



Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online

A Project of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

<http://www.mhsc.ca/>

Encyclopedia Committee

Abe Dueck

ajdueck@mbconf.ca

Bert Friesen (Chair)

bfries@mts.net

David Giesbrecht

db_g@shaw.ca

Linda Huebert Hecht

lhhecht@watserv1.uwaterloo.ca

Peter Penner

justpen@shaw.ca

Alf Redekopp

aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

Sam Steiner (Managing Editor)

steiner@uwaterloo.ca

Richard Thiessen

richard.thiessen@columbiabc.edu

Victor Wiebe

victor.wiebe@usask.ca

Report to the CMEO Board

3 December 2004

During the past year we have added 88 articles to the Encyclopedia and deleted one article. The largest portion of the additions came from Ted Regehr's biographies of ordained leaders in the Northwest Conference of the Mennonite Church completed in conjunction with his history of that conference. In addition 20 articles were extensively revised or completely replaced. Most of these were congregational articles in Ontario, but also included some biographies published earlier in the print version.

One minor addition was made to the front page of the website – a more obvious clickable “encyclopedia” button was added under the heading. Some additional pictures were added to the random rotation of photographs that are presented when entering the site.

Some Statistics

Below is a table showing comparable figures since web statistics began to be kept in April 2000.

	Dec. 2000	Dec. 2001	Dec. 2002	Dec. 2003	Dec. 2004
Hits per Day	1,786	2,920	4,215	12,506	18,461
Visitors per Day	524	657	734	1,026	1,356
Unique visitors (Total)		173,599	314,027	502,400	N/A
Page Views per Day		2,215	3,072	4,030	6,454
Articles in CMEO	2,216	2,239	2,304	2,371	2,458

Expanding the Vision of CMEO

Last year the Editorial Committee agreed to explore expansion of the Encyclopedia's scope and organizational structure. Reasons included:

- Two-thirds of site visitors come from outside Canada. An international English-language online encyclopedia would find a receptive audience.
- The Hutterites, Church of the Brethren and Brethren in Christ do not have comparable sites; it would be appropriate to invite other “Anabaptist” groups to participate in an expanded encyclopedia project.
- Collaboration would expand content breadth, the writer and editorial volunteer base, and funding possibilities. Broader institutional participation would enhance the academic credibility of the site.
- The site could include an expanded “Anabaptist Ethereal Library” that included carefully prepared full-text sources, as well as links to appropriately vetted sources at other sites. A recent request asked for the texts of various Mennonite *Privilegia* negotiated with governments.

Implications of a New Vision for CMEO

There are a number of practical implications that would emerge from such an expansion, including:

- A modified governance structure, perhaps separating administrative and funding oversight from editorial oversight. Most editorial work can be done by email, though an initial meeting of an enlarged editorial committee would likely be helpful. An administrative oversight board appointed by participating bodies could also work by email, perhaps with a face-to-face annual meeting. The administrative board should include major funding agencies.
- Review of current funding assumptions – that access to the encyclopedia site is free and that project funding is donor and grant based.
- Coordination of the project through a central location. Some paid staff time would be required for coordination of assignments and to serve as the upload gateway.
- Key to expansion would be cooperation of denominational, conference-based and regional historical societies in identifying writers and editorial volunteers.
- Creation of a new identity and domain for the Encyclopedia – Anabaptist Encyclopedia, Anabaptist-Mennonite Encyclopedia, Believers Church Encyclopedia are some possibilities.
- Review of the current web structure of the encyclopedia in the context of current software technology, e.g. emerging XML and database technologies.
- Review of content parameters for inclusion in the site, e.g. only deceased persons receive a biographical entry.

Next Steps

The Editorial Committee of CMEO approached the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission and the Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee to explore collaboration on the project. These were chosen as the starting point since they represent the largest Mennonite groups in the U.S. that are “web-friendly.” Both have expressed interest in exploring expansion of the project.

Representatives of CMEO, the MB Historical Commission and the MC USA Historical Committee will meet early on Friday, December 3 to take a first look at practical cost and management implications as well as the opportunities presented by collaboration. The MB and MC USA folks will also be at the table for the editorial committee meeting where we hope to spend one hour of discussion on “expanding the vision.”

Some further next steps might include:

- Formation of a working group to identify and invite participation by other partners, and to draft recommendations on next steps to be brought to the potential participating bodies. These would need to include both administrative and financial implications.
- Proceeding to scan the remainder of *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, and selected portions of vols. 1-4.
- The working group should have a fully developed recommendation for the potential project partners by the end of 2005.

Sam Steiner,
Managing Editor