

Historical Committee
Dale Schrag, Chair

Last year's annual report of the Western District Conference Historical Committee made the bold promise that "The Historical Committee has pledged to ensure that in the next year every WDC congregation will have an initial—or updated—entry in GAMEO" (The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online). We did wonder if the COVID-19 pandemic made this exactly the wrong time, or exactly the right time, to undertake such a project. The jury is still out regarding that decision. Thanks in no small part to Kent Moore, who volunteered to spend part of his one-month sabbatical in May preparing GAMEO entries for the committee, we made considerable progress. The following congregations now have—or will soon have—updated or new entries in GAMEO:

- Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church (Goessel)
- Beatrice Mennonite Church
- Eden Mennonite Church (Moundridge)
- First Mennonite Church (Beatrice)
- First Mennonite Church (Hutchinson)
- First Mennonite Church (McPherson)
- First Mennonite Church (Newton)
- Grace Hill Mennonite Church (Whitewater)
- Hope Mennonite Church (Wichita)
- New Creation Fellowship Church (Newton)
- Salina Mennonite Church
- Shalom Mennonite Church (Newton)
- Tabor Mennonite Church (Newton)
- Trinity Mennonite Church (Hillsboro)
- Zion Mennonite Church (Elbing)

Fifteen churches is a not insignificant number, but it still represents barely 25% of WDC congregations. And although several churches have told us they are working on the project and will have it finished soon, we are still a long way from "every WDC congregation" having "an initial—or updated—entry in GAMEO." It would appear that we are "scratching some congregations where they do not itch." Yet we remain committed to the enterprise, believing that expanding the world's access to information about one's congregation is an exercise in evangelism.

A second issue that occupied much of the committee's focus this year was finding a way to encourage congregations to consider creating a land acknowledgement statement for their church. In doing so, we were following the lead of some cutting-edge WDC congregations. First among them is Houston Mennonite Church that described its process and result in a 2019 article by pastor Marty Troyer in the journal *Vision*. You will find the article at the following link: <https://press.palni.org/ojs/index.php/vision/article/view/343/289>. Another powerful case for a land acknowledgement is available in the video of the 15 November worship service at Rainbow Mennonite Church in Kansas City. You can find that video at the following URL: [November 15, 2020 - YouTube](#). Southern Hills Mennonite Church in Topeka is currently in the process of developing its own, unique land acknowledgement, and the Historical Committee is sponsoring a seminar at the upcoming WDC Assembly that will describe that process.

The committee has also maintained close contact with the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College, and we can report that the MLA has been alive and well even though it has been closed to the public much of the year due to COVID.

- Telephone and email requests for information increased significantly over previous years.
- Volunteers (Karen Ediger, James Lynch) are returning to work.

- Volunteer David Haury continued to work during the pandemic by taking small manuscript collections to his home for processing.
- Additional processing was done on the papers of J. Winfield Fretz.
- *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* was published in January 2021. The volume consists of papers from the 2018 conference at Bethel College on Mennonites and the Holocaust, and was edited by John Thiesen, MLA director, and Mark Jantzen, professor of history.
- The committee has assisted the MLA in the solicitation of a major manuscript collection with close ties to the Western District Conference.

The committee has also expressed a desire for more members (James Juhnke resigned his position in February), more diversity, and more clarity of structure and purpose. Current committee members are Roger Juhnke, Brett Klingenberg, Raylene Hinz Penner, Dale Schrag, chair, John Thiesen, ex officio.