

Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia SchoolNet Project

From June through November 1998, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was the recipient of a grant from Industry Canada in the amount of \$24,652.80 to develop a website focussed on two projects – copying and placing on the World Wide Web Canadian-related material from the print version of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, volumes 1-5, as well as an introductory “Who are the Mennonites” storyboard for persons wanting more general, less detailed, information on Mennonites in Canada. At the time of writing this report, we were nearing completion of this phase of our long term Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia project.

Conrad Grebel College served as the contractor for the project, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is the “custodian” and ultimate owner of the site. The grant funds were administered by the College. The final website will be located two places – on the SchoolNet Canada server in Ottawa, and on the Conrad Grebel College server in Waterloo. Continued additions and changes to the site at Conrad Grebel College will of course be possible.

Five young adults had contract positions for the project: Derek Suderman served as project leader and developed the “Who are the Mennonites” path in the site. He was employed for the entire length of the contract. The four persons serving ten-week terms and doing the more technical scanning, optical character recognition and preparation of web pages included Cory Albrecht, James Seyler, Judith Friesen Epp and Clifford Snyder. They all demonstrated much interest in the project and worked diligently throughout. I served as general supervisor. I particularly want to affirm Derek Suderman’s leadership and initiative throughout the project.

Mennonite Publishing House and the Institute of Mennonite Studies (Elkhart, Ind.) generously gave us rights to freely copy material from the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, asking only that articles derived from the *Encyclopedia* include links to the Mennonite Publishing House website. MPH also provided copies of *Encyclopedia* “seconds” that we could cut up to ease our scanning. Other persons and agencies were also very generous in allowing us to use photographs in the site.

We began by scanning articles from the 1990 supplemental volume, particularly the larger survey articles. When we looked at volumes 1-4, it quickly became apparent much more work would be involved. The text was forty years old and the writing style varied considerably. Because of the limited research time available to us, we did not include articles on local towns and communities for this reason. Likewise we decided agencies, businesses and institutions that continued in existence in 1998 could not be included from the older volumes because of the dated content. (Volume 5 did not update detailed local material found in vols. 1-4). General theological articles were not included because it was unclear they reflected current Canadian Mennonite understandings without careful review by scholars more qualified than our team! Consequently the present content of the Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia remains very patchy.

Nonetheless, there are close to 1600 articles in the Encyclopedia. Of these about 1000 are congregational entries. The CME editorial committee will need to set priorities both for rewrites and original articles to fill in the many and obvious gaps. But this is a good start!

The inability of the University of Waterloo technical people to provide the level of support we needed at various points along the way led us to look for alternative locations to have our site located. During the past year Conrad Grebel College established its own server within the larger University of Waterloo network. With the approval of the MHSC Executive we agreed to purchase a separate MHSC hard drive to be mounted on this server. Hopefully this move from the university server will have taken place by the time of the annual meeting. In addition we hope to establish our own domain name (preferably www.mhsc.ca) after the transfer to the new server. This will give us a stable address even if we should move to other servers in the future.

The Editorial Committee is meeting prior to the annual meeting; hopefully additional information will be available at that time.

Submitted by
Sam Steiner

November 3, 1998