

Present: Abe Dueck, Henry Fast, Bert Friesen (chair), David Giesbrecht, Linda Huebert Hecht, Alf Redekopp, Sam Steiner, Richard Thiessen, Victor Wiebe.

Regrets: Ted. Regehr

1. **Call to order and welcome:** Henry Fast has joined the Manitoba subcommittee, all members of which were invited to this meeting. The project is broadening out. Bert Friesen opened with prayer.

2. Minutes and business arising from May 5, 2001 meeting:

2.1 Accepted as circulated.

2.2 Discussion of 'Who are the Mennonites' section. The traditional definition of Mennonite has been religious. A suggestion was made to follow the approach of E. K. Francis in his book. David Giesbrecht, Abe Dueck and Victor Wiebe will work on this section.

2.3 Ted Regehr has been asked to write a guide for institutional articles.

3. Review of agenda

3.1 Harry Olfert has done some testing and will report to us at 10:30 tomorrow morning. As yet no payment has been made to him.

4. Report of content of web site to date

4.1 **Progress on new content:** All the provincial subcommittees have added names for potential biographies to our list.

4.2 **Progress on editing process:** With more articles coming in, editors Abe and Bert have worked on thirteen articles in the last three months. Twenty-three new articles have been mounted on the website this past year. A two stage editorial process is needed in order that the task does not become too heavy. To maintain consistency and quality in the articles the provincial subgroups should edit the articles first, ensuring they correspond to our template and style sheet. It is more feasible to involve the author in the editorial process at the local level and the edited version should be sent to the author before final submission. Concern was expressed for the amount of work involved for the editors if the volume of articles continues to increase. It was agreed that:

- local subcommittees will do the first revisions before sending articles to Abe and Bert
- Sam informs the committee when a new article is posted
- thank you letters be sent by the local committees and writers notified by telephone or email when the article is posted

To avoid duplication in the biographies, committee members should first check the site to see if the biography has already been done. A person may have worked in several provinces. There is a need then to create a master list. This could be done in a four column spreadsheet with: name or

subject, writer, contact person, name of the province working on it. Sam was asked to create an alphabetical list based on the last names with first names second. One option is to link this table to the website style sheet. A second option is to add the table to the website but keep it hidden, ie unlinked.

Mailing expenses of the local group should be charged to this committee and other expenses sent to the chair for approval who will forward them to the society treasurer. Travel costs should be offered to members of the local group. At present we do not have a policy on current expenses.

4.3 Review of style sheet and guidelines: A question has arisen concerning how our authors should cite footnotes from the internet. The options are: the Chicago manual of style, MLA, recent style sheets. Richard Thiessen will chose the one we will use.

Sam Steiner reported that we are now averaging 2,920 hits with 657 visitors per day. Of these, 1073 are unique or new visitors and 23,000 have visited the site more than once. Statistics have been kept since April 2000. We received the most hits on Nov. 19, over 10,000. This may have been due to an index search engine. Two-thirds of the hits are from outside Canada. Some of the most popular topics relate to: the Amish, Folk Medicine, the Conestoga wagon, the Canadian Pacific Railway and Furniture and Woodworking.

A news release should be written to inform people about and promote the encyclopedia.

The question was raised as to the extent of use of the biography template. In B.C. it has proven to be a great tool, relieving the fears of writers. The template is mounted on the site map. Information on photos also has been added. There is a line underneath the photo which the viewer can click on and go to the article. Links are now imbedded so users are linked to the home page if they come in from the 'outside.' Our cover letter refers to these links. There is no congregational template. The sheet of questions from the original database can provide a guideline for the latter. There is a need to complete the style sheet and guidelines for institutions.

5. Report on provincial groups:

5.1 For **Ontario**, Sam reported that Linda is chair of this subcommittee. The first meeting was held to introduce the idea. It met once; six people were present. A list of 65 names was compiled as well as a list of resources. Institutions were not discussed. In regard to avoiding duplication in the provincial subgroups, a list on the website would be sufficient.

5.2 The **Manitoba** group has been sharing its minutes with others. Abe reported that institutional articles are in process on the Chair of Mennonite Studies, Coaldale, Whitewater Bible School, St. Elizabeth, etc., a number of articles are on the way. The article on MEI is now complete. They have not received any biographical articles recently. The Manitoba group was assigned to do testing regarding fund raising. A report on this will come later.

5.3 Victor Wiebe did not have much to report for **Saskatchewan**. There are problems in gathering resources on educational institutions and also in getting materials to writers. A number of people are working on biographies. Also, some writing is being done on printing and publishing (Mennonite presses). Victor and Leonard Doell are the editors. One problem they have is how to enlarge the group due to their geography.

A question was raised about including biographies of non-Mennonites, for eg. an MLA in

Saskatoon. In Manitoba there are people who made contributions to agriculture, ones who had careers elsewhere but left the church during or after university. Lawyers are another such group. It was agreed we should work from centre out. We won't consider them at present since there is enough to do. The main criterion at this time is the religious definition of Mennonite.

Victor suggested the idea of writing an article on Mennonites in Canada based on census statistics with a table and interpretive text. The first reporting on Mennonites was done in 1891 and following that every ten years. Reports such as that of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1944 could be used as well as the new books on J. J. Thiessen, and David Toews. Victor has been looking at this and hopes to pursue it further.

5.4 There is no representative from **Alberta** present. No new articles have been written on the bible schools. In the future Ted will be writing about the North West Conference. We are not aware of any subgroup that exists.

5.5 David Giesbrecht reported for **British Columbia** where biographies are the main focus. They have a list of 80 names, most of which have been assigned. They have met once as a subcommittee. There is lots of interest and suggestion. Most of the writers are working on several articles, one is working on four. They have over 30 writers. The leaders in the interior are harder to assign. The committee is able to delegate the work which is positive but quality control remains a challenge. They are also receiving photos with articles.

5.6 In regard to **photographic images**: they should be sent separately and not imbedded in the article. Our style sheet has no stipulations on photos. (The Manitoba group decided to use jpeg.) The image should not be bigger than 480 x640. Images can be scanned and originals need not be sent to us. Information regarding photos should be added to our stylesheet.

To make our submissions consistent it was decided to use the Schoolnet guidelines in regard to the size of the file. Schoolnet specifications will be sufficient but if we have better resolution that would also be good.

Thursday, November 29

Bert again opened the meeting with prayer.

Abe made announcements and outlined plans for the day.

6. Technical matters:

6.1 **Search engine:** Questions were raised in regard to using the microsoft engine and discontinuing use of alta vista. The google search engine is free and re-indexes once a month. Sam will set up a google search page as a trial and will add it to the site map. He will inform us when it is in place so that we can all try it.

The total number of articles now is around 2200 with separate pages for the bibliography. Editing of those already entered was done initially by Schoolnet. Victor will send Sam this list.

6.2 **XML, web site management:** Peace Works advised us earlier against using XML since not enough tools are in place and converting to a data base is too text heavy. Conversion

(inserting codes manually) would be very labour intensive at this point. XML is not widely accepted being still in its infancy. It may make web site management easier in the future and speed up searching in the databases but perhaps paid staff will be necessary when converting to XML. Regarding security, at present our system is a sub site of the University of Waterloo and is as secure as that of Conrad Grebel College.

6.3 Peace Works, status of contract: No contract is in place at present and soliciting a new job would entail costs. We need to consult them again in the next six months, just before the next half yearly meeting. At that time we should inquire regarding the cost of conversion to XML, tools available and extent of it's users, in order to make comparisons.

6.4 Other questions: The time problem of site management. The number of email inquiries on resources is increasing. There are a couple per day with topics varying from genealogy to barn removal. We can give people the standard sources to check, other Mennonite sites, Menno Link.

If we trademark our name we would have some control on rights. It then would be part of our logo. Victor was asked to check the costs, benefits, and effect of this on security.

If we have our own domain name (url), separate from the society, the cost is \$50 per year with a registration fee every two years. We are not obligated to use it. The advantage is that one can search on that name alone. We could use cme.ca. Victor was asked to inquire about using the acronym and the name written out. Richard Thiessen reported that the name: cmeo.ca is available.

7. Fund raising:

7.1 Presentation by Harry Olfert: \$270,000 was projected as the 5 year goal with a fundraising cost of \$25,000. Staff and travel would be included in this budget (see handout from May 5, 2001 meeting). Harry Olfert's approach is to have all board members and provincial societies make contributions first. Size is not as important as that everyone contribute, \$100 as a minimum. On the basis of these contributions from the core group he would then approach members of the larger Mennonite community. Olfert's plan is to have 40 people give \$500 over 5 years (or, 35 people give \$1000, etc.). This would be an individual appeal not from the society. When the goal is achieved the options are: sustained funding, getting an organization to take it over (for eg. in B.C. Anabaptist Group Funds). It would be logical for MCCC to take on the project where a staff /volunteer position could be created.

Harry Olfert's written report: (Corrected copy to follow.) The Prospect Development Exercise from May 5, 2001 was tested with eight potential donors. From his conversations with the president of the Crosstown Credit Union board in Winnipeg, Olfert's sense is that we would have a lead donor in the credit union. We could work through the provincial credit unions. A key issue is how the project connects with the mission of the church. Another question is whether funding is attached to particular people's stories. Olfert was not able to contact all the individuals, for eg. the Fasts and Peter Enns, CEO of Crosstown Credit Union in Winnipeg. Olfert's suggestion is that we put together a support statement on why this project should be done. Formal solicitation could continue by making contact with lead donors, "the Quiet Campaign." A question to consider is whether the sustaining part is integrated after five years. Relationships must be maintained with the donors so that they feel part of the project, treating them as partners, not funders. Should an endowment be created?

Thursday afternoon

Item from Wed. evening: Richard Thiessen presented a **template for educational institutions**, 38 items. He will circulate it by email for feedback. There could be a block of general items at the beginning for all types of institutions and a second part with items for specific institutions. As was done for the biography style sheet, an example should be added. The plan is to have the template ready for beginning of January and to include Columbia Bible College as the example. It will be a two stage approval: circulate template, then sample article.

7.2 Implications of board acceptance of a major fund raising effort: Bert's outline:

Fund raising resolution

1. who a. potential askers b. potential donors
2. what target amount: for what purpose; brochure
3. benefits to contributors and to wider community
4. rationale for this fund raising effort: implications for MHSC; need to convince society of need to hire staff

Resolution:

1. approve the CMEO to raise funds
2. for this project
3. by this method

Rationale

1. need staff for this project
2. if not staff, then this is only what this project can get done

The rationale and proposed resolution were debated. Questions considered were: the idea of ongoing vs project based work; whether the fund raising would be done by each of us or by some in each province. If staff is hired \$270,000 is needed. For the alternative route: money for updating, technical support, etc. \$50,000 would be required.

Related questions mentioned: what are plans in the US; is government funding available; can we access funds that exist for hiring students; is it realistic to expect our board to raise \$40,000? (Olfert suggested 150 as a core group of contributors to lead by example); is an MCCC volunteer position an option (this might involve \$550 for board and room and \$1000 per month); the volunteer's responsibilities would include managing the site (administrative), writing and editing; the question is how would the volunteer be supervised.

A decision could not be reached at this point. It will be reconsidered at our next meeting. One flaw is that there is no termination point. It must be seen as a long term project or the five years are lost. A complete update of all the congregations could be part of the job description. We need to propose another model or articulate the present one. We are not ready to make a resolution to the board.

Bert will present the pros and cons to the annual meeting of the society (Nov. 30) and the Manitoba group will contact MCCC, Ken Reddig regarding a volunteer position. Our report to the society will include: two staffing models, the status quo and project oriented work; two funding models, full time vs a MCCC volunteer service position who could update congregational articles

and add new congregations. We will tell the board we are still discussing fund raising.

8. Finances: \$5000 is available to us for the next two years to be used mostly for travel to meetings. We did not use the whole amount last year; a small amount was used for web revision. There is a separate line to edit the web site which we will request remain there. It may be needed for the summer project. It may also be needed for consulting Peaceworks on some of our questions.

Abe suggested pursuing the idea of a summer project. Each provincial society could pursue this as well. Career start federal government grants are available for persons under 30 years of age for up to sixteen weeks. They are intended for non-profit organizations, to provide a career opportunity and should pay more than minimum wage.

There is a need for us to have a mid year meeting to discuss models, staffing and directions for fund raising. We could apply for summer students in any case, in Man. and in B.C. and add the additional monies needed from our budget. If a student is hired it is important to have a congregational template in place.

9. Other business: Our next major thrust might be some of the 50 different areas mentioned in 1998. A substantial list was compiled; also to do general articles on topics like fishing, needlework, crafts.

Articles on Mennonite conferences should also be included, for eg. on Quebec and the Maritimes. Biographies from those regions will be included; they can be written in French. We could ask the Mennonite historian in Quebec to be a corresponding member of this group, as well as Annie and John Victor Brousseau and the editor of the Chinese Herald. We already have articles on congregations in the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec, Mennonites in the Chinese Church.

Summary: Bert will report to the society board that we are: not ready to fund raise yet; are studying the question of staffing; are considering hiring a summer student to work on content, a short run solution; and that we might ask for a mid year supplement.

10. Date of next meeting: May 24 (7-9pm); May 25 (9-12am) in Winnipeg at the Mennonite Heritage Center

11. Adjournment

Recorded by Linda Huebert Hecht