

MEMO

Date: 10 February 2010

From: Laureen Harder-Gissing, Archivist, Mennonite Archives of Ontario

To: Church historians and record keepers

Re: The Archives and your congregation

Greetings from the Mennonite Archives of Ontario! The archives was born in 1941 when Mennonite papers held in the Archives of Ontario were returned to Mennonite hands. In 1965, Conrad Grebel University College committed to house and administer the archives. We are now approaching our 70th year of collecting, preserving, and making available the history and experience of Mennonites in this province.

A significant change occurred in 2009 with the retirement of Sam Steiner, who held the archivist position for 34 years. As the new archivist, let me take a moment to introduce myself. I grew up on a farm near Vineland, Ontario and became a member of the Vineland United Mennonite Church. I then attended the University of Waterloo to study history, and lived at Conrad Grebel. I have a master's degree in Religion and Culture from Wilfrid Laurier University, and a degree in library and archival management from the University of Toronto. I spent several years researching Ontario Mennonite history for congregations and institutions, including Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, The First Mennonite Church (Vineland) and the Mennonite Aid Union. Most recently, I was the librarian of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Resource Centre. The variety and richness of Mennonite history and experience in Ontario continues to amaze and inspire me.

The Archives is here to support your work of preserving and telling your congregation's story. In turn, your congregation's records can assist other congregations and researchers. To that end, here is a list of materials you should consider depositing with us:

- ✓ Church bulletins
- ✓ Annual report books
- ✓ Minutes of congregational, committee meetings, and other groups within the church (eg. women's missionary societies)
- ✓ Membership directories
- ✓ Programmes of special events
- ✓ Congregational newsletters
- ✓ Deeds, cemetery records and other unique documents requiring safe storage
- ✓ Newspaper clippings involving church members
- ✓ Photographs (in particular: leaders, buildings, special events and scrapbooks)
- ✓ Sound or video recordings of a typical church service (Our goal is to collect one recording of a sermon by each of your pastors.)
- ✓ Congregational histories (published or unpublished)

In addition, individual members may have personal collections that could illuminate the history of your congregation or other aspects of Mennonite history and culture (if they have served a voluntary service term, for example).

The Conrad Grebel library collects rare Mennonite-related books and periodicals going back to the origins of the Anabaptist movement. If you think you have found items of interest, please contact me at the address below.

A question we are asked with increasing frequency is “what do we do about electronic documents?” Our answer is that currently electronic formats are not designed for long term preservation. Printing to paper, while retaining important information (eg. the date of an email communication) is still the best option.

Some congregations choose to deposit materials to other archives, such as the Mennonite Heritage Centre, administered by Mennonite Church Canada, in Winnipeg. The Heritage Centre and Mennonite Archives of Ontario have an agreement whereby our archives is the primary depository for Ontario Mennonite records. Nevertheless, you are free to choose where you want to deposit your congregation’s materials. For documents where you have numerous copies (eg. bulletins or annual reports), consider placing them at both archives.

We hope this brief memo answers some basic questions. Please do not hesitate to visit our website, especially the **Help! I’m a Congregational Historian** section, or contact me for additional advice and to learn more about the work of the archives.

Laureen Harder-Gissing
Archivist-Librarian
Mennonite Archives of Ontario
Conrad Grebel University College
140 Westmount Rd. N
Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6

lharderg@uwaterloo.ca

519-885-0220 x24238

www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/mao