



PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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Outgoing Society President Presents Final Report

by John R. Yeatts

Three years ago, when I was given the privilege to serve as president of the Historical Society, I announced three goals. The first was to seek new board members to give long-term leadership to the Society. At our September meeting we elected a new slate of officers: David Flowers, president; Christina Embree, vice president; Hank Johnson, secretary; and Karen Ulery, treasurer. We also engaged a new executive director, Joshua Nolt, who comes with a mission to continue our focus on the "history" side of our name but to add more emphasis on the "life" side to allow us to better support the church.

While we welcome Joshua, we regret losing Ken Hoke as executive director, who is leaving the right way by putting our Society in a strong place administratively. We are deeply indebted to Ken for his diligent service and owe him our heartfelt thanks.

My second goal was to stimulate more involvement from our traditional partners, the Old Order River Brethren and the United Zion. I am delighted that both John Dietz of the Old Order and Jay Showalter of the United Zion continue on the board. Both these churches are developing archives for their denominations' historical writings and artifacts.

My third goal was to develop collaborating partnerships with groups sharing similar research interests. Such relationships have developed with Zambian Christian University through the work of Dwight Thomas

and the Theological Study Group with the help of their leader Bob Verno.

Our gatherings this year are typical of meetings that Ken Hoke has administered during his tenure. At the 2024 Annual Heritage Service, Bishop Rob Patterson spoke on "openness," specifically on the word "and." The 2024 Annual Meeting held during the Brethren in Christ U.S. General Assembly in July focused on stories from the Great Lakes Conference. At General Assembly, Karen Ulery coordinated and hosted a display table, sold books, and received memberships.

Editor Harriet Sider Bicksler produced issues of *Brethren in Christ History and Life*. Significant features included Randall Basinger's analysis of the history of the peace position and a dialogue among Lynn Thrush, John Yeatts, and Jay McDermond on "The Brethren in Christ and the LGBTQ+ Community."

We are grateful for those who serve the Historical Society in so many ways. Pray for us as we work to support the Brethren in Christ Church. Board members beginning January 1, 2025: David Flowers, president; Christina Embree, vice president; Henry (Hank) Johnson, secretary; Karen Ulery, treasurer; Devin Manzullo-Thomas, archivist; Glen Pierce, assistant archivist; Harriet Sider Bicksler, editor; Leonard Chester, Canadian representative; and John Dietz, Jay Showalter, David Weaver-Zercher, John Yeatts, members-at-large.

Be Sure to Renew Your Society Membership!

Your membership and support are very important for our ongoing work. If you are one of our lifetime members, thank you for your support. For the rest of us this is a call to action. Note that this year there will not be a separate membership renewal letter and there is a change of address for where US members should mail their checks. You will receive a tax-deductible receipt for all donations beyond the basic membership.

Please make your check payable to Brethren in Christ Historical Society and return your check and this form to Brethren in Christ History Society, c/o Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church, 1865 Fruitville Pike, Lancaster, PA 17601.

In Canada, send your check to Leonard Chester, 109-303 Elgin St., Port Colbourne, ON L3k 6A2. You may also renew online at bic-history.org/join or bic-history.org/renew if you already have an account.

2025 Membership Renewal

(or to join the Society as a new member)

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS include the following (stated in annual fees, except Lifetime):

- Basic Membership \$30
- Contributing Membership \$50
- Supporting Membership \$100
- Patron Membership \$200
- Lifetime: one-time minimum payment . . . \$1000

Thank you, but please remove my name from ongoing membership.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Province _____ Zip/Code _____

Meet Our New President and Executive Director



David Flowers, *president*

I received a BA in Religion from East Texas Baptist University and a MTS in Biblical Studies from Houston Graduate School of Theology, a missional, multi-cultural, and multi-denominational seminary. I have more than twenty-five years of ministry experience in and outside the church, pastoring churches in Texas, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

I grew up in the Southern Baptist Church (SBC) in East Texas and was in student ministry for seven years before leaving the SBC as a neo-Anabaptist. I then taught at The Woodlands Christian Academy (North Houston) completed a masters degree, and pastored a Mennonite church in Virginia. For the past eight years, I have had the honor and privilege of pastoring the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church.

I've been married to my wife, Lanna, for almost twenty-three years. We have two boys, Kainan (12) and Judah (8). When I'm not pastoring or spending time with my family, I enjoy reading, writing, baseball, going to the movies, hiking the trails, all-things Star Wars, talking theology over coffee, and contemplating the mysteries of the universe.

I first joined the Brethren in Christ Historical Society in 2017 because I deeply resonated with the history, beliefs, and values of the Brethren in Christ, and I wanted to do what I can to help the society and our denomination uphold our distinctives and live into our historic theological streams. I'm passionate about championing our heritage. Therefore, I'm honored to step into the role of president. I look forward to working with our new executive director, Joshua Nolt.

I believe the society will expand its reach to younger generations and be a resource for the "history and life" of the Brethren in Christ Church, as we seek to encourage historical and theological reflection and facilitate conversations around contemporary issues.

Joshua Nolt, *executive director*

I was first introduced to the Brethren in Christ when I was 8 or 9 years old. My family began attending Manor Brethren in Christ Church, where John Hawbaker served as pastor. John began planting seeds and praying for me as a young person, seeds that eventually grew into a call to ministry.

To prepare for that call I attended Lee University (Cleveland, TN), and shortly thereafter, Biblical Seminary (Hatfield, PA). I began pastoral ministry right out of college in 2000 in a small Assemblies of God church plant, re-joining the Brethren in Christ when I began serving as an associate pastor at New Hope Church (Harrisburg, PA) from 2005-2010. From there my family and I made a brief trip to serve at The Meeting House (Toronto, ON) from 2010-2011, after which I began serving as senior pastor at Lancaster Brethren in Christ where I continue to serve.



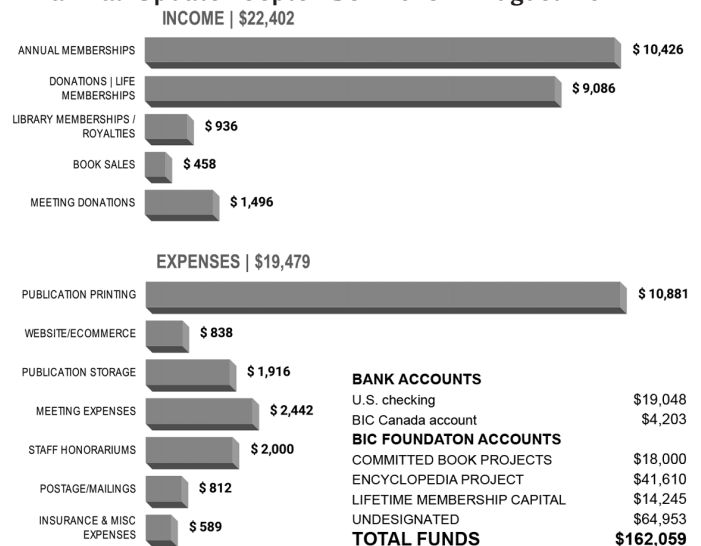
I'm a theological mutt. The Brethren in Christ theological tradition is made of several streams, and so is my theological background. Lee University is Pentecostal, Biblical Seminary is Reformed, and Portland Seminary is Quaker. My doctoral work at Portland Seminary focused on spiritual formation in the local congregation. I have a deep love for the Church, and an affinity for the Brethren in Christ.

I hope my work for the Historical Society can serve our collective life together, not only reflecting on the past and recording what is important for future generations, but also shaping the conversation of our current moment.

Treasurer's Report

Our total funds are held in three primary locations: our US checking account, the Be in Christ Church in Canada (for Canadian membership payments), and our investment account with the Brethren in Christ Foundation, with some of those investments being designated for specific uses. **Committed Book Projects** include monies given or designated for specific book printing project(s), including an upcoming biography of E. Morris and Leone Sider. The **Encyclopedia Project** money was given to develop a searchable database of Brethren in Christ history (under review as to its feasibility), and the **Lifetime Membership Capital** is held with the plan that the interest generated will pay the yearly membership fees for Lifetime members. Lastly, **Undesignated** funds are available to develop and commission upcoming projects, which currently include an updated history of the Brethren in Christ and book about the history of world missions. If you have questions or comments about our funds, please contact our treasurer, Karen Ulery, at treasurer@bic-history.org.

Financial Update: September 2023 - August 2024



News and Notes

From the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives

Tidbits discovered while searching the Archives for something else

A 1902 article in The Kansas City Star with the byline "Abilene, Kas., Mar. 18," was titled "A Thrifty Kansas Sect: The Quaker-like River Brethren Are Prosperous." Several paragraphs into the news article, the unknown reporter writes:

In the history of the church in this state, there has been but one dissenting effort and that was the "Firebrand" movement of three years ago. B.H. Irwin, an evangelist, came here and held meetings in the churches of the sect. He attacked the methods of the brethren. He was turned out of the churches, but held meetings at the homes of members and secured a following of several scores of the older members of the community. These he held in an almost fanatical movement for several months until the neighbors, becoming weary of the meetings, gave him warning to leave. This he did, but returned with some assistants and held tent meetings.

One night the neighbors ducked [dunked] three of his assistants in a stock trough, tore down the tent and would have tarred and feathered Irwin had he not made his escape. None of the River Brethren had any hand in this, but they felt a satisfaction in seeing him dealt with.

While looking for information on the beginnings of Extension Churches in Tennessee, the following handwritten note was found in Rev. Elam Dohner's collection:

The tent for evangelistic meetings which we purchased for Kentucky was pitched for two extension points in Tenn. in the summer of 1954. The first was at DeRossett, with Edgar Giles being evangelist. The 2nd was in McMinnville, with Bishop Henry Schneider as evangelist. Both were well attended, and the seed planted for which we now have a church in each place.

At the same time as the DeRossett tent meeting, John Rosenberry was engaged in a "Big Tent" Crusade in Oak Ridge, Tenn., the U.S. Gov. atomic energy military base of 400,000 acres.... When interviewing the Provost Marshal, I was asked to give our tenets of beliefs.... When he came to the statement of the doctrine of Non-Resistance, he hesitated, re-read the caption aloud, then commented, "You may have something there. We have surely proved that war never settled anything."

Today, 30 years later [the note was written in the mid-1980s], the population of Oak Ridge has quadrupled and new acquaintances in the area are asking why we did not follow up with a BIC church in that area.

Responding in 1973 to a recent graduate from Messiah's history department, who had expressed in a letter his concern that Messiah College was losing its Anabaptist character, Dr. Carlton Wittlinger wrote:

While your concern for a better balance of theological ideology in administration and physical education is understandable (I share it), we must not forget that our service commitment is to a wide spectrum of evangelicals. There-

fore, a faculty in which the Anabaptist element is so prominent as to be overwhelming is not appropriate. If Anabaptism cannot stand upon its own feet amidst the heat of heterogeneous evangelical dialogue, it is not worth its salt. This must be a college where theological ideas confront and test each other; it must not be an Anabaptist enclave.

In a 1976 memo to three persons reviewing preliminary drafts of his denominational history, Dr. Wittlinger asks them to respond to his chapter 19, "Quest for a New Brethren in Christ Identity":

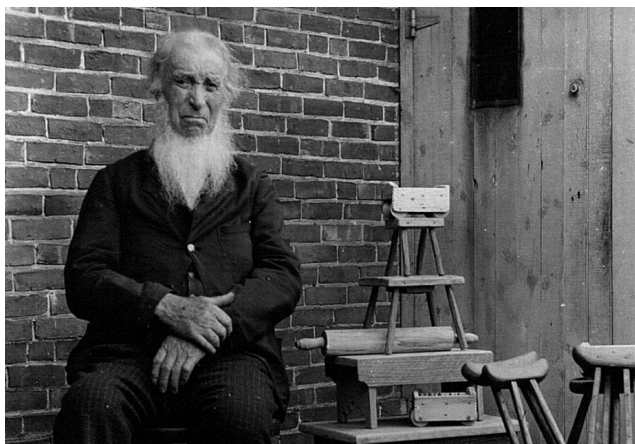
At the present I am working on the final revision of the chapter, and the concluding pages have been largely rewritten.... I solicit your opinions in response to the following questions:

- (1) Is this a true conception of the 1960s? If not, why not?
- (2) If it is, would there be better phrasing to present any part of it?

I am a historian rather than a public relations specialist; my concern is with the truth whether I or anyone else likes or dislikes it. On the other hand, I am not bound to tell the truth as offensively as possible. One of the readers of another chapter came upon some statistics (from General Conference minutes) which evidently aroused negative feelings, for I was encouraged to "bury them somewhere in an appendix." This procedure, of course, would reduce history to the level of propaganda.

Dr. Wittlinger did several interviews in preparation for writing about early views on separation and nonconformity. Among his notes on interviewing Asa Climenhaga:

His grandfather David [1828-1913] (see photo below) wore a four-in-hand tie while a member of the Bertie congregation in Ontario. Because he also wore a full beard, the members of the congregation evidently were unaware of the tie. When Asa put on a tie in college, the Bertie officials considered disfellowshipping him. Then Peter Climenhaga, Asa's father, pointed out that they would also have to disfellowship grandfather David. That settled the question; the officials promptly dropped the matter.





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Images from the Past

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



Two of the many treasures in the Brethren in Christ Archives are plat books of Dickinson County, Kansas, one published in 1909 and the other in 1921. Donated to the Archives by Jane Zercher Stauffer (and originally owned by Jane's maternal grandfather, Jesse E. Brechbill), these plat books contain two dozen plat maps, each one displaying a township in Dickinson County, where many Brethren in Christ families settled in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

The image to the left shows a portion of the 1921 plat map of Hayes Township, situated a few miles northeast of Abilene. On it you can see Brethren in Christ family names—Bert, Brechbill, and Hoover—written on the parcels of land they owned. By comparing this 1921 map to the one published in 1909, we can see how Brethren in Christ families sold their land to other Brethren in Christ families or passed it along to children in the next generation.

Also of note are symbols denoting a church and cemetery on a corner of A. T. Hoover's parcel. This was the Bethel Brethren in Christ Church, built in 1887 on land donated by Anna H. Bert. In 1894, Bethel Church hosted the denomination's annual General Conference, the conference at which Rhoda Lee made her impassioned plea for the Brethren in Christ to engage in international missions. Although the Bethel Church building no longer exists, about eighty Brethren in Christ men and women gathered at the site in 2022 to pray that the denomination's mission work would continue to flourish.

Next time you're in the Archives, ask for these plat books and also a copy of the August 1991 *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, in which Wilma I. Musser chronicles the history of the early Kansas Brethren in Christ churches. Together they'll tell a great story.

— David Weaver-Zercher