Digital history project opens Bethel database for all

**Historian's scans, photos open portion of MLA to world**

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NORTH NEWTON, Kan. — As Ben Goosen has been researching his book on Mennonites and German nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, he has also been adding to Bethel College’s digital resources.

Goosen, a doctoral student in history at Harvard University, is the author of *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era*, forthcoming this year from Princeton University Press, and for which he has drawn extensively on the holdings of Bethel’s Mennonite Library and Archives.

In the seven years he has been working on the book, Goosen has also been contributing to a large-scale digital history project, the German History Sources Database, for the MLA.

He has digitized — mostly through taking photos with a digital camera, some through digital scanning — thousands of books, pamphlets, articles and periodicals published in Germany about Mennonites between 1800 and 1956.

The database includes materials from more than 2 dozen libraries and archives in Europe, North America and Latin America — especially Germany, the United States and Paraguay.

“The vast majority is in German,” Goosen said. “There are a few things in English, Russian or Dutch, but 95 percent is in German.”

“This includes full runs of periodicals, Mennonite genealogical [materials], official organs of conferences, church history — anything that Mennonites had a hand in or that has to do with Mennonites.”

He collected much of the material on research trips. “Where I had access to books or newspapers, I would take physical photos of each page. That would be maybe 200 photos for a book,” he said.

“I put these in folders on my computer, labeled with title, author and year of publication. They can be organized alphabetically by title, or chronologically by year of publication.”

**Other digitization**

In the meantime, John Thiesen, Bethel co-director of libraries and archivist, has been digitizing the MLA’s printed holdings over the past number of years, as well as putting both those and Goosen’s digitized materials on the Bethel server.

The MLA website now hosts this digitized collection, making it accessible to anyone with Web access — family researchers, historians, students, archivists, museum curators or anyone interested in Mennonite, German or church history.

“It expands the MLA from being not only a physical library,” he said. “It also makes documents that aren’t in the MLA’s collections accessible.”

Goosen said libraries and archives are interested in opening their materials to everyone, which has a democratizing effect. “It’s very cool that the MLA is getting in on this new way of doing archival and historical work, which is very much at the forefront of where the field is moving,” he said.

The new database is at mla.bethelks.edu/gmsources/gmsources.php.