

Mennonite Historical Library

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Goshen College's Mennonite Historical Library (MHL) has a growing collection of around 90,000 published resources by and about Anabaptist-related groups. The MHL attempts to collect relevant material comprehensively across the broad geographical, doctrinal, and practice spectrums of Anabaptist faith and life from the sixteenth century to the present. It collects archival/manuscript materials and artifacts within more limited parameters. Founded in 1906, the collection occupies the third floor of the Harold and Wilma Good Library on Goshen's campus. Staffed by a trained historian, professional librarians, and other support staff, the MHL makes its resources available for in-person research to any interested individual. Few items are available for interlibrary loan to external users. The MHL website, <https://www.goshen.edu/mhl/>, provides contact information, current hours, and an online catalog of most published resources. From September through mid-May, the MHL is generally open Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Check the website or call ahead for current hours if you are traveling a distance to visit the library.



*The Mennonite Historical Library is located on the third floor of Goshen College's Good Library.
(Photo courtesy of Goshen College)*

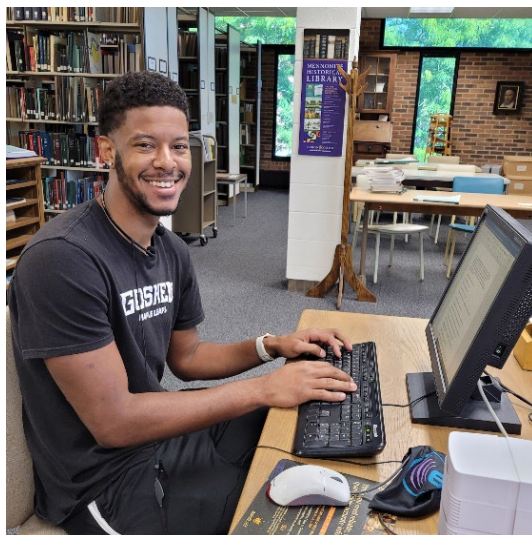


Vision and Mission

In 2011, John D. Roth, then director of the MHL, founded the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (ISGA). The program of ISGA and the resources of the MHL combine in a shared vision and mission to enrich Anabaptist scholarship through global connection and storytelling. The goal is to connect all interested users—from local community members to international scholars—with the resources of Goshen College and the Mennonite Historical Library in the pursuit of equitable and accessible source preservation, research, and publication that engages global Anabaptism. Both the collecting efforts and the engagement with researchers demonstrate that the library includes the interests of researchers of Plain communities in this vision and mission.

Does a Collection That Collects Comprehensively Have Everything?

In reality, the MHL's collecting scope of "everything by and about" Anabaptist-related groups is not achievable. Still, the pursuit of that scope for more than a century has built a collection that often provides access to published resources that matches and sometimes exceeds the breadth and depth of what researchers of Plain communities might find elsewhere. For any particular region, a regional collection will typically match or even exceed resources in Goshen. And certainly, access to oral history and personally lived experiences is most likely found in the region of focus. However, MHL resources will serve most researchers of any Plain community very well. Researchers wishing to compare communities in multiple places or across longer sweeps of time may find that a single visit to the MHL will serve them better than a series of visits to several collections. Those interested in exploring antecedents of any particular community also may benefit from the ability to find the conference reports, periodical publications, and other published writings that preceded the development of the community of interest.



Left: Goshen College Senior History Intern Ruam Barbosa (GC '23) catalogs and indexes Portuguese-language oral history interviews collected by Costa Rican Anabaptist historian Jaime Prieto.

*Right: A sample of some of the more than 700 periodical titles regularly received by the MHL.
(Photos courtesy of Goshen College)*

Persons interested in tracking down a particular book, pamphlet, or periodical may contact MHL staff or search the online catalog available at the MHL website. The online catalog includes a high percentage of the books and pamphlets in the collection. The MHL currently receives over 700 periodical titles on a regular basis, and users can expect to find almost all periodicals that have a national or regional audience as well as many local periodicals. Not all of these are included in the online catalog. (Newsletters of individual congregations are generally not represented in the MHL collection.)

Family Histories and Directories

The MHL strives to be particularly alert to acquiring family histories. Whether a person is interested in what was likely the very first Mennonite genealogy book published in North America—J. Snively’s *Genealogical register of the male and female descendants of John Jacob Schnebele* (Chambersburg, PA: M. Kieffer & Co., 1858)—or any of several thousand subsequent genealogies up to and including John A. Gingerich’s *The Descendants of Barbara C. Byler (1871–1952 and Her Marriages...* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2024), the MHL probably has it. The library’s avid collecting of the related genre of Amish and Old Order Mennonite directories also extends from the predecessor meeting calendars through works like H. N. Troyer’s 1940 prototype *Ohio Amish Directory* (52 leaves) and on to the now widespread assortment of family directories. It is unlikely that Troyer would have imagined a Holmes County directory of over 1,100 pages (as in 2020), let alone directories for other groups that include families in places like Guatemala and Bolivia (Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church).

Works Issued by Amish and Mennonite Publishers

The MHL attempts to keep active orders for all new and revised publications by the range of publishers who regularly produce materials specifically for Amish or Mennonite audiences. Among these are Christian Aid Ministries, Christian Light, Grace Press, Kindred Press, Lamp & Light, MennoMedia, Pathway Publishers, PrairieView Press, and Rod & Staff. The library staff regularly monitors advertising in incoming periodicals to identify and attempt to obtain copies of self-published works and works printed and/or sold by smaller enterprises in Anabaptist communities. The library also collects materials in many languages that document Plain groups’ mission and service work around the world. Some of the material from these publishers—for example, curriculum material and tracts—may not appear in the library’s online catalog. Nonetheless, the MHL can usually provide interested researchers direct access to works they would have difficulty locating in any other collection.

Rare Books

Most of the approximately 2,000 volumes the MHL houses in its Rare Book Room were printed before 1801. A good number of these old books represent the direct or indirect faith influences and migration journeys of today’s Plain Anabaptist communities. For example, the oldest volume, a bilingual New Testament (Greek-Latin) was edited by Humanist scholar Erasmus and printed in

Basel in 1516. This edition was one of the “tools” that served the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli and his circle as they worked to understand the Bible and translate it into a German text. Some of the members of Zwingli’s circle (e.g., Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz) used their acquired understanding of the Bible to found Swiss Anabaptism. And the Zürich translation of the Bible, as printed by Christoph Froschauer, continued to be an important translation for later generations of Anabaptists. In addition to numerous editions of that Zürich translation, the MHL also has strong collections of the spectrum of hymnals, devotional and doctrinal works, and martyrologies used by subsequent generations. A well-known example: the MHL houses the only copy of the earliest known printing (1564) of the *Ausbund*. In fact, with one exception, researchers can see at Goshen at least one copy of every subsequent known edition of the *Ausbund* through at least 1980. (Although the MHL does not own an actual copy of the 1622, 3rd edition, researchers can consult full facsimiles of that edition at the library.) The MHL demonstrates similar strength in its holdings of almost every other Anabaptist work that has remained important through multiple generations.

Supporting the value of its collection, the MHL also has extensive reference works that assist in identifying and understanding rare and other works. Comprehensive, historical, and dialect dictionaries can assist in better understanding texts. Detailed studies of hymn texts and melodies enrich the understanding of individual hymns. Bibliographies and guides to printers add broader context to an individual work. What else did the same printer print? Where are other copies or other editions located? Gazetteers and geographical dictionaries help clarify exactly where an individual lived or an event took place.

Plain Communities Not of Swiss Origin

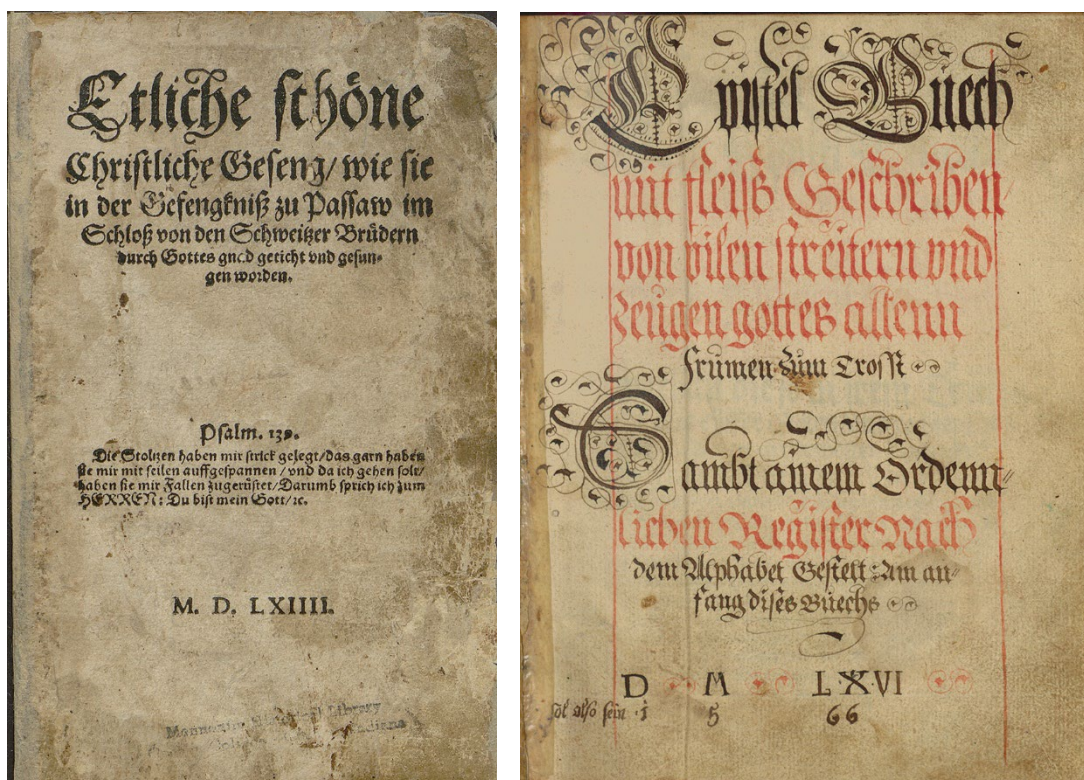
Among Anabaptist-focused collections, the MHL is perhaps the only one that includes significant resources not only on Plain communities of Swiss/South German origin, but also on Plain communities such as the Hutterites and Old Colony Mennonites. (Other collections, especially in Canada, have stronger resources for at least one of these two groups, but would likely have minimal resources related to Plain communities of Swiss origin.) Thus, the MHL may be a good choice for researchers interested in studying groups comparatively on any of a range of potential topics: economics, dress, language, music, demography, etc.

Manuscripts and Archival Collections

Prior to 2017, what is now the Mennonite Church USA Archives was housed on the Goshen College campus in direct physical proximity to the MHL. This proximity helped reinforce MHL’s primary focus on collecting and caring for published resources. When the denominational archives moved to nearby Elkhart, Goshen College’s institutional records and faculty papers remained in Goshen and are managed by the MHL. Among those records are the collections of individuals who undertook significant research on Mennonites and Amish, such as Harold S. Bender, Guy F. Hershberger, John D. Roth, Theron F. Schlabach, and John S. Umble. Many of these papers are in an unprocessed or semi-processed state. Staff ability to provide remote access to the content of these collections is therefore limited. A small percentage of the Goshen College Archives is

represented online through the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID): <https://archives.mhsc.ca/>.

In addition, the MHL cares for a collection of about two dozen manuscripts deposited for safekeeping in Goshen by the Lehrerleut Hutterian Brethren. Included in that collection is the 1566 *Epistel Buech*, a collection of letters written by sixteenth-century Hutterian leaders, a late sixteenth-century manuscript copy of the so-called Great Hutterian Chronicle, and the earliest extant Hutterian church register (late eighteenth/mid-nineteenth century). The MHL also houses microfilm copies of many European archival sources related to Anabaptists. Of special interest are microfilms of records in Zürich, Bern, the Amsterdam Mennonite archives, and a nearly complete set of all Hutterian codices located in European archives.



Left: First known edition of the Ausbund's Passau songs, 1564; Right: Earliest known Hutterian codex in North America, *Epistel Buech*, 1566. (Photos courtesy of Goshen College)



“Friendship Quilts and Family Registers,” a 2022 exhibit in the Good Library Gallery, is typical of those mounted regularly by the Mennonite Amish Museum Committee. (Photo courtesy of Goshen College)

Artifacts

MHL’s artifact collection focuses on objects of Amish and Mennonite material culture: clothing, handcrafted objects from quilts to tools, selected pieces of furniture. Many of the close to 4,000 artifacts originate from communities in northern Indiana. However, the collection also includes, among other things, items “brought home” by the earliest Mennonite missionaries to India and Argentina, communion cups found after World War II in damaged Mennonite churches in what today is Poland, and close to 100 Lancaster County Amish-made pin cushions. The largely volunteer Mennonite Amish Museum Committee draws inspiration from the artifact collection in planning and mounting one or two exhibits annually in Goshen College’s Good Library Gallery. These exhibits often feature a combination of pieces owned by the MHL and items borrowed from private individuals. More information about the Good Library Gallery and its exhibits can be found at <https://www.goshen.edu/academics/art/good-library-gallery>.

Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

Several of the specific program initiatives of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism (ISGA) may be of direct interest to Plain communities’ researchers, especially those who are able to use online resources. Of special note is Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO; https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Welcome_to_GAMEO). This resource includes all of the content of the five-volume *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, with additional articles and revisions as contributed to the editors. Originally initiated by a team of dedicated Canadian Mennonites, GAMEO now has its organizational home with ISGA. There is considerable “legacy” content from the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* regarding Plain communities. Various articles have been revised and

new articles have been added for some newer communities. ISGA welcomes revisions and additions, including biographies of deceased leaders.

The Global Anabaptist Wiki (<https://www.anabaptistwiki.org/>) provides a different option to create and share information about specific groups. See, for example, the group of articles called Beachy Amish Around the World. This site is a place where one could upload and share doctrinal statements or other documents created by a specific group.

Earlier ISGA initiatives included the Bearing Witness Stories Project (<https://martyrstories.org/>), a collaborative endeavor to collect and share stories of costly discipleship from within the Anabaptist tradition, and the Global Anabaptist Profile (<https://www.goshen.edu/isga/gap/>), a major survey of the demographics, beliefs, and practices of 24 Mennonite World Conference churches in 18 countries. Both of these initiatives also produced at least one printed work (available in hard copy from ISGA). Although they do not directly represent Plain communities, they may be instructive or relevant as comparisons for study of the small but growing number of Plain communities outside North America.



*MHL/ISGA Director Elizabeth Miller meets with GAMEO board members in the MHL's John Horsch Room.
(Photo courtesy of Bert Friesen)*