

# **From Separation to Diversity: The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, 1968-2018**

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The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) of 2018 is the only Mennonite historical society in the world that is a federation of regional Mennonite historical societies, academic institutions and museums. It also includes representatives from Canadian Mennonite denominations. The society began more modestly as a project of two small Mennonite provincial historical societies and a half dozen denominations with a single time-limited focus—to publish a one-volume history of Mennonites in Canada by 1974, inspired by the 1967 centennial celebrations of Canada as a country and mirroring similar centennial projects among various other Canadian ethnic groups. The society has enlarged the scope of its activity over the years, but it has remained focused on the Mennonite experience in Canada. This has encompassed the stories of Mennonites in the United States or Russia which led them to immigrate to Canada, or to emigrate from Canada to places like Mexico. Although the Society's 2018 projects remained introspectively focused on Canadian Mennonites, it no longer saw them as “unique” or “separate.”<sup>2</sup>

## Canadian Mennonite Historical Reflection before the 1960s

Canadian Mennonites did limited self-reflection on their history prior to the 1960. In Ontario much of the reflection that took place came through the efforts of outsiders. Mabel Dunham's 1924 novel, *Trail of the Conestoga*, described in fictional form the early nineteenth century history of Mennonites in Waterloo County. This story became the narrative for much Ontario Mennonite understanding in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> In 1926 the Waterloo Historical Society, with minimal Mennonite participation, encouraged the building of the Pioneer Memorial Tower at Doon, Ontario, that honored the early Pennsylvania German settlers in Waterloo County, Ontario.<sup>4</sup> Then in 1951 the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario was organized through the persistence of non-Mennonite educator, G. Elmore Reaman. He later wrote *The Trail of the Black Walnut*, a history of Pennsylvania German "Loyalists", including Mennonites.<sup>5</sup> The only Mennonite-initiated historical project in the era was preacher Lewis J. Burkholder's 1935 history, *A Brief History of the Mennonites of Ontario*, sponsored by the Mennonite Conference of Ontario, and undertaken in response to similar Mennonite regional history projects by Mennonite conferences in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Similar ventures occurred in Manitoba, the other large Canadian Mennonite settlement. In the early 1930s an effort was made to launch a society called the "Canadish-Mennonitischen Historischen Vereines"<sup>7</sup> In the 1940s Paul J. Schaefer, principal of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, authored a three-volume set of booklets, *Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten!: Lektionen für den Unterricht in der Mennonitengeschichte*, the third of which described the Mennonites of Canada. Then in 1952 John G. Rempel edited fiftieth anniversary historical reflections for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and P. J. B. Reimer edited a book celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1962.<sup>8</sup> In the 1940s, sociologist, E. K. Francis, began studying the Manitoba Mennonites, and authored a highly praised academic volume on their history and sociology in 1955 titled *In Search of Utopia: the Mennonites in Manitoba*.<sup>9</sup> In the 1940s, too, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBoc), the inter-Mennonite body that coordinated the immigration of Mennonites from the early Soviet Union to Canada in the 1920s, decided to write a history of its activities. It considered a wide variety of potential authors, and in the mid-1950s briefly considered expanding the project to become a history of Mennonites in Canada. This enlarged vision was ultimately rejected. But in 1959 the young editor of the *Canadian*

*Mennonite*, Frank H. Epp, agreed to write the history of the Board, a work published in 1962 as *Mennonite Exodus*.<sup>10</sup>

Concurrent with the CMBoc's efforts to write its history was the vision of John C. Reimer, a teacher in the Steinbach, Manitoba area, to create a Mennonite museum. He had begun collecting artefacts in the 1930s, and helped to establish a Museum Committee in 1949, at the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations of the immigration of Mennonites from Russia to Manitoba.<sup>11</sup> In April and November 1958 a small group met to work further on this vision, and organized the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS).<sup>12</sup> The group that published the last volume of Paul Schaefer's historical series in 1953 also called itself the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, though it did not appear to be a formal organization.<sup>13</sup> The focus of the MMHS for the next decade remained the museum, which subsequently incorporated in 1964 and opened to the public in 1967.<sup>14</sup>

### The Birth of MHSC

By late 1966 some members of the Manitoba society were looking for projects beyond the museum. Central to this visioning was businessperson Ted E. Friesen, a partner and vice-president in the growing D.W Friesen & Sons printing and publishing business in Altona, Manitoba. Friesen had an avid interest in Mennonite history, and was a participant in many Canadian Mennonite-related board structures. This included service on the executive of the new Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada's Board of Christian Service. Friesen and his brothers had founded and published the inter-Mennonite *Canadian Mennonite* weekly newspaper already in 1953.<sup>15</sup>

On December 29, 1966 Ted Friesen wrote a letter to J. Winfield Fretz, president of Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario. Friesen was acquainted with Fretz through his denominational and MCC relationships. He was also aware that Ontario Mennonites had recently organized a historical society in 1965.<sup>16</sup> He sent copies of his December 1966 letter to J. J. Reimer, chair of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, as well as Henry H. Epp and Gerhard Lohrenz, two members of the new but short-lived Conference of Mennonites in Canada Historical Committee. Friesen sent a blind carbon copy to Frank H. Epp as well, a journalist and historian who Friesen knew well and considered a potential author for the historical writing project he wanted to propose.<sup>17</sup>

In his letter, Friesen promoted the idea of a “general history” of Mennonites in Canada “along the lines of C. Henry Smith’s book.” He suggested it could be launched as a joint centennial project of the Manitoba and Ontario societies, with completion several years in the future. Friesen envisioned financial support from Canadian Mennonite denominational bodies as well. Smith’s *Story of the Mennonites* had been published in 1941 and had become the standard survey history of the Mennonites.<sup>18</sup>

Fretz responded warmly to the proposal and agreed to call a special meeting of the Ontario society’s board to discuss the idea.<sup>19</sup> Frank Epp, however, while interested in the vision, was ambivalent about undertaking the project personally. He later said his hesitance was two-fold: he understood that Walter Quiring, a former editor of *Der Bote*, was working on a history of Mennonites in Canada, and secondly, he feared such a work would only further Mennonite ethnocentrism, “which in my opinion, was already excessive.”<sup>20</sup>

Epp was also experiencing major changes in his own life—he had resigned as editor of the *Canadian Mennonite*, and was moving with his family to Ottawa to undertake two part-time positions—working for MCC as an Ottawa office, and serving as pastor of the young Ottawa Mennonite Church. Perhaps his memories of the difficult negotiations with church leaders over inclusion of controversial topics while writing *Mennonite Exodus* a few years earlier (such as the affinity between Mennonites and National Socialism through persons like Walter Quiring) also made him hesitant to consider the project.<sup>21</sup>

Epp’s ambivalence created space for other potential authors to be considered. Winfield Fretz, Ted Friesen, C. C. Neufeld and Waldemar Janzen met in the Winnipeg airport on March 4, 1967 to flesh out more details for the proposed book project. They identified funding sources, including the major Mennonite denominations in Canada, and created a list of Mennonite academics who could resource the effort.<sup>22</sup> On April 1, 1967, Fretz met with the Ontario society’s executive. It immediately agreed to work in a joint venture with the Manitoba society on a general history of Mennonites in Canada. Fretz drafted formal proposals seeking funding for such a project from the major Mennonite denominations in Canada. He also spoke with Siegfred Enns, the first “Mennonite” Member of Parliament, about possible government grants, though Enns was not encouraging.<sup>23</sup> Fretz also discussed the project with Walter Klaassen, who taught religion and history at Conrad Grebel College. Fretz subsequently suggested to Ted Friesen that “we could work something out in such a way that be-

tween [Walter Klaassen and myself that] we might assume responsibility for editing such a volume.”<sup>24</sup> Fretz soon withdrew his own interest in working on the book but indicated that Walter Klaassen was still interested in the project as late as September 27, 1967.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, in October 1967, Frank Epp said he “would like to express stronger interest in this project myself.” In his brief time in Ottawa, Epp had discovered some of the archival resources available on Mennonites in the Public Archives of Canada, and he had received encouragement for the project from the General Conference Mennonite Church’s Historical Committee.<sup>26</sup> Particularly important to this change of heart was Ted Regehr’s presence as a senior member of the Public Archives staff, and the person who guided Epp’s investigation into the Mennonite resources located there.<sup>27</sup>

Both Fretz and Friesen seized upon Epp’s interest, and they invited him to become an integral part of the planning process, though no formal appointment of an author/editor could yet be made since no formal oversight structure was yet in place.<sup>28</sup> Epp responded in January 1968 with a three-page letter stating his views on writing the history—the need for it to be a one-author project, the relationship of the author to a “competent committee or readers with advisory powers” and some thoughts on financing. He even suggested “it would be well to begin the project with the purchase of a four-drawer legal size filing cabinet.”<sup>29</sup> Friesen and Fretz both recognized the need to formalize the planning to which they had jointly given leadership. Friesen lamented to Fretz at the end of 1967 that the Manitoba society’s representatives to the project had not yet met.<sup>30</sup> Finally on January 5, 1968, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, approved the project, and endorsed Frank Epp as the author they favored to lead it.

The year 1968 would be pivotal. The first formal meeting of the “Joint Committee” of the Mennonite Historical Societies of Ontario and Manitoba was a small affair that took place on January 11, 1968 at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) in Winnipeg. Each society had named three persons to the committee. The Ontario society had appointed J. Winfield Fretz, Orland Gingerich and Wilson Hunsberger as its representatives, while the Manitoba society had appointed Ted Friesen, Gerhard Lohrenz and Vern Ratzlaff. Frank Epp was also invited to participate in the planning.<sup>31</sup> Only three of the appointees were present at the January 11 meeting—J. Winfield Fretz, Ted Friesen and Vern Ratzlaff. Frank Epp was unable to attend because of illness. Fretz chaired the meeting, and Ratzlaff took minutes. The small group established a budget of \$15,000 to be sought from the two societies, the Confer-

ence of Mennonites in Canada and two Mennonite Church conferences in Ontario, with another \$6,500 to be sought from the Mennonite Brethren and smaller western Canadian conferences like the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. They proposed an Editorial Council (essentially what became the MHSC board with representation from all stakeholders), an Editorial Committee (which became the Readers Committee), and an Editor. It is interesting that Winfield Fretz persisted in using “editor” language rather than “author” terminology. The reason for this is not entirely clear; perhaps he wanted to retain a greater sense of a collaborative approach that incorporated research by graduate students.<sup>32</sup>

After the meeting, Fretz wrote to Frank Epp, indicating he had been the “unanimous” choice of the [three-person] committee to be the “editor” of the project.<sup>33</sup> Despite some continuing misgivings, Frank Epp dove into the project, hiring two students for research--Ernie Dick in Ottawa and Edward Dahl in British Columbia. Epp also prepared briefs seeking funding from the denominational bodies identified in earlier conversations, as well as provincial and national governments.<sup>34</sup>

The organizational meeting for the editorial council (that became the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the MHSC) finally took place on September 27, 1968 at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg. Those present at the meeting represented the historical societies and a variety of denominational bodies. J. Winfield Fretz chaired the meeting, and Ted Friesen served as secretary. In his minutes Friesen called the group the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society (Committee on the History of Mennonites in Canada). The representatives learned that all the denominational bodies had agreed to support the project, except for the Mennonite Brethren. However, it hoped to obtain donations from individuals within the Mennonite Brethren community. The reasons for the Mennonite Brethren decision are somewhat murky. Ted Friesen, after a conversation with Victor Adrian of Mennonite Brethren Bible College, believed the request had gone to the Mennonite Brethren too late, and with inadequate detail.<sup>35</sup>

The executive members of the “Editorial Council” named for the project were J. Winfield Fretz (chair), Herbert P. Enns (an Ontario businessperson, treasurer), Ted E. Friesen (secretary), with additional members Newton Gingrich (moderator of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario) and P. J. B. Reimer (minister, teacher and lay historian in Southern Manitoba). Gingrich was soon replaced by Ontario pastor John W. Snyder, who also became “business

agent” for the book project. These men served as the officers of the Joint Committee (Editorial Council).<sup>36</sup>

### **The Mennonites in Canada Book Series**

The rhythm of the society and the *Mennonites in Canada* project unfolded through annual meetings over the next several years, with occasional executive meetings interspersed. By January 1969, the joint committee occupied itself with progress on Epp’s research, grappled with always-lean budgets, and tried to buy an elusive Walter Quiring manuscript on Canadian Mennonite history for an amount that ranged up to \$3,500. The executive also suggested the launching of a new Mennonite historical society that would encompass Alberta and Saskatchewan.<sup>37</sup>

Frank Epp identified the theme of “separation” early in his research. Although some resistance to this term as “too negative” emerged in the November 1969 Joint Committee meeting and continued for several years, Epp ultimately sustained this motif through to publication of the first volume. Epp had initially pointed to “separation” as a unifying motif in a presentation to the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario in April 1969. He argued that “Mennonite history began with a theological separation, which in turn gave rise to ecclesiastical and sociological separation.... The seeds of separation were responsible not only for the isolation of Mennonites from the rest of the world ... but also from each other....”<sup>38</sup>

The structure of a Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was embedded from the time of the 1968 creation of the Joint Committee of the Manitoba and Ontario societies. It was rooted, in other words, in the groups who were willing to fund the *Mennonites in Canada* project. The first annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society (Committee on the History of the Mennonites in Canada) held in November 1969 at Conrad Grebel College included representatives from the Ontario and Manitoba Mennonite historical societies, as well as the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, the Waterloo Markham Mennonite Conference, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. The Mennonite Brethren and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference were also considered members, though they were not able to attend the meeting.<sup>39</sup>

Annual meetings rotated between Ontario and Manitoba, always with underrepresentation from the groups located in the province

not hosting the meeting. Sometimes the discussion strayed from the *Mennonites in Canada* project. In 1970 the annual meeting discussed the pending demise of *The Canadian Mennonite* weekly newspaper and agreed to have Winfield Fretz contact Mennonite Central Committee Canada about establishing a periodical to take over the inter-Mennonite dissemination of news. In late 1971 the Joint Committee became the custodian of the *Canadian Mennonite* files, and they were ultimately shipped to Conrad Grebel College, where Frank Epp had joined the faculty in July 1971.<sup>40</sup>

December 1971 marked the halfway point towards the goal of publishing *Mennonites in Canada* in 1974. Frank Epp had written a chapter to accompany an application for a Canada Council grant, and suggested it was time to put a Readers Committee in place. To lead this committee, he proposed his former Ottawa acquaintance, Ted Regehr, now an Associate Professor of History at the University of Saskatchewan. Epp proposed other members of the committee be John A. Toews (Fresno, California), John B. Toews (Calgary, Alberta), Gerhard Lohrenz, P. J. B. Reimer, Orland Gingerich and Lorna Bergey (local historian and secretary of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario). The board learned that the Canada Council had approved the first of several grants that supported the project. The group also agreed that the anticipated volume would be too large (500-600 pages) to be accepted in "The Peoples of Canada" monograph series sponsored by the Canadian Department of the Secretary of State and which had initially expressed interest in the project.<sup>41</sup>

In 1972, after Frank Epp relocated to Waterloo, Ontario to teach at Conrad Grebel College, he launched a series of nineteen "Mennonite History Institutes" in local communities. These were mostly one-day events, usually on Sundays, composed of one or two sessions, though four "institutes" included three or four sessions. They emphasized the importance of Mennonite history, promoted the book project, and sought personal memories of historical events, for example, of assisting the 1920s immigrants from the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup>

The Joint Committee's vision began to expand in 1972. It learned that Mennonites in British Columbia had established a historical society, and that Saskatchewan and Alberta were in the process of forming a Western Canada Mennonite Historical Society. This led to discussion of forming a truly national Mennonite historical society that might cooperate with bodies like the Institute of Mennonite Studies located in the United States on publishing projects and to serve as a single contact for Canadian government grants for projects like a proposed National Film

Board movie on the hundredth anniversary of the 1870s migration of Mennonites to Manitoba.<sup>43</sup>

The question of a publisher for the history had come up as early as 1970. The Joint Committee discussed whether to seek a national secular publisher, or whether to use a denominational press. Because it hoped for a market beyond Mennonites, the Joint Committee asked Frank Epp to contact national publishers to assess their interest. In 1971 he reported that McClelland & Stewart was willing to publish the book. By 1973 McClelland & Stewart had withdrawn its interest because of the length of the manuscript and its academic nature. Van Nostrand Reinhold was then considered, and negotiations undertaken. Suddenly in December 1973 Macmillan of Canada expressed interest and was selected by the Joint Committee.<sup>44</sup>

In 1973 Frank Epp realized the *Mennonites in Canada* book project was getting too large for one volume and argued for the manuscript to be divided into two volumes. Initially J. Winfield Fretz strongly opposed this expansion of the project—he believed there would be buyer resistance to a second volume, finding the funds for expanding the project would be difficult, and the fact that Frank Epp was taking on the role of president of Conrad Grebel College later in 1973 would make his ability to complete a second volume difficult. However, a meeting of the Ontario society's executive with Frank Epp and Ted Regehr changed Fretz's mind, and he advocated for a second volume to the Joint Committee. Because of the pressure of time, the approval for publishing two volumes took place in May/June 1973 in separate decisions by the boards of the Ontario and Manitoba societies.<sup>45</sup>

An interesting issue that arose in some informal discussion wondered if Frank and Helen Epp should be identified as co-authors of *Mennonites in Canada*. Frank Epp acknowledged that his wife, Helen, had "spent more time in terms of hours with this book than I have." However, he said she was not interested in co-authorship because her work focused on searching for and gathering materials, doing bibliographic work, and typing research notes and the various versions of the manuscript.<sup>46</sup>

Pivotal years in the formal development of Mennonite Historical Society of Canada came in 1974 and 1975. In 1974 volume one, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: the History of a Separate People* was published at the end of November. It was also the year that the four then-existing provincially-based Mennonite historical societies agreed to form a national Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. A provisional board was established, composed of J. Winfield Fretz (Ontario), chair; George Groening (BC), vice-chair; Ted

Regehr (Alberta-Saskatchewan), treasurer and Ted Friesen (Manitoba), secretary. Interestingly, the new society did not include denominational representatives.<sup>47</sup>

The objectives of the new society were to initiate and coordinate national projects of interest to Canadian Mennonites, to serve as a liaison between the provincial societies, to coordinate contacts with national governmental bodies, to encourage the collection and preservation of Mennonite materials, and to work with other historical associations and societies.<sup>48</sup>

### MHSC Diversifies its Vision

In the December 1974 annual meeting, the MHSC again looked beyond the *Mennonites in Canada* project, creating a Publications Committee headed by Ted Regehr. It desired publication of a journal with "broad appeal but ... academically respectable," focused on Canadian Mennonite history. In the short term, Regehr suggested the historical society sponsor an issue of the financially struggling *Mennonite Life*, published at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas. Regehr also urged publication of a regular newsletter; a proposal immediately approved and turned over to Ted Friesen for execution.<sup>49</sup>

The transition to a more diverse program really began in 1975. MHSC did sponsor and edit the December issues of *Mennonite Life* from 1975-1980. Ultimately the notion of the Society publishing a journal became moot when the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, published by the Chair of Mennonite Studies in Winnipeg, and the *Conrad Grebel Review*, published by Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo both began in 1983. Discussion continued within the *ad hoc* group developing the MHSC constitution on whether to expand board membership beyond the provincial historical societies to denominations and MCC Canada. Already in 1976 Arthur Driedger began to represent MCC Canada because of the financial assistance that body continued to give to MHSC for various projects, some of which it proposed to the society.<sup>50</sup>

One vision brought by Frank Epp that was discussed for several years, but never brought to fruition, was a *Canadian Mennonite Yearbook* that would be inter-Mennonite in scope. An Archives Committee was also struck and worked on cooperation between the two major Mennonite archives in Manitoba and the Mennonite archives in Ontario, through developing an agreement on collection policies, and creating similar and non-competitive accession procedures. The Archives Committee also worked on microfilming

projects in congregations, and the promotion of oral history projects.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the leadership of MHSC began to shift within the group of leaders who shepherded the first volume of *Mennonites in Canada*. J. Winfield Fretz stepped down as chairperson in 1975 and shifted to the role of treasurer. Ted Regehr, who was now deeply involved in all aspects of the society's work, became the new chair.<sup>52</sup> Not all was smooth sailing however. The Manitoba and British Columbia societies were each experiencing internal difficulties that detracted from their ability to give attention to the national society. The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society had been focused on centennial activities related to the 1874-1879 migration of Mennonites from Russia to Canada, and on the continued development of their museum at Steinbach. British Columbia was also trying to establish a museum but was having difficulty in finding affordable land and focusing its objectives for the museum. In Manitoba this was finally resolved by the separation of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society from the Mennonite Village Museum project in 1979. The Manitoba society then began to focus on broader historical and cultural issues, especially in publications. The B.C. society was not able to refocus and restructure its efforts until the mid-1990s.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile discussions of further volumes continued. In November 1976 Frank Epp had suggested the theme for volume two should be "survival." This theme was confirmed by 1978.<sup>54</sup> By the end of the 1970s, however, there was talk of expanding the *Mennonites in Canada* project to a third volume, and in the early 1980s the prospects grew to a fourth volume. Planning for volumes three and four was approved in December 1981. Other historical ventures were considered, and some were undertaken, including publishing an English translation of the Anna Baerg diary, sponsoring a biography of C. F. Klassen, initiating the indexing of the *Canadian Mennonite*, and exploring participation in Canada's national Learned Societies academic meetings. A thirty-two-page guide for writing congregational histories by Frank Epp, *Stories with Meaning*, was published by the society in 1979.<sup>55</sup>

With the publication of volume two, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* in July 1982, the society again turned to other issues. These discussions now fell under the leadership of Ted Friesen who took over as chair of the MHSC in December 1981 and continued in that role until 1996.<sup>56</sup> Those issues included the discussion with the Institute of Mennonite Studies in Elkhart, Indiana, on whether the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, published in the 1950s, should be totally revised or whether a

supplemental volume should be published to fill the gaps of the previous 30 years. The MHSC board strongly supported a total revision of the encyclopedia. The Canadians felt the existing encyclopedia inadequately covered Canadian and non-North American people and institutions and was weak on the “Russian Mennonite” story. At their most visionary, the MHSC representatives to consultations on the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* project called for a new 10-volume encyclopedia. However, when challenged by the Americans to match financial commitment with the vision, the Canadians pulled back from their aggressive position and ultimately supported the creation of a fifth supplemental volume. The concerns expressed about coverage of Canadian issues in the encyclopedia did recur in the 1990s when an internet-based encyclopedia project was considered and ultimately launched as the *Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*.<sup>57</sup>

The early 1980s brought other challenges and opportunities. In December 1983 the MHSC finally changed its constitution to allow more diverse formal representation on its board beyond the provincial Mennonite historical societies. Denominational bodies and conferences, as well as MCC Canada were invited to be represented on the board, with larger denominational bodies entitled to one board member for each 10,000 members.<sup>58</sup> But these years also had their challenges. One related to paying for the authorship of volume two. Frank Epp had completed his term as president of Conrad Grebel College in 1979 and continued as a faculty member at the College. This transition marked a time of difficult negotiations between the MHSC and the College on how to pay for academic release time for Epp to work on volume three of *Mennonites in Canada*. Government grants were not as easily obtained as been previously the case, and the slower sales of the recently released second volume of *Mennonites in Canada* raised concerns about the viability of volumes three and four, as the society saw its finances become more limited.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, it was at this time, too, in December 1984, that Epp was asked to head a task force on the future of the society. He prepared a report, “Some suggestions for the future of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada,” that went to the January 1986 meeting of the board in Winnipeg. His suggestions for MHSC’s “future tasks” included translation of German sources into English, the writing of biographies of past leaders, work on constructing a chronology of Mennonite life, and integrating the various conference directories into one directory. He said this led to the idea of an encyclopedia as either a national or international initiative from Canada.<sup>60</sup> These recommendations came in the context of the databases his research assistant and

youngest daughter, Marlene Epp, was creating in research support of volumes three and four. She worked for the MHSC four days a week compiling database files on persons, congregations, conferences and educational institutions.<sup>61</sup>

These new initiatives, however, came under the cloud of Epp's health. In fact the January 1986 discussions were undertaken without Epp. By this time he was gravely ill, awaiting a heart transplant, and was not able to attend the meeting. He died January 22, 1986. In March, the MHSC's executive met to discuss how to move forward with volumes three and four of the *Mennonites in Canada* project. Marlene Epp provided detailed reports on the work to date, and proposed that she and her sister, Esther Epp-Tiessen, could complete volume three. The executive believed, however, that a senior historian was necessary to successfully secure government grants, and that Frank Epp's own role in Canadian Mennonite history during the period 1940-1965 would be difficult for his daughters to critique. The executive instead invited Ted Regehr to complete volume three, and asked Marlene Epp to continue as a research associate. She consented to this and worked on the project until 1991 at which time she turned to full time graduate studies.<sup>62</sup>

The executive also appointed a task force to pick up discussion on the future of MHSC. The task force's recommendations included creation of a standing Archives Committee, a standing committee on academic conferences, and a database committee to give oversight to the databases created by Marlene Epp. The task force further suggested specific projects might include a shortened "textbook" version of volumes one to three and creation of school curriculum on Mennonite history. It proposed the bylaws be changed to enable academic institutions like the Mennonite colleges and the new Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg to become members of the Society. The recommendations were affirmed, though the bylaws could not be immediately revised. In the early 1990s as volume three, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed*, was nearing completion, and at the urging of Royden Loewen, the society again considered future projects. Suggestions included closer linkage to the Learned Societies meetings, sponsorship of more conferences, and publication of a short booklet on Mennonites in Canada, along with the "one-volume" idea. The Database Committee also pondered the possibility of an online encyclopedia.<sup>63</sup>

The full fruits of these discussions would not be realized for several years, though all the 2018 programs of MHSC could be seen as descendants of the Task Force and Royden Loewen's rec-

ommendations. The overlap in membership between the Archives Committee and Database Committee, and the growing attention given to the databases created by Marlene Epp, meant the Archives Committee effectively became inactive, as the various archival centers tried to figure out a way to share more widely the information contained in the databases still stored on computers located at several Mennonite institutions.<sup>64</sup>

Sponsorship of Mennonite-related academic conferences steadily became more prominent in MHSC's activities. A three-day symposium on Mennonites in Canada in the 1950s was held at Conrad Grebel College in May 1988 and was co-sponsored by the MHSC and the College. MHSC also co-sponsored a conference on Canadian Mennonites and Nationalism in 1993 at Concord College (formerly Mennonite Brethren Bible College), a "Quiet in the Land" conference on the role of women in Mennonite history in 1995 at Millersville University in Pennsylvania, and the "One People, Many Stories" conference in Clearbrook, B.C., celebrating the completing of separate multi-volume histories of Mennonites in the United States and in Canada. Other conferences, in association with the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, soon followed.<sup>65</sup>

In December 1995 the MHSC authorized the Archives Committee to undertake a feasibility study on loading the databases developed by Marlene Epp on to the Internet. This was partially done during 1996 as MHSC created its first website, including a nascent *Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* that included brief profiles of 550 Canadian Mennonite congregations. The MHSC approved the project on a three-year trial basis, and established an editorial committee, composed of the Archives Committee and two additional members. The creation of the editorial committee occupied the attention of the various archivists, leaving the Archives Committee with limited agenda. The Archives Committee did not meet and had no activity from 2000-2010.<sup>66</sup>

After MCC Canada declined financial support for an overarching one-volume history of Mennonites in Canada, the MHSC returned with a proposal for funding in support of research and conferences (and occasional monographs) on issues in Mennonite history that had previously been overlooked. This developed into an ongoing project known as "Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites" (DVCM) that has extended to 2018.<sup>67</sup>

The first five projects approved under "Divergent Voices" included: 1) History of Aboriginal-Mennonite Relations (Conference held at U. of Winnipeg, October 2000); 2) The Return of the Kanadier Mennonites: A History of Accomplishments and Chal-

lenges (Conference held at U. of Winnipeg, October 2002); 3) Mennonite Hosts and Refugee Newcomers: 1979 – the Present (Conference held 30 Sept.-1 Oct. 2005); 4) *Mennonite Women in Canada: a History* (a book by Marlene Epp, published by the University of Manitoba Press in fall 2008); and 5) War and the Conscientious Objector (Conference held October 2006 at U. of Winnipeg)<sup>68</sup> A later DVCM book project was writing the history of MCC Canada in a book authored in 2013 by Esther Epp-Tiessen, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: a History*.

The MHSC explored other diverse directions in the early 2000s. In 2004 the MHSC board approved expanding the *Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* into an international project, partnering with the Historical Committee of Mennonite Church USA and the Historical Association of the Mennonite Brethren Church. This expanded project became known as the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)*. In 2018 GAMEO had over 16,400 articles and averaged 1,200 visitors per day.<sup>69</sup>

The Society also launched an Award of Excellence “given to a person who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research, writing, organization or the dissemination of Mennonite historical knowledge.” The first award was given posthumously to Delbert Plett, a lay historian and attorney from the Steinbach, Manitoba area who had written prolifically on Low German Mennonite history and thought. Awards to one, two or three persons have followed each year.<sup>70</sup>

MHSC expanded its program in several other new directions during the first decade of the century. In 2004, for example, it invited Quebec Mennonites to form a provincial historical society and to become part of MHSC. The Société d’histoire mennonite du Québec joined MHSC in December 2005.<sup>71</sup> In 2004 as well, MHSC provided \$15,000 in funding over three years to the Global Mennonite History Project, in cooperation with Mennonite World Conference. The project produced five volumes on the history Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches around the world—one volume for each continent.<sup>72</sup> Finally, it was during these years that stock of volumes two and three of *Mennonites in Canada* housed at Friesen Printers in Altona Manitoba, having become a burden for the society, were disseminated more broadly. Several efforts emerged to offer copies to local libraries and congregations leading to the distribution of several hundred copies of each volume.<sup>73</sup>

Three later MHSC projects require mention. A Genealogy Committee was established in 2010 to develop a website that would include copies of source documents as well as a genealogical name

database. Despite some significant financial investment, this project had not come to fruition by 2018.<sup>74</sup> More happily, a task force created in 2012 proposed the creation of a multi-institutional photograph database. The Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) launched in March 2015. By 2018 the database included almost 85,000 records and over 38,000 scanned images from nine institutional and historical society partners. After its launch, the MAID Management Group functioned as a subcommittee of the Archives Committee.<sup>75</sup> Finally, a decision was made to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Society with a special conference in 2018 focused on the history of Mennonites in Canada since 1970 with the theme of “A People of Diversity.”

### Conclusion

The diversity to which MHSC has aspired since the 1980s is best reflected in the range of topics explored by the Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM) conferences. Topics have included sexuality, including LGBTQ Mennonites, wealth, mental health, human rights, and Mennonite persons or groups who have left the Mennonite faith. They have poked into corners that survey histories like the *Mennonites in Canada* series could spend limited time addressing.<sup>76</sup>

The original *Mennonites in Canada* volumes and the DVCM conferences both linked MCC Canada and the Historical Society closely during their overlapping history. Central to solidifying this link were Ted Friesen and Frank Epp who worked passionately for both organizations in the 1960s when both organizations were formed. MCC Canada has effectively used the MHSC to undertake research and writing on sometimes controversial issues at arm's length. It has appeared to be mutually beneficial at minimal cost to MCC.<sup>77</sup>

MHSC has remained a small organization with a limited budget. Its annual operational costs of \$10,000 or less were funded by membership fees of the 15 participating organizations and institutions in 2018. The bulk of budget supports MHSC's one board meeting and annual general meeting held annually in a major Mennonite center in Canada. The projects to which it has given birth, like GAMEO, DVCM and MAID, do their own fundraising in cooperation with institutions with which they partner, and receive minimal financial support from MHSC.<sup>78</sup>

MHSC has become more diverse in its perspectives through the addition of non-traditional Mennonite groups like the Société

d'histoire mennonite du Québec, and through academic connections to Canadian universities through organizations like the Humanitas Anabaptist Mennonite Centre (Trinity Western University), Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies (University of Winnipeg) and the Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies (Conrad Grebel University College).<sup>79</sup>

MHSC has little visibility in the Mennonite community or Canadian academic world. It has no individual members, no “head office,” rarely has held public events in which it is the major visible partner and has published very little under its own name. Nonetheless it has contributed much to the self-understanding and self-identity of Canadian Mennonites through the cooperative projects it has facilitated in its five decades of networking Canadian Mennonite historical preservation.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This reflection is from an “insider” perspective. From 1974 to 2008 the author was the archivist at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario. He attended the annual meetings of MHSC from 1975 to 2016 with few exceptions, and variously served in the roles of treasurer, secretary, vice-president and president during some of those years. The research is based primarily on MHSC archival records held at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario. Further exploration could be done in the papers of Ted Friesen and the archives of MHSC held in the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.
- <sup>2</sup> Reflected in the subtitle of volume 1 in the *Mennonite in Canada* series—*The History of a Separate People*.
- <sup>3</sup> Bender, Elizabeth H. and Sam Steiner. "Trail of the Conestoga, The." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* [hereafter GAMEO]. April 2011. Web. 12 Oct 2018. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Trail\\_of\\_the\\_Conestoga,\\_The](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Trail_of_the_Conestoga,_The).
- <sup>4</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Waterloo Pioneer Memorial Tower." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, September 9, 2018. Web. October 12, 2018. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo\\_Pioneer\\_Memorial\\_Tower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo_Pioneer_Memorial_Tower).
- <sup>5</sup> “The Society’s Beginnings.” Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario. 2010. Web. October 12, 2018. <http://www.pgfsociety.com/society/the-societys-beginnings-2/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Weber, Harry F. authored the *Centennial History of the Mennonites in Illinois* in 1931 and Martin G. Weaver published *Mennonites of Lancaster conference: containing biographical sketches of Mennonite leaders; histories of congregations, missions, and Sunday schools; record of ordinations; and other interesting historical data* in the same year. See L. J. Burkholder. *A Brief History of the Mennonites in Ontario: Giving a Description of Condi-*

tions in *Early Ontario, the Coming of the Mennonites into Canada, Settlements, Congregations, Conferences, Other Activities and nearly 400 Ordinations*. Waterloo, Ont.: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1986. Print. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were a few earlier, more limited, historical writings by Mennonites, including Benjamin Eby in his *Kurzgefasste Kirchen Geschichte und Glaubenslehre der Taufgesinnten-Christen* (1841), and in Ezra Eby's *Biographical History of Waterloo Township* (1895-1896). Burkholder was appointed as historian for the Mennonite Conference of Ontario in June 1928. His duties were "to gather and preserve all historical data of value in the past, and to record all such events, including the ordinations and deaths of Bishops, Ministers and Deacons." *Calendar of Appointments of the Mennonite Church of Ontario for the year, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928 to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1929* (1928): [16]. This task later expanded into a mandate to write the history that was published in 1935.

- 7 "Statut des Canadisch-Mennonitischen Historischen Vereines." Peter H. Rempel personal email to Royden Loewen, December 19, 2018, forwarded to Sam Steiner with attachments, December 26, 2018. Although I did not have opportunity to explore this, Rempel believes the originals that he copied in the 1970s were in the Bernhard J. Schellenberg collection at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives in Winnipeg.
- 8 Peter H. Rempel. *The Genesis of "Mennonite Exodus"- the Book.*, 2018. Print. : 1-2. There ended up being four volumes in the series, the last published in 1953 covering the Mennonites in Mexico and South America. See also J. G. Rempel, *Jubilaum-Album der Konferenz der Mennoniten in Canada, 1902-1952*. Winnipeg? : Konferenz der Mennoniten in Canada, 1952 and P. J. B. Reimer, *The sesquicentennial jubilee, Evangelical Mennonite Conference: 1812-1962*. Steinbach, Manitoba: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962.
- 9 "Emerich K. Francis." In: Wikipedia, Die freie Enzyklopädie. 27 April 2017. [https://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emerich\\_K.\\_Francis&oldid=164958723](https://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emerich_K._Francis&oldid=164958723).
- 10 Peter H. Rempel. "The Genesis of 'Mennonite Exodus' the Book." 2018. Unpublished paper, 6-7, 9-12. See Frank H. Epp. *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution*. Altona, Manitoba: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council by D. W. Friesen, 1962. Print.
- 11 "Beginnings." Mennonite Heritage Village. Web. June 13, 2018. <https://mennoniteheritagevillage.com/about/>.
- 12 Lawrence Klippenstein. "MMHS and MHV: Fifty Years Together (1958-2008). *Heritage Posting* 62 (2008): 1. Web. <http://mmhs.org/sites/default/files/u3/pdfs/hp62.PDF>.
- 13 Bert Friesen, "MMHS celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary." *Heritage Posting* 60 (2008). Web. <http://mmhs.org/sites/default/files/u3/pdfs/hp60.PDF>.
- 14 Bert Friesen, "MMHS celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary." *Heritage Posting* 60 (2008). Web. <http://mmhs.org/sites/default/files/u3/pdfs/hp60.PDF>; "Beginnings." Mennonite Heritage Village. Web. June 13, 2018. <https://mennoniteheritagevillage.com/about/>.
- 15 Reimer, Margaret Loewen and Sam Steiner. "Friesen, Ted E. (1920-2016)." *GAMEO*. June 2016. Web. 15 Jun 2018. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Friesen,\\_Ted\\_E.\\_\(1920-2016\)&oldid=134527](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Friesen,_Ted_E._(1920-2016)&oldid=134527).

- <sup>16</sup> Steiner, Sam. "Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario." *GAMEO*. October 2017. Web. 15 Jun 2018. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite\\_Historical\\_Society\\_of\\_Ontario&oldid=154914\\_XXVb](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Historical_Society_of_Ontario&oldid=154914_XXVb).
- <sup>17</sup> Ted E. Friesen to J. Winfield Fretz, December 29, 1966. *Frank H. Epp Collection*. Hist.Mss. 1.26.2-103.5/10. Ted Friesen's son, Eric, was a student at Conrad Grebel College at this time, providing another setting in which Fretz and Friesen maintained their friendly relationship.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* C. Henry Smith's *The Story of the Mennonites* was published in 1941. Although very readable, *The Story of the Mennonites* included limited documentation. It was reprinted and expanded several times by Cornelius Krahn, most recently in 1981.
- <sup>19</sup> Winfield Fretz to Ted Friesen, January 4, 1967. MAO. XV-31.2 /1 J. Winfield Fretz Correspondence.
- <sup>20</sup> Frank H. Epp, "Report to Joint Committee," September 27, 1968. MAO. Frank H. Epp collection, HM 1.26.2-103.1 /7. Walter Quiring was a journalist born in Russia, who became a sympathizer of National Socialism prior to moving to Canada in 1962. He edited *Der Bote* for a time. His manuscript on Canadian Mennonite history was never published, and MHSC failed in its multiple attempts to purchase a copy of the manuscript. See Ted D. Regehr. "Quiring, Walter (1893-1983)." *GAMEO*. February 2012. Web. 27 Jun 2018. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Quiring,\\_Walter\\_\(1893-1983\)&oldid=160856](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Quiring,_Walter_(1893-1983)&oldid=160856).
- <sup>21</sup> Even after he had "accepted" the assignment as editor for the project, Epp was concerned about the complexity of the project "that *at so many junctures* will have to be *promoted and defended* at a *number of levels* of authority and to a *number of treasuries*" [emphases in original]. Frank H. Epp to J. Winfield Fretz, March 26, 1968. MAO Frank H. Epp collection, HM 1.26.2-103.1 /1. See also Peter H. Rempel. "The Genesis of 'Mennonite Exodus' the book." 2018. Unpublished paper.
- <sup>22</sup> "Minutes," March 4, 1967. MAO. Mennonite Historical Society of Canada collection. XV-31.1.
- <sup>23</sup> J. Winfield Fretz to Ted Friesen, April 4, 1967. MAO. MHSC collection. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> J. Winfield Fretz to Ted Friesen, September 27, 1967. MAO. MHSC collection. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence.
- <sup>26</sup> Frank H. Epp to Ted Friesen, October 17, 1967. MAO. MHSC collection. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence.
- <sup>27</sup> Ted D. Regehr (1937- ) grew up in Coaldale, Alberta, received a BA from the University of Alberta in 1959, a MA (1963) and a PhD (1967) from the University of Saskatchewan. During his graduate years he also worked at the Public Archives of Canada and was a member at the Ottawa Mennonite Church. Regehr served on the faculty at the University of Saskatchewan from 1968 to 1996. His role in MHSC from its beginning was formative in shaping the academic orientation of the society. See "Theodore D. Regehr fonds." Alberta on Record. 2004. Web. 27 June 2018. <https://alberta.onrecord.ca/theodore-d-regehr-fonds>.
- <sup>28</sup> J. Winfield Fretz to Frank Epp, December 29, 1967. MAO. MHSC. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence.

- <sup>29</sup> Frank H. Epp to T.E. Friesen and J. Winfield Fretz, January 8, 1968 [inadvertently dated 1967, but clearly 1968 from the content]. MAO. MHSC collection. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence. After Epp's death in 1986, his collection as donated to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario included 28 four-drawer filing cabinets, as well as five four-drawer cabinets of materials gathered for the *Mennonites in Canada* project.
- <sup>30</sup> T.E. Friesen to J. Winfield Fretz, December 27, 1967. MAO. Frank H. Epp collection. Hist.Mss. 1.26.2-103.5 /10.
- <sup>31</sup> See T. E. Friesen to J. Winfield Fretz, May 17, 1968 for a list of Joint Committee members at that time. MAO. Frank H. Epp collection. HM 1.26.2-103.5 /11. Orland Gingerich was a Western Ontario Mennonite Conference bishop, and Wilson Hunsberger was a social worker; both were active in the Ontario society. Gerhard Lohrenz was a minister and faculty member at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. Vern Ratzlaff was on the faculty at Mennonite Brethren Bible College.
- <sup>32</sup> "Minutes of the Joint Committee Meeting," Jan. 11, 1968. MAO. MHSC collection. Minutes.
- <sup>33</sup> J. Winfield Fretz to Frank Epp, January 12, 1968. MAO. MHSC collection. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence. Epp did not immediately accept the assignment, stating that he needed clarification on various parts of the role. Frank H. Epp to J. Winfield Fretz, January 16, 1968. MAO. MHSC collection. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence.
- <sup>34</sup> J. Winfield Fretz to The Joint Manitoba-Ontario Historical Sub-Committee, April 18, 1968. MAO. MHSC collection. XV-31.2 /1; "Brief to Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Conferences in Canada," May 1, 1968. MAO. Frank H. Epp collection, HM 1.26.2-103.1 /1 and "Brief to the Governments of Manitoba, Ontario, and Canada," May 1, 1968. MAO. MHSC collection. XV-31.2 /1.
- <sup>35</sup> The Manitoba society was represented by P. J. B. Reimer, Gerhard Lohrenz, Henry Dueck (also the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference), J. J. Reimer, and Ted Friesen. The Ontario society was represented by Orland Gingerich (also the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference), Wilson Hunsberger (also the Mennonite Conference of Ontario), and J. Winfield Fretz. Other representatives included Vern Ratzlaff (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches), Henry H. Epp (Conference of Mennonites in Canada), Newton Gingrich (Mennonite Conference of Ontario), Dan Zehr (Western Ontario Mennonite Conference; he also had just begun working for MCC Canada in peace concerns and voluntary service). Frank H. Epp was present as editor, and David Kroeker as reporter for the *Canadian Mennonite*. "Minutes of the joint meeting of the Ontario & Manitoba Mennonite Historical Societies," September 27, 1968. MAO. MHSC collection. XV-31.1; T. E. Friesen to J. Winfield Fretz, October 6, 1967. MAO. MHSC collection. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence. Friesen also said maybe the Mennonite Brethren "would like to see the train moving before they jump on." This explanation is not completely satisfying. The Canadian Mennonite Brethren of the mid-1960s were at the height of their institutional, programming and mission activity. A commitment of \$1000 per year for five years would have been a miniscule addition to the budget. Mennonite Brethren archival records were not available to me at the time of writing.

- <sup>36</sup> John W. Snyder, who replaced Newton Gingrich on the executive, had been manager of the Provident Bookstore in Kitchener until 1967, and thus had contacts with publishers based in Ontario. "Minutes of the joint meeting of the Ontario & Manitoba Mennonite Historical Societies," September 27, 1968. MAO. MHSC collection. XV-31.1.
- <sup>37</sup> See "Minutes of the first Executive, Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society meeting," January 4, 1969. MAO. MHSC collection. XV-31.1.
- <sup>38</sup> See Frank H. Epp, "The almost separated society: a tentative approach to the history of Mennonites in Canada," April 26, 1969. See also "Minutes of the first annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society (Committee on the History of the Mennonites in Canada)," November 22, 1969. MAO. MHSC collection. XV-31.1.
- <sup>39</sup> "Minutes of the first annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society," November 22, 1969.
- <sup>40</sup> "Minutes of the second annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society (Committee on the History of the Mennonites in Canada)," December 5, 1970.; "Minutes of the third annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society," December 18, 1971. MAO. MHSC. XV-31.1
- <sup>41</sup> "Minutes of the third annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society." As part of his report, Epp also listed the 16 persons who had served as research assistants on the project from 1968 to November 1971. Heading the list were Ernie Dick (6 months), Edward Dahl (482 hours), followed by his family -- Helen Epp (458 hours), Esther Epp (235 hours), Marianne Epp (232 hours) and Marlene Epp (174 hours).
- <sup>42</sup> "Minutes of the third annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society"; "Minutes of the fourth annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society."
- <sup>43</sup> "Minutes of the fourth annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society." The Joint Committee named a film committee, composed of William Schroeder, Roy Vogt, H. H. Epp, J. Winfield Fretz and Lorna Bergery.
- <sup>44</sup> "Minutes of the second annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society (Committee on the History of the Mennonites in Canada," December 5, 1970; "Minutes of the third annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society," December 18, 1971; Frank Epp, "Report #7," December 15, 1973; "Minutes of the fifth annual meeting of the Ontario-Manitoba Historical Society," December 15, 1973. MAO. MHSC. XV-31.1. In the event, Macmillan of Canada published volumes 1 and 2, with Herald Press holding U.S. publishing rights. University of Toronto Press published volume 3 as Macmillan of Canada no longer existed as an independent publisher, and author Ted Regehr had a previous history with editors at the U. of T. Press.
- <sup>45</sup> J. Winfield Fretz to Frank H. Epp, April 27, 1973; "Memo regarding May 21 meeting on Mennonite history," and J. Winfield Fretz to Members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Manitoba," May 24, 1973; . MAO. MHSC collection. XV-31.1.
- <sup>46</sup> Frank H. Epp to T. D. Regehr, March 28, 1974. MAO. MHSC. XV-31.2. J. Winfield Fretz correspondence.
- <sup>47</sup> "Minutes of the organizational meeting, Canadian Mennonite Historical Society," June 28, 1974. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The discussion of the pro-

posed constitution prepared by Ted Regehr resulted in a slight change of the name from Canadian Mennonite Historical Society to Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. See "Constitution of the Canadian Mennonite Historical Society." MAO. MHSC. XV-31.1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> "Minutes of the Board Meeting Canadian Mennonite Historical Society," December 6, 1974. MAO. MHSC. XV-31.1. The notion of an ongoing journal was superseded in the early 1980s by the launch of the *Conrad Grebel Review* by Conrad Grebel College and the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* by the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. An 8-page newsletter was published in January 1976, but was the only issue released. It contained news from both the provincial societies and the MHSC. See Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. *Newsletter* (January 1976). It likely failed because provincial societies had their own avenues of communication with their members, and the MHSC had no individual membership base of its own.

<sup>50</sup> "Minutes of the Board Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," December 5, 1975; "Minutes of the Board Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," December 4, 1976. MAO. MHSC. XV31.1. The Manitoba society did not formally join MHSC until 1981, after the restructuring of the Manitoba society.

<sup>51</sup> "Agreement between Archives: Conference of Mennonites in Canada and Archives: Conrad Grebel College and Archives: Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches," 1975? MAO. MHSC. XV31.1. The three archives were the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, and the Mennonite Archives of Ontario in Waterloo. All were located on the campuses of Mennonite post-secondary institutions. An oral history workshop was resourced by Ernie Dick, former research assistant for Frank Epp, who was then working in oral history in the Public Archives of Canada. Ted Regehr initially gave oversight to the Archives Committee. The *Canadian Mennonite Yearbook* vision continued to be discussed at least until 1981; in the latter years as a possible joint project with Mennonite Central Committee Canada. See "Minutes of the annual meeting of MHSC," December 5, 1981. MAO. MHSC. XV-31.1.

<sup>52</sup> "Minutes of the Board Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," December 5, 1975.

<sup>53</sup> Delbert Plett, "President's report." *Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter*. No. 1 (December 1984): 1-2. <http://mmhs.org/sites/default/files/u3/pdfs/HP01.pdf>; "Dear Members and Friends." *The Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia Newsletter*, 1, no. 1 (May 1995). [http://www.mhsbc.com/news/pdf/RB01-1\\_1995\\_May.pdf](http://www.mhsbc.com/news/pdf/RB01-1_1995_May.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> F. H. Epp, "Progress report #12," November 26, 1976; F. H. Epp, "Progress report #14," December 2, 1978. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1.

<sup>55</sup> "Minutes of the annual meeting of [,]" February 9, 1980. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1.

<sup>56</sup> Sam Steiner and Alf Redekopp. "Mennonite Historical Society of Canada." *GAMEO*. June 2017. Web. 7 July 2018. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite\\_Historical\\_Society\\_of\\_Canada&oldid=148895](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Historical_Society_of_Canada&oldid=148895).

<sup>57</sup> The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* was a project of the Institute of Mennonite Studies at Associated (now Anabaptist) Mennonite Biblical Seminary and

Herald Press. See the MHSC's annual meeting minutes and attachments from 1982-1984 for the debate from the Canadian perspective. Ultimately the MHSC appointed Rod Sawatsky, Harry Loewen and John J. Friesen to the editorial council for the supplemental volume that was published in 1990.

- <sup>58</sup> "Minutes of the annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada [hereafter MHSC]," December 3, 1983. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. Between 1984 and 1986 the Saskatchewan-Alberta society divided and became two societies. Thus the Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia societies became the foundation of the MHSC until a new society based in Quebec joined in 2005.
- <sup>59</sup> Sales of volume 1 had provided good income for the society, but slower sales of volume 2 found more of MHSC's funds tied up in slow-moving stock. See for example, "Minutes of the annual meeting of MHSC," December 8, 1984. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1.
- <sup>60</sup> Frank H. Epp, "Some suggestions for the future of MHSC," January 4, 1986. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The suggestions for a Canadian Mennonite directory or yearbook persisted into the 1990s, but with no action taken other than suggesting it might be a better project for MCC Canada. See for example discussion at the 1993 annual meeting. "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of MHSC," December 4, 1993. MAO. MHSC-XV-31.1.
- <sup>61</sup> Ultimately, she also created databases on periodicals and businesses. See "Minutes of the Database Committee of MHSC," December 1, 1989. MAO. MHSC. XV-31.3 /1.
- <sup>62</sup> "Minutes of the Executive of MHSC," March 22, 1986. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The executive believed that volume 3 should be the last in the series. This helped lead to the decision to shift the closing date for volume 3 from 1965 to 1970. It was initially thought authorship for volume 3 might read "Ted D. Regehr, with Marlene Epp," but this did not happen since Marlene Epp ultimately left the project in 1991 in order to begin doctoral studies. While working with MHSC, Marlene also wrote a column for the *Mennonite Reporter* and continued to develop the various databases she had been working on for several years. The MHSC also set up a Frank H. Epp memorial fund, ultimately in cooperation with Conrad Grebel College and the Mennonite Publishing Service (*Mennonite Reporter*). Ultimately this fund, which never reached its endowment goal, was given oversight by Conrad Grebel College and was eventually wholly turned over to the College.
- <sup>63</sup> "Minutes of the Executive of MHSC," December 5, 1986. "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of MHSC," December 6, 1986. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The task force was composed of John J. Friesen, Ted Regehr, Sam Steiner and Bert Friesen. The Symposium Planning Committee was composed of John J. Friesen, Sam Steiner, Bert Friesen, Ted Regehr, Ken Reddig, Leo Driedger, Abe Dueck, Adolf Ens, Vic Doerksen and Harry Loewen. The Archives Committee was composed of Sam Steiner, Lawrence Klippenstein and Ken Reddig. The Database Committee, not appointed until December 1987, was composed of Bert Friesen (chair), Ken Reddig, Lawrence Klippenstein, Sam Steiner, and Ian Wilson (recently appointed as Archivist of Ontario). Ted Regehr and Marlene Epp related to the committee as "staff." In the event, Ian Wilson never met with the committee. After Marlene Epp left the em-

ploy of MHSC, Linda Huebert Hecht became the operator of the databases. The MHSC talked of a one-volume history of Mennonites in Canada for many years, and assigned Ted Regehr to the project, but the project never came to fruition, perhaps because the sales of volumes 2 & 3 remained low. See the minutes of the society and the Database Committee for 1988-1996. The notion of school curriculum also never came to fruition, though variations of this idea continued to be raised into the 1990s. A later suggestion of a "coffee-table" book that would accompany volumes 1-3, also was not pursued. See "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of MHSC," December 4, 1993. MAO; "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of MHSC," December 7, 1996. MHSC XV-31.1

- <sup>64</sup> Roy Loewen led discussion on new projects at each annual meeting through the mid-1990s. See for example. "Minutes of the Annual Meeting MHSC," December 2, 1995. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1.
- <sup>65</sup> "Symposium on Mennonites in Canada in the 1950s: From People of God to Citizens of the World?" May 12-14, 1988. MAO. MHSC. XV-31.1. The symposium included academic papers, and reflections or "vignettes" by local historians. The papers from the "Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism" conference were published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in 1994. See later annual meeting minutes for information on the other conferences. The 1998 conference celebrated the completion of two historical series, the four-volume *Mennonite Experience in America* and the three-volume *Mennonites in Canada*, especially the final volumes by Paul Toews and Ted Regehr. See also T. D. Regehr, "Historians and the Canadian Mennonite Experience," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (July 1999): 443-469.
- <sup>66</sup> "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of MHSC," December 7, 1996; "Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia [recommendations to MHSC]," December 2, 1996. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The first CMEO editorial committee separate from the Archives Committee was named in December 1997, and was composed of Bert Friesen (chair), Sam Steiner, Linda Huebert Hecht, Abe Dueck, Ken Reddig, Alf Redekopp, Richard Thiessen, Victor Wiebe, and David Giesbrecht. The other project proposed by the Archives Committee at this time was the creation of a Central Registry of Mennonite Materials from the Former USSR on the MHSC website. This included a listing of microfilmed materials from the former USSR that were located in major North American Mennonite archives. See "Archives Committee Report to MHSC," December 7, 1996. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The Archives Committee relaunched in 2011 at the time the Quebec society was developing an archival center. "Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," January 22, 2011.
- <sup>67</sup> The report of MCC Canada's decision to decline support of a one-volume history came to the December 1998 annual meeting. The "Divergent Voices" was formalized the following year. See the minutes of the annual meetings for 1998 and 1999.
- <sup>68</sup> "Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites." Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. 3 February 2015. Web. 31 July 2018. <http://mhsc.ca/mhsc/projects.htm>.
- <sup>69</sup> "Minutes of the Board Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," December 3, 2004. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The Mennonite Brethren Histori-

cal Commission and the Historical Committee of Mennonite Church USA became partners in GAMEO in 2005. Mennonite Central Committee became a partner in 2006, followed by Mennonite World Conference in 2007 and the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism in 2011. In 2012 GAMEO's financial accountability shifted from MHSC to Mennonite World Conference. In 2017 the administrative "home" moved to the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. See also "Associate Editor Report," May 3, 2018. Document in possession of author.

- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., The initial award to Delbert Plett was somewhat controversial, since Plett often attacked certain Mennonite academics in his writings. The second award went to one of MHSC's founders—Ted E. Friesen. When possible, the award was given to persons still living, but after the time of active work. The recipients of the award are listed at: "Award of Excellence." Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. 2018. Web. October 7, 2018. <http://mhsc.ca/mhsc/award.html>.
- <sup>71</sup> "Minutes of the Board Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," December 2, 2005. MAO. XV-31.1.
- <sup>72</sup> "Minutes of the Board Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," December 3, 2004. MAO. MHSC XV-31.1. The five volumes appeared between 2003 and 2012. Royden Loewen of MHSC co-authored the North American volume with Steve Nolt.
- <sup>73</sup> "Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," January 22, 2011.
- <sup>74</sup> "Proposal for MHSC: Task Force on Genealogy," January 2010. Document in possession of author. "Minutes of the Annual Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," January 23, 2010.
- <sup>75</sup> "Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada," January 19, 2013; "Beginnings." Mennonite Archival Image Database. 2018. Web. 9 October 2018. <https://archives.mhsc.ca/about-19>. The initial task force included Laureen Harder-Gissing (Mennonite Archives of Ontario), Alf Redekopp (Mennonite Heritage Centre) and Conrad Stoesz (Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies). In 2018 partners in MAID included the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Winnipeg), the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives, the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia, the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, the Mennonite Heritage Archives (Winnipeg), and the Mennonite Library and Archives (Fresno, California).
- <sup>76</sup> "Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites." Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. 2015. Web. October 9, 2018. <http://www.mhsc.ca/mhsc/dvcm.html>.
- <sup>77</sup> Mennonite Central Committee Canada was founded in 1963 through a merger of seven regional inter-Mennonite service agencies in Canada. Epp-Tiessen, Esther. "Mennonite Central Committee Canada." *GAMEO*. June 2015. Web. October 12, 2018. [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite\\_Central\\_Committee\\_Canada&oldid=160924](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Central_Committee_Canada&oldid=160924).

- <sup>78</sup> See for example, “Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Statement of Operations, 1 November 2015 – 31 October 2016.” Document in possession of author.
- <sup>79</sup> See “Minutes of the Board Meeting, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada,” January 19, 2018. Web. [http://mhsc.ca/mhsc/Minutes\\_Releases/MHSC%20Board%202018.pdf](http://mhsc.ca/mhsc/Minutes_Releases/MHSC%20Board%202018.pdf).