



## PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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## Three Events Slated for Summer 2020

This year gives us a unique opportunity to explore two parts of our history. It is an election year in the United States, but all Brethren in Christ/Be In Christ people around the world live in nation states and have to decide how we will live in the world.

First, our Annual Heritage Service will be held on Sunday, June 7, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. at the Ringgold Meeting House, 14467 Misty Meadow Rd, Ringgold, Maryland. Dr. John Yeatts will speak about our history related to involvement in politics. We'll also address current views on the subject. John is professor emeritus at Messiah College and senior pastor emeritus at the Grantham Church and also teaches the core course on Brethren in Christ History and Values,

Second, the Historical Society's annual meeting this year will take place during the Brethren in Christ

U.S.'s biennial General Assembly in Kansas in July. Kansas is the source of many historical developments for the Brethren in Christ. We will be co-sponsors along with Kansas church leaders of a bus tour of historic church sites, which will be hosted by Bishop-elect Ron Bowell. You will be able to register for the bus tour when you sign up for General Assembly events.

Finally, we also encourage you to attend the annual Hymn Sing at the Ringgold Meeting House, on Sunday, August 30, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. This event is sponsored by the meeting house trustees each year.

**Please note:** At this time, we don't know whether all of these events will take place as scheduled, due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We'll post any updates or schedule changes on our Facebook page and website.

## Thanking One Treasurer and Welcoming Another

Starting April 1, Nevin Engle will be replaced as treasurer for the Historical Society by Karen Ulery. Nevin has served as treasurer since 2006, replacing his wife Mary Ann when she passed away. Nevin describes his service this way:

In September 2000, Morris [Sider] called and talked to Mary Ann and said he was looking for a secretary-treasurer for the Historical Society and he would take either one of us. Mary Ann said she was looking for a place where she could make a significant contribution and she thought this was the place. When she became frustrated, I would kid her that she wrestled the job away from me! Upon her passing in January 2006, I took the position in her honor. Sometime in 2012, at my request, the position was divided into two positions: secretary and treasurer. It has been very rewarding to serve on the board. A lot of things have changed since 2000.

The board is grateful to Nevin and his wife before him for their two decades of faithful service to the Historical Society.

Replacing Nevin as treasurer is Karen Ulery. Karen's Brethren in Christ connections go back several generations (at least five or six, she thinks). She grew up as a pastors' kid, with both of her parents (Keith and Lucy Ulery) serving in pastoral roles over the years. She is a graduate of Messiah College. She has worked on "all thing tech" at Elizabethtown (PA) Brethren in Christ Church for 15 years, and is now the director of administrative ministries there. Karen and her husband, John Yoder, are the parents of Kyrä Ulery Yoder, a senior history major at Messiah College who has completed work-study in both the Sider Institute for Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan Studies and the Brethren in Christ Archives, and Trevin Ulery Yoder, a senior in high school. Welcome, Karen!



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## MCC at 100: Brethren in Christ Involvement in Mennonite Central Committee

In 2020, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is celebrating its one hundredth anniversary. MCC is a “worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God’s love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice.” The Brethren in Christ have been involved with MCC since around 1940, when we teamed with MCC to petition the United States government to offer alternative service for conscientious objectors during World War II.

Formal membership came a few years later, and soon after, C.N. Hostetter Jr., then a well-known Brethren in Christ church leader and president of Messiah College, became chair of the board of MCC, serving for 15 years. Brethren in Christ leadership at MCC has continued through the years, including Wilmer Heisey, executive director, MCC U.S., 1980s; Harriet Sider Bicksler, chair, MCC U.S., 1999-2008; Gwen White, current chair MCC U.S.; and Ruth Leshner, current chair, MCC East Coast.

Throughout this year, MCC is sharing stories from the past one hundred years. As part of this effort, MCC staff compiled a brief summary of the various ways the Brethren in Christ have been involved. Following are several brief vignettes from those stories and the summary.

Elsie Bechtel, a member of Valley Chapel in East Canton, Ohio, worked with MCC in 1944 at a state hospital in Howard, Rhode Island. From 1945 to 1947, she was an MCCer in France, much of the time with Secours Mennonite Américain aux Enfants (American Mennonite Aid to Children). Committed to the doctrine of nonresistance, she held that this conviction should lead to positive action. Bechtel found relief work to be an avenue for expressing God’s love. “Curing hate by love may seem like a wintry task,” she said in a speech in 1945 to other relief work candidates at Goshen (Indiana) College, “but we can pour on love as recklessly and with as great abandon as the geranium pours out color and brightness, for our God is the God of love and there is no limit to his supply.”<sup>1</sup>

From 1951-1976, MCC’s Pax program provided varied service opportunities for hundreds of young men. Joe Haines, then a member of the Pleasant Hill (OH) Brethren in Christ Church, served with Pax in an orphanage and school in Hebron, West Bank (Palestine) in 1959-1961. He describes a typical day: “I played trombone to wake boys, bought provisions in the market (a good chance to practice Arabic), did other chores as needed, led woodworking activities, orga-



*In this 1960 photo, Pax worker Joe Haines supervises some of the older boys at the Hebron Orphanage and school in Hebron, West Bank, who are working with wooden handcrafts. Photo courtesy of MCC.*

nized hikes.” Joys included “relating to the boys and getting to know them and staff, exploring the land of the Bible—it was like a living classroom.” Because of his service with Pax, he served again with MCC in the Middle East with his wife. He says, “I was ready to get back to that part of the world. I had really fallen in love with the Arabic language and felt it could end up being kind of a mission for me.”

Ben White, pastor of Circle of Hope’s Pennsauken (NJ) congregation, worked in Mexico City in the early 2000s with MCC’s SALT (Serving and Learning Together) program for young adults. He says: “I worked . . . on the southern edge of the city [with] PARED (which means

“wall”)—Programa Activo de Reconciliación (Reconciliation) Esperanza (Hope) y Dignidad (Dignity). We taught peace, nonviolence, and sexual abuse prevention workshops in public schools. That year transformed my life and some of the relationships persist today, 17 years later. I am so grateful. I still work with MCC East Coast in its Philly programs, support financially, and advocate for more and more participation in my local church and denomination. I am proud to say ‘We are MCC!’”

In Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe, Cyclone Idai made landfall on March 15, 2019. MCC, the Brethren in Christ Church in Mozambique, and other partners provided food assistance, toiletries and supplies to more than 11,000 people in Mozambique. MCC and the Brethren in Christ Church in Malawi provided maize flour, beans, plastic tarps, relief kits and more to 500 households in Malawi. “The food relief will really make a difference in our lives,” said Rose Innocent, mother of five, in Malawi. “Please, pass on this message of our gratitude to people who have sent us this food assistance.” The joint response in Malawi continues into early 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Information from M. J. Heisey, *Peace & Resistance: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Witness through Three Generations*, (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2003), 150-152.



*Ben White served in Mexico City with MCC’s Serving and Learning Together (SALT) program for young adults.*

**On Saturday, June 20, 2020,**  
the Manor Brethren in Christ  
Church will host

### **Celebration 2020: MCC at 100.**

The day will include afternoon festival activities and an evening worship service.

*More information about this event and other centennial events is at <https://mcc.org/centennial/events>.*

## News and Notes

From the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives

### Searching for Rhoda Lee:

### Who was the Woman that Inspired the Brethren in Christ to Enter Missions?

by Devin Manzullo-Thomas

Many Society members also know the story of how those first efforts emerged. A woman named Rhoda Lee gave an impassioned plea at the General Conference of 1894 and, after a spontaneous donation of five dollars, strategically circulated a hat to collect further funds for the cause. That money eventually resulted in the formation of a Board for Missions and the sending of the first missionaries to Africa. The rest, as they say, is history.

But who was Rhoda Lee, the woman who inspired the Brethren in Christ to take up the Great Commission? In the 1990s, Helen Johns—a member of the Nappanee congregation in Indiana—set out to answer that question. The results of her study were published by Evangel Publishing House as *Searching for Rhoda Lee*.

What did Johns find? Here's a snippet from her book:

*Too much has been left to the imagination concerning Rhoda Ellis Noble Lee. Because she passed a hat to begin a foreign missions fund at General Conference, we have tended to romanticize her, even revere her. However, her life had substance apart from that isolated act. To allow her to remain one-dimensional does no justice to her memory, to her passion and intelligence. . . .*

*This is a study of a person in love with her church but out of step with it; a person who followed her heart, her up-*



Rhoda Lee

*bringing, and her beliefs, and who had the courage . . . to be vocal about them among the Brethren. Rhoda was an idealist who sincerely wanted to make a difference for the Lord. But her acts of conscience probably ensured that she could never be totally accepted in a church which valued family, unity, prosperity, and peace above almost anything. Like most prophetic voices, hers probably brought her frustration and grief.*

*What many people don't know about Rhoda's life after that fateful General Conference in 1894 will surprise them: that she died in poverty in 1899 at the young age of forty-two; that she left five children without a mother; that the wealthy of her*

*church did not seem to officially help her or her family; that even today people of the generation of her great-grandchildren avow that the Brethren "didn't treat her very well"; that she died without a hint of knowledge of how she would be revered in the Brethren in Christ Church today.*

*Yet what appears a tragic ending probably is not. A more probable reality is that her striving for truth and change was rewarded. Her perseverance and courage ultimately must have brought her closer to the Lord at her death than if she had remained silent. Perhaps, through acknowledging what she perceived as her own powerlessness, she learned that God alone can move people to action; all God required of her was that she be accountable for her own faithfulness.*

If you're interested in reading the entire story of Lee's life and learning more about her prophetic call to the Brethren in Christ, you can purchase a copy of *Searching for Rhoda Lee* by contacting [archives@messiah.edu](mailto:archives@messiah.edu).

*After a rousing speech from Rhoda Lee (inset) calling the Brethren in Christ to take up the Great Commission, one layperson laid a five-dollar bill on this table—the first donation to start a missions program. Sensing an opportunity, Lee grabbed a hat and passed it around the room, raising even more money to send Brethren in Christ people to witness to the world.*







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## Images from the Past

*From the photograph collection of the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives*



In the last issue of *History Matters* we sent out a call for readers to donate materials that might help the Archives to collect, preserve, and tell the story of Hispanic Brethren in Christ churches. Will Teodori, creative director for the BIC U.S., responded to our plea with several photographs from the 1990s, one of which appears here. This image, which depicts a worship service at the Iglesia Ebenezer congregation in 1994, had been used with the other photos as part of a denominational brochure to raise funds to build a “worship, evangelism, and training center” in Miami. We are thrilled to add these images to our collection!

If you have any other photos that might help us to tell the “Miami story,” please contact [archives@messiah.edu](mailto:archives@messiah.edu).

