



PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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2023 Heritage Service to Feature our Old Order and United Zion Brothers and Sisters



Attendees gather outside the Ringgold Meeting House following the 2018 Heritage Service.

The Annual Heritage Service will be held at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 4, 2023, at the Ringgold Meeting House, 14426 Misty Meadow Rd., Smithsburg, MD 21783.

This year, we are planning a joint service with the Old Order River Brethren, the United Zion Church, and the Brethren in Christ Church U.S. These churches are the three related groups in the United States that grew out of the original formation of the River Brethren in south central Pennsylvania in the late 1700s. Each group will lead the worshippers in song, and a representative from each group will describe three deeply held values or beliefs and one desire for their ongoing ministry as a church family.

The Old Order River Brethren presenter will be Chris Brode. He will speak and lead a song in the Old Order style. Copies of sheet music with notes will be provided to assist non-Old Order folks to participate in singing an old tune. Representing the United Zion will be Rev. Ethan Levensgood, song-leader, and Rev. John Leisey who will speak. Dr. John Yeatts, will speak for the Brethren in Christ U.S.

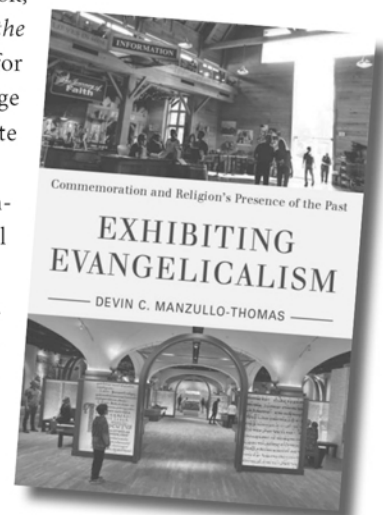
We want this to be a time to share about our deeply-held values and beliefs, and to celebrate what God continues to do in our midst as historically-related church families within the larger family of Christ-followers. Please plan to join us for this service.

Notes from the Board of Directors

We celebrate the publication of Devin Manzullo-Thomas's new book, *Exhibiting Evangelicalism: Commemoration and Religion's Presence of the Past* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2022). Devin is the archivist for the Brethren in Christ Church and Messiah University. See the next page for an excerpt from what Historical Society member Andrew Saylor wrote in a note of appreciation about the book.

Beth Mark resigned as secretary of the board after several years of faithful service. She continues to be involved with the Society as an editorial assistant for *Brethren in Christ History and Life*. Thank you, Beth!

We want to encourage people to include the Historical Society in their estate planning and/or to offer a matching gift challenge. Contributions beyond our regular membership dues and extra donations are very helpful in ensuring the Society's continued financial stability. If you'd like more information, please contact Ken Hoke at 101 Clarindon Place, Carlisle, PA 17013 or email: ken.hoke@gmail.com.



Zimbabwe Author Receives Major Award

This year, 2023, is the 125th anniversary of the beginning of Brethren in Christ missions, when the first missionary party set out in 1898 for Africa and ended up settling in the Matopo Hills of what is now Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Brethren in Christ Church has thrived and grown from those early years to become the largest Brethren in Christ conference in the world.



In 2003, the Zimbabwe church hosted the Mennonite World Conference Assembly. Those who attended the assembly will vividly remember Barbara Nkala's distinctive voice as she gave announcements at each plenary meeting. Barbara has been a leader in the Zimbabwe church for many years and currently serves as the Mennonite World Conference regional representative for Southern Africa.

Recently, Barbara was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award as part of the Zimbabwe's 2023 National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA) which recognize outstanding achievements in arts and culture. Barbara was cited for being one of the earliest published writers in Zimbabwe. She has written both fiction and nonfiction, including *Growing and Branching Out: Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa*, co-written/edited with her sister, Doris Dube (Radi-

ant Publishing, 2014). In 2022, she was NAMA's Legends Award winner.

Barbara responded to the editor's request for her comments on receiving this award:

I was out of the country with my husband when I learned about the Lifetime Achievement Award that was going to be presented by the Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts, and Recreation on February 25. The award was supposed to have been a surprise to the recipient. We had earlier been given VIP tickets to attend the 2023 National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA). Nothing unusual about that. When the official who tracked me by phone announced the award to be presented to me, it was a bolt from the blue.

As the stunning news sank in, I was so humbled and grateful, and my heart could only sing praises to God. It was as if the great Giver of blessings had placed a huge carrot cake in my plate, one that would not finish. The congratulatory messages started pouring in that night. I could not help asking myself, why me? Whatever the answer, the award inspired me and strengthened my resolve to continue nurturing the young and aspiring writers to intentionally tap into their dreams for literary success. I am grateful to NAMA and many supporters, and mostly to my husband and children who have always encouraged and supported all that I do. The Historical Society congratulates Barbara on this award recognizing her significant achievements!

Appreciation for Exhibiting Evangelicalism

by Andrew Saylor

This is not a review. I am calling it an appreciation. I read a lot of history and theology. This book combines those disciplines. Or more precisely, as Devin states it, "public history and religious history."

My expectations for this book were limited. It seems a very academic topic: it is "the first-ever history of evangelical history museums in the United States." Devin writes about Billy Sunday's home, the Park Street Church in Boston, the Billy Graham Center Museum, the Billy Graham Library, and the Museum of the Bible. Can you imagine a greater challenge than writing about museums? Oh, it can be done. Just string together lots of research. But how stimulating could it possibly be?

It's clear Devin has done enormous and thorough research. He has clearly dug up details and documentation. When he tells you something is not known, he speaks with authority . . . and Devin quickly wins your trust. That's not always easy because his subject takes him into controversial places. As he puts it, "Ultimately, what I

offer in the pages that follow is a new account of the culture wars and the terrain on which they are mobilized and waged."

Devin makes the stories fascinating and shows us how relevant they are. It may be academic in one sense, but not in the pejorative sense that word is sometimes used. It's quite accessible. And his writing is remarkable. It flows. Within the sentence, within the paragraph, within the page—you get the idea. I would have thought it would be inevitable there would be stretches of essential but tedious information that one just had to get through. I did not encounter any.

I want to express appreciation for this work, but also celebrate Devin being in our midst. There's an interesting phenomenon that people tend not to go to see the natural wonders they live close to. Maybe that's like prophets not being honored in their hometowns. Let's not make that mistake with Devin.

Andrew Saylor is a lawyer and attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. A formal review of the book will appear in a future edition of *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.

News and Notes

From the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives

Remembering the Messiah Bible School Class of 1912

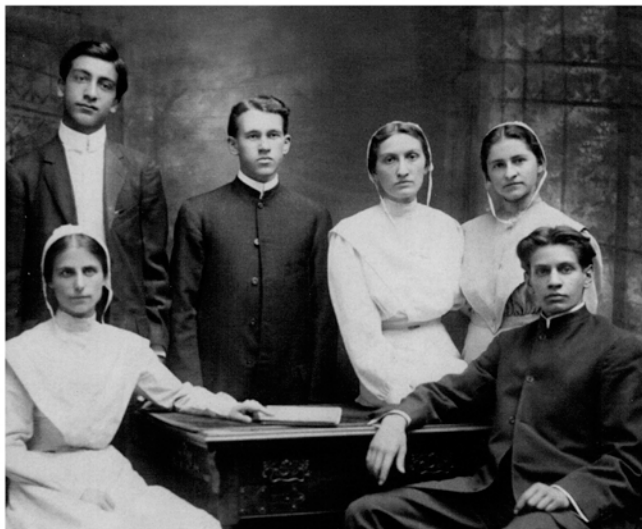
In my role as director of archives at Messiah University, I'm often asked to give talks about various aspects of the university's history and religious heritage. In February of this year, for instance, I had the privilege of giving just such a talk to an all-faculty gathering. I organized my brief talk around three photographs from our archival collection—including this photo of the Class of 1912 at Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home.

These six students were the first class to “graduate” from the school, which the Brethren in Christ Church had launched just three years earlier, in 1909. (Of course, in 1912 these students didn't graduate in the sense of obtaining a formal degree; the school was not yet accredited to do so.) This first class was pretty small—just six students. It was also pretty homogeneous, at least in terms of race and religion: Five of the six students were born in North America; have German-sounding last names like Hess, Musser, and Zercher; and were affiliated with the Brethren in Christ Church.

What do we know about these six students? In his book *Messiah College: A History*, E. Morris Sider provides some glimpses of their backgrounds and personalities.

Ira Zercher (third from left) was the first student to register to attend Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home. He was older than the other students, and before enrolling at the Bible school had no more than a grade-school education. At the end of the first school year, he extolled the value of his experience in the classroom, with a bit of a poetic flourish: “This pen may rush, this ink may fade, this paper crumble away, and the hand which wrote this becomes feeble, yet the pleasant seasons I have spent here drinking at wisdom's fountain shall never be forgotten.”¹

Emma Smith (who later married John Climenhaga) and Joe Smith (fourth and fifth from left, respectively) were children of the school's founder, S. R. Smith, a Brethren in Christ minister and businessman who offered his home in Harrisburg's Alison Hill as the school's first location. (After the first year in Harrisburg, the school moved—along with S. R. Smith's noodle factory—to the village of Grantham.) Emma loved music, a fondness she inherited from her father. As a student she was actively involved in extra-curricular activities, including as a member of



Class of 1912 (from left to right): Ada Hess (seated), Samuel Krikorian, Ira Zercher, Emma Smith, Joe Smith, and Barbara Musser.

the Good Will Purity Association, a club that sought to improve students' moral attitudes and behaviors. She once gave a talk at a club meeting titled “What Are the Dangers of City Life for a Country Girl?”²

Samuel Krikorian (second from left, behind seated woman) is not mentioned in Sider's history, but more recent historical research conducted as part of the Messiah University Intercultural History Project has yielded some information about him. Krikorian was an Armenian Christian who es-

caped persecution in his home country of Turkey and, in 1909, emigrated to the United States. His eventual arrival in Grantham was the somewhat serendipitous result of a chance meeting between his aunt, Rebecca Krikorian, and S. R. Smith at the train station in Harrisburg. Rebecca, who as a midwife had helped to deliver Samuel, had always hoped that her nephew would become a minister; she prayed earnestly for him—first, for his arrival in the United States and, second, for him to find a suitable school for his ministerial training. She found that, initially, in Smith's Messiah Bible School. Eventually, Rebecca would move to the West Coast, and Samuel would follow her, eventually earning a degree from Pasadena University in California.³

While significant in many ways, Krikorian's presence in this photo is a reminder that, despite being a predominantly white and predominantly Brethren in Christ institution for much of its history, Messiah from its founding was never designed to be narrowly sectarian. In fact, the school's first charter states that “applicants for admittance to the school may be admitted irrespective of race, color, sex, creed, or faith, who believe in the deity of Jesus Christ...”

Messiah Bible School would welcome its first African American student, Rachel Flowers, in 1916, and her brother, Vincent, in 1922.⁴

As the first class of students to graduate from Messiah Bible School, these three women and three men hold a significant place in the institution's history—and, by extension, in the history of the Brethren in Christ Church. Their stories deserve to be preserved and shared.

¹ E. Morris Sider, *Messiah College: A History* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1984), 41-42.

² Sider, *Messiah College*, 22-23, 111-112.

³ Christina Thomas, “Coming to America: The Life of Rebecca Krikorian, Part II,” *Diary of a Historian* (blog), June 12, 2014, <https://diary-of-a-historian.com/2014/06/12/coming-to-america-the-life-of-rebecca>

krikorian-part-ii/; Thomas, “Last, But Not Least: Reverend Samuel Coffing Krikorian,” *Diary of a Historian* (blog), July 11, 2014, <https://diaryofahistorian.com/2014/07/11/last-but-not-least-reverend-samuel-coffing-krikorian/>.

⁴ Christina R. Thomas, “The Life of Rachel H. Flowers, 1900-1988,” *Brethren in Christ History and Life* 43, no. 2 (August 2020): 168-202.



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Images from the Past

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



Marriage celebrations are commonplace around the world and no less so among the Brethren in Christ. In a 2007 journal article, Dwight Thomas described a Brethren in Christ wedding in Bihar, India, noting the relationship between the local Santal culture in India and Brethren in Christ weddings in North America.

“This photo of Peter and Nellie Mlotshwa echoes some of the same tendencies,” Dwight notes. “The North American-styled clothing is obvious, but small details such as the boutonniere on the groom’s lapel indicate the degree of cultural adoption by these two Zimbabwean Brethren in Christ. However, it is likely that local customs were also present at their 1959 wedding. This is certainly the case in Zambia, where lobola negotiations still precede the wedding, and where traditional activities follow it.”

Dwight continues, “It has been my hope to add to my earlier study a similar description of a Zambian wedding. The intersection of American Brethren in Christ culture with those of global believers will always result in adoptions of one sort or another, and careful examination of the adopted elements can reveal significant things for thoughtful observers.”

God called both Peter and Nellie to full-time service to God. From 1969 to 1975, both taught at Ekuphileni Bible Institute. From 1976 to 1981, Peter served as overseer, first at Matopo District, then Mtshabezi, and finally at Wanezi District. While studying at Daystar in Nairobi, he was diagnosed with cancer and died in 1984. Nellie has continued her fruitful ministry at EBI and elsewhere in Zimbabwe, enriched by the time she spent in 1987 at the Haggai Institute of Advanced Leadership Training in Singapore. Their story is told in *Celebrating the Vision* (145-151).