

**Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online**  
**Conrad Grebel College**  
**Wednesday, 29 November 2000**

**Present:** Alf Redekopp, Abe Dueck, Ted Regehr, Richard Thiessen, Sam Steiner, Linda Huebert Hecht, Bert Friesen, Victor Wiebe, David Giesbrecht

1. Call to order: Bert Friesen
2. Opening remarks: Bert Friesen opened with prayer.
3. Review of minutes of 5 May 2000. Alf was commended for the quality of the minutes. MSC
4. Review of agenda and time targets. Alf reviewed the 26 October 2000 meeting of the Manitoba sub-group. The feeling of the group is that we need to get down to the actual writing of the articles. The editing process also needs to be tested so that when articles come to Sam they are ready to be mounted on the web. There needs to be editing of the submitted articles so that statements that are made do not contradict other articles in the encyclopedia.
5. Review of the web site. The committee reviewed the redesigned web site. "Who are the Mennonites" has been integrated into the larger encyclopedia. A new index has been created and a new search engine has been added. The Alta Vista search engine has been replaced by the Microsoft Server search engine. The question of a site index was raised by Victor. The major links would be listed as headings with the items under each link listed below each heading. The buttons will be eliminated in favour of hyper-text links, and the links to the left of each article will be eliminated. Search results will be weighted according to whether or not the query words appear in the title of the article. Question of whether or not search engine allows Boolean searches. Comment on the datedness of the colour scheme. Question of moving from html to xml, which is a database language. Question of archiving articles so that earlier editions of articles are available. Positive comments were made on the general improvement of the site's overall appearance and organization.
6. Review of assignment list for individuals and the Manitoba group. Committee members reported on their progress regarding the writing of articles and contacting potential authors. Alf mentioned that Anna Ens will be writing an article on the Whitewater Bible School, a school not listed by the committee. Alf also reported that Helmut Harder will be writing an article on Mennonite Church Canada. David suggested that a form letter thanking those who contribute articles be sent out. Pictures should be submitted with the articles—one of the building and one of an individual or group of people. It is preferred that pictures be submitted electronically. A few revisions were made to the 5 May 2000 list.

7. Review of style sheet, guidelines, and time-lines. Victor suggested that the style sheet should specify that we are asking for encyclopedia articles and not journal articles, and that writers should be informed that editorial changes will be made to insure that the articles conform to CMEO standardisation. Under General Principles we could add that Turabian is also acceptable in terms of style. The date should be in the sequence of day-month-year. Rules for citations and rules for the beginning of an encyclopedia article should be specified. The Manitoba group will look at a standardisation of Russian and Ukrainian place names. There was a stated preference for two letter abbreviations for provinces and states. Any additional comments regarding style should be directed to Victor and Sam.

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8. Sara Wahl was introduced to the committee. Sara agreed that a site map would be easy to incorporate into the site. There was some discussion regarding colour schemes. The colours have a 1970s look, which ironically is in vogue with young people right now. However, it looks dated to older audiences. Sara will put several options together and the committee will review them at a later time. Boolean operators are available to searchers. A description of this aspect of the site is available in the help section. The question of moving from html to xml: if the web site would have been designed a few years later, it would have been designed as a database instead of as static text. To redesign the site all of the files would need to be manipulated, taking the html coding out. If our information will remain relatively static, it might not be necessary to convert the site. A database format allows people to search specific parts of the encyclopedia, such as an author field or a subject field or a title field and not the entire index. The conversion would also allow various administrative options, such as the ability to allow a number of people from different locations to input the data for the articles. One of the key questions is the choice of database. Sara will provide us with a quotation on the conversion of the site from html to xml. Question of archiving articles so that earlier editions are available to researchers following up a citation of an encyclopedia article. The question arose regarding accessing database information from other Mennonite sites, such as Mennonite.net, to update encyclopedia articles. For example, congregational articles contain information on staffing and congregational membership size, and some denominational sites collect this information and update their databases on a regular basis. Would it be possible to tap in to these denominational databases to update the encyclopedia site?
9. Review of editorial process: divisions of labour and policies for the various situations. Question of how we engage writers to write the articles, and how we conclude the contact with the writer once the article has been written. The current letter for writers contains information on the location of the style sheet, but there is some feeling that the style sheet is intimidating to many writers. The committee member who is the contact person should have the freedom to edit the submitted article so that it conforms to the style sheet, pass it back to the writer for his or her approval, and then pass the article on to the editorial process, or to pass the article back to the writer and ask him or her to edit the

article so that it conforms to the style sheet before the article is forwarded to the editors. The committee member will need to use discretion in terms of how they suggest changes to the article, but specific suggestions regarding organization or clarity of a point should be made to help the writer clarify things. Question of who determines whether or not secondary data on an institution is warranted. It should be the editorial staff. Victor distributed a sample biography from the encyclopedia, written in a different format (see appendix 1). Victor will revise the order of the biographical elements. The occupation should be limited to two. We do not want a comprehensive list of churches that the person was a member of, only an indication of the denomination. If siblings are named then there should be an accompanying article in the encyclopedia. The officiating pastor is probably not necessary. Surnames are preferable to first name in repeated references. Victor will revise and there will be a link to it in the style sheet. Several commented that this will be a very helpful item.

10. Projections of priorities for next year in terms of content, format and process. The first topic discussed was the basic issue of moving from a text-based to a database model. There was agreement that we should move in this direction. The cost of converting the data will need to be determined before we know when we can actually implement the conversion. Mennonite Foundation was mentioned as a possible source for funds for this type of project. In terms of content, we need to decide whether or not we should focus on institutional articles or expand the work to include biographies. We could form several provincial groups to work at identifying potential biographies, and perhaps assign writers for these biographies. Initiating this in each province will be Richard in B.C., Ted in Alberta, Victor in Saskatchewan, Abe in Manitoba, and Linda in Ontario. There was lengthy discussion on biographical essays on only people who are deceased or including living people, and discussion on only biographical essays or also including brief biographical entries, serving like a “who’s who” type of entry. The Manitoba group will address this question.
11. Financial status, plans for fundraising. The first question of business is to determine what portion of the committee’s annual meeting expenses will be covered by the committee, and what portion will be covered by the board or provincial societies. The second question is determining if we are entitled to funds that may be carried over from last year that were not expended, or asking for an allocation of \$5,000 a year for the next three years. Other sources of funding will have to come from government grants, Mennonite institutions, and the Mennonite corporate community. The feeling was that the Mennonite educational institutions should be encouraged to support CMEO by becoming members of the MHSC and by contributing directly to the CMEO project. Mennonite corporate institutions, especially those in the high-tech environment, could be encouraged to support CMEO, but the key is to identify who these institutions are and how best to raise funds from them. A professional fund-raiser would have to be engaged in order to raise funds from the private sector. Funds would have to be raised for an editorial office and the expenses associated with that. Raising funds for an endowment would probably not go over well with the private sector. The Manitoba sub-group will contact Harry Olfert from Winnipeg to talk about acquiring his services to prepare

proposals to the Mennonite corporate community, foundations, and various levels of government. The budget should include a separate line for conversion costs which is on top of the \$5,000 grant from the society.

12. Technical requirements: hardware and software projections for the next year(s). This will depend on the quote that we will receive from those proposing to convert the data to a database. Sound and video images are an important component of a site that is attractive to youth, and the cost of incorporating these items needs to be factored in to the CMEO hardware and software requirements.
13. Other business. There is a need to update our constituency. A press release focussing on our new design or the 100,000<sup>th</sup> visitor since July would be appropriate. Should the committee have an American representative? Sam Steiner will contact John Sharpe and inform him of what we are doing and learn about U.S. initiatives in this area. Harmonization with other activities would be mutually beneficial. How can the smaller Mennonite groups in Canada be involved in the writing of their experience? Members from these communities could be asked to join some of the provincial sub-groups.
14. Date of next meeting: 11-12 May, 2001, Winnipeg.
15. Meeting adjourned.

Recorded by Richard Thiessen