



PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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CORRECTION: A caption on p. 3 of the Fall 2020 newsletter misleadingly indicated that the Brooklyn Brethren in Christ and Pilgrim Chapel Brethren in Christ churches were the same congregation. In fact, the Brooklyn congregation (which met at 958 Bedford Avenue) dissolved at that location in 1969 due to internal conflicts. A new congregation, Pilgrim Chapel, opened at 403 Rogers Avenue later that same year, with the same pastor and much of the congregation of the Brooklyn church. We apologize for the confusion.

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Annual Heritage Service Goes Virtual Again: Do You Have a Pandemic Story?

Last year, the Annual Heritage Service was a Facebook Live event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. John Yeatts spoke about historic Brethren in Christ attitudes towards participation in politics in the context of looming 2020 presidential election in the US. Far more people were able to watch the event live or later on YouTube than usually attend the service in person, and many expressed their desire for the service to be live-streamed and/or recorded again in the future.

This year, **the Heritage Service will be held on June 6, 2021, at 3:00 p.m.** The venue will again be virtual, which feels like some kind of new oxymoron. How can a service that has traditionally taken place in the 150-year-old Ringgold Meetinghouse go virtual yet again? One obvious reason is that even though many people are now fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and new case rates are not as high as they had been, it is still wise to limit time in close proximity with other people.

There's another reason too. We are sad to report that in February, the Ringgold Meetinghouse was broken into and vandalized. Several window panes in the basement and on the main floor were broken, and the globes of the vintage lanterns from the "sanctuary" were smashed. Two attic windows—both glass and frames—were also destroyed. Plates, place settings, and serving dishes in the basement dining area were smashed against a stone wall. Fortunately, there was no structural damage to the building, and apparently nothing was stolen. The board of trustees of the Meetinghouse will clean up the building, fix the things that can be fixed, consider what security measures might need to be taken and what funds are available to help with the repairs. There are also questions about the future of the Meetinghouse, given how rarely it is used and the amount of upkeep that is required.

For the past year, our individual and corporate lives have been upended by the pandemic—the first of its kind in more than one hundred years. A century from now, our descendants will likely wonder what we did—how we handled the isolation, suffering, death, and political controversies of this pandemic—just as many of us wonder how our ancestors fared during the flu pandemic immediately following World War I and other epidemics. Maybe your parents or grandparents, or aunts and uncles and cousins, passed on stories from past epidemics that have encouraged or informed how you view the COVID-19 pandemic. Or perhaps you have a story about how your family or congregation responded to the current pandemic.

We would like to feature some of these stories from the past and present in the Annual Heritage Service this year. If you have a story to share—either from long ago or the past year—please send a summary of it, along with a relevant photograph or two if you have any, to Ken Hoke, executive director, at 101 Clarindon Place, Carlisle, PA 17033, or ken.hoke@gmail.com. Deadline is May 15, 2021. And watch for more information about how to watch the live event on June 6.

We hope that in 2022, we will again be able to hold the Heritage Service in person at the Ringgold Meetinghouse. In the meantime, if you would like to contribute to the cost of repairs from the break-in, contact Frank Kipe at frank@microdairydesigns.com.



David Perry, worship arts pastor at Grantham Brethren in Christ, leads singing at the 2018 Annual Heritage Service.

Family Stories

Early on in the pandemic, stories from previous experiences with epidemics, contagious illnesses, and social distancing started surfacing on social media. People also shared books about past pandemics that resonated with the current situation which we were all learning to navigate. Here are two Brethren in Christ examples from the early twentieth century.

The Fourth Wave

by Harriet Sider Bicksler

On February 29, 1920, my paternal grandmother, Alice Steckley Sider, died at age 31. A few days before, on February 26, her fifth child, a girl named Mary, was born and died the same day. According to my father, Lewis Sider, in his book, *Missionary Reminiscences*, they both died “as a result of the flu epidemic which was then raging through our area [Wainfleet, Ontario].”¹ My father, who was eight years old when his mother died, was the oldest of the four remaining children.

It could be argued that my grandmother’s death was not one of the 50 million world-

wide in the 1918-1919 flu pandemic, but according to some sources, there was a fourth wave during the winter of 1920, when she died.² In addition, the pandemic was most deadly among 20 to 40-year-olds; she was 31.

I believe that my grandmother’s death at the tail end of the flu pandemic and my grandfather’s subsequent remarriage the next year significantly affected the trajectory of my father’s life. For several reasons, he left home when he was 18 to continue his education at Messiah Academy, and never returned to Ontario to live. After completing high school, he went west to Upland, California to attend Beulah College, where he met my mother. And the rest, as they say, is history.



Jesse and Alice Steckley Sider on their wedding day, December 28, 1910.

1 Lewis B. Sider, *Missionary Reminiscences: An Autobiography* (Grantham, PA: Self-published, 1989), 3.

2 Alicja Zelazko, “How Long Did the Flu Pandemic of 1918 Last?” Britannica, accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/story/how-long-did-the-flu-pandemic-of-1918-last>.

It’s an Ill Wind that Doesn’t Blow Somebody Good

by E. J. Swalm

E. J. Swalm was a bishop and administrator in the Brethren in Christ Church for many years, living in Duntroon, Ontario. Thanks to his granddaughters for sharing this poem. According to his own note at the top of the handwritten page, he “wrote this Poem while we were quarantined due to Lela [his daughter] being ill with scarlet Fever” in April 1927.



E. J. and Maggie Swalm family; Lela is standing in the back row on the right.

Ill is the wind that does not bring,
A disguised blessing on the wing,
And though at first it seems severe,
It later fills your heart with cheer.

For many years we tried in vain,
To satisfy an inward claim,
Of freedom for the appetite,
Like Egypt gave an Israelite.

When in the Spring we took a stroll,
Through wood or bush we must control
Our cravings for those toothsome leeks,
So often found by woodland creeks.

The reason is not hard to give
When people are so sensitive
And interfere with what you eat
Because your breath is not so sweet.

One day our little girl took sick,
Which we hoped would leave her quick,
Instead an itchy rash did cleave her,
Which Doctor said was scarlet fever.

He said the case was very mild,
Yet best of care must give the child,
And lest it spread through ways unseen,
He placed us under quarantine.

When we were told of seeming fate,
That we were forced to isolate,
And keep aloof for five long weeks,
We hastened to the bush for leeks.

We took along a barrel of course,
In a vehicle drawn by a horse.
When we returned with barrel filled,
The fever germs knew they’d be killed.

As we devoured those wholesome greens
We brought to pass our wistful dreams.
How satisfied we were to know,
We need not care for friend or foe.

We feel quite sure ‘twill have effect,
When Doctor comes to disinfect.
He’ll say, “No need to fumigate,
The terrible stench will work first rate.”

News and Notes

From the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives

Cooperating for the Greater Good

by Devin Manzullo-Thomas

Some members of the Historical Society may recall the name Howard F. Landis. For many years, Landis was a successful building contractor in the Souderton, Pennsylvania, region and a lay leader at the Souderton Brethren in Christ Church, where he served as deacon, trustee, treasurer, and Sunday school teacher and superintendent, among other roles. He was also active in the wider denomination on various boards and committees. (For more on Landis's life, see the article "Howard F. Landis: Skilled Carpenter and Dedicated Layman" in the August 2001 issue of *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.)

Recently, the Archives obtained materials from Howard F. Landis, including a short but interesting account he (presumably) wrote in the 1950s or 1960s regarding an inter-denominational cooperative service project in which he was involved.

The context for the project was Hurricane Diane, a powerful storm that caused considerable damage and loss of life along the Atlantic Coast in the late summer of 1955. In Pennsylvania, the storm produced heavy rainfall that in turn caused widespread flooding. Estimates indicate that flood waters demolished about 150 road and rail bridges and breached or destroyed 30 dams. There was, as a result, tragic loss of life. In total, over 100 people were killed by the hurricane's impact in Pennsylvania.

In this dire circumstance, Landis joined with other Christians in the Souderton area, including Mennonites, to provide recovery assistance for those impacted by the flood waters. Here is an excerpt from his account:

One evening . . . a group of Christians [from the Souderton area] were gathered together and naturally the topic of conversation was the recent . . . flood [caused by Hurricane Diane]. One of the group, a Mennonite pastor named Derstine, spoke up. He said, "Yes, here we sit and talk about it, why don't we do something?" That pastor did do something about it, for the following Saturday he and two of his laymen flew to Stroudsburg [about 75 miles north of Souderton] to offer assistance. His heart was moved as he saw the area strewn with mud and debris. He asked [the] Red Cross area director . . . if there was any need for outside help. It so happened that [the director] knew the Mennonites, having worked with them on a previous occasion and he said he was very much interested. Pastor Derstine said, "I will be here on Monday morning with 200 men." This he said rather presumptuously for he had not as yet asked for volunteers and it was already late Saturday afternoon.

That evening telephones began buzzing and a meeting was called with representatives from different churches in the area attending. When the idea was suggested that the work should be carried out in a cooperative basis some of the groups balked . . . for this was the



Howard F. Landis and his wife, Bertha, with the truck advertising their building contractor business.

first time the churches in the community attempted anything like this on the local level. Up until this time we had adopted the policy of "you paddle your own canoe and I'll paddle mine."

You know, we Protestants are a funny group of people. We picture ourselves as a mighty army marching under the command of our leader, who is Christ, yet seemingly everyone is out of step—that is, everyone except our own enlightened group. And so we hold high our sectarian banner while the Lord's work suffers and the name of Christian is mocked by the unbeliever. Of course, one can see the implica-

tions of this type of thing.

Well, the [representatives of area churches] got over this hump and the [group] decided to work together. As they proceeded, they began delegating work and solicited for trucks, pumps, and other equipment. . . .

Pastor Derstine made a final appeal, and said, "Men, there's something wrong with us if we can't be out here Monday morning with 200 men." He asked the men present at the meeting to carry the peal to their congregations and [they] began phoning volunteer lists. . . .

Monday morning came. . . . Not only were the various churches there in force, but the various civic organizations were also ready to help. And instead of the 200 men asked for, there were 250 volunteers. After a period of prayer, the men filed into seven buses and fourteen trucks and headed for Stroudsburg. . . .

We arrived . . . and everything was lined up to go. A crew of three [volunteers] . . . were mapping out the different areas with the civil defense director and . . . a captain was assigned to each bus and they were given a certain street to work on. It was a masterful piece of organization. A real spirit of Christian fellowship was manifest as bankers, farmers, and businessmen worked side by side in the none-too-pleasant task of cleaning mud from homes. . . .

[On the] second day of the operation . . . 450 men showed up for work. . . . Altogether 1,200 men volunteered and contributed 18,000 [work] hours. Approximately 375 homes were cleaned.

We will look back on this experience as a landmark in interchurch relations [in our area] and I trust it is only the beginning.

Landis' account, among other strengths, showcases the ways that the Brethren in Christ of the 1950s and 1960s were continuing to break out of their denominational enclave. Much has been made of the church's decision to join Mennonite Central Committee in the 1940s, or of its recruitment into the National Association of Evangelicals in the 1940s and 1950s. Here we see an example of how one local congregation joined with other Christians, of various traditions, in its region to serve those in need.



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Images from the Past

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



The photo shows students hard at work reading and studying in the library, with Gladys Bohem (later Sider), the college librarian, supervising.

This 1939 photograph shows the Podrasnik Library at Beulah College, the Brethren in Christ church school in California. Founded in 1920, the school by 1935 had outgrown its original location, leading administrators to purchase a plot of land at the western end of the town of Upland on which to build a new campus. The library was part of the main building on the new campus, which also included administrative offices, classrooms, and a chapel.

In his history of *Beulah College, A Vision for Service*, E. Morris Sider describes how the library got its name:

“Alois Podrasnik was a wealthy man and a civic leader [in the Upland community] . . . Jesse Eyster [then-president of the Beulah College Board of Trustees] decided that he should call on Podrasnik for a donation to the new campus. This was not easy to do because Podrasnik and his house were awe-inspiring to humble people of Brethren in Christ background. . . [But] Eyster finally resolved to make the contact. The result was a donation of \$1,000, a much larger sum than had been expected [the equivalent of about \$20,000 today]; understandably it was considered an answer to prayer. It was in recognition of this gift that the library was named after Podrasnik.”