



PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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"History Matters" is published three times a year by the Brethren in Christ Historical Society. No subscription charge. Comments, ideas, article suggestions, and letters about "History Matters" may be directed to the Editor:

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Historical Society Moves Into the Future

by Joshua Nolt, executive director

In a recent conversation with a Brethren in Christ bishop, I was asked, "Do you see the journal taking the role of the *Evangelical Visitor*?" His question came about as I shared with him, and others, about my hopes for the Brethren in Christ Historical Society to contribute to robust and healthy conversation in our denomination as we learn from our past and contribute to our current life together. During its more than one hundred years of publication, the *Evangelical Visitor* fulfilled that conversational role in our church family. As we look forward to this next season of the life of the Historical Society, my hope is that we, as a Society, can pick up on this conversational work.

How will we do this? Not by doing anything new, per se, but by doing things differently. Our hope is to pull together conversations that are being held by smaller or regionalized groups and share them with the broader Brethren in Christ family.

For example, did you know that three times a year a small group of people gather online to discuss theological issues? This group is called the Theological Study Forum. You might have come across the fruit of this group as you've read some of the papers by the presenters that were published in *Brethren in Christ History and Life*. Or, did you know that two Brethren in Christ pastors host a monthly podcast called "BIC Life"? Both pastors are newer to the Brethren in Christ and explore issues of Brethren in Christ identity, among other things. These ef-

forts are in addition to our own publications and events and our partnership with Zambian Christian University.

Our hope is to bring these smaller conversations to a wider audience of the Brethren in Christ in the US and beyond in order to be a resource for local churches and leaders. This is in the spirit of one of the original conceivers of the Historical Society, Martin Schrag, who envisioned that such an organization could not only "promote the study of the history of the Brotherhood" but also could "assist the active work of the church."

A simple next step will be a new Historical Society monthly email that will communicate upcoming publications and events, both online and in person. This monthly email will be the main form of communication to connect you with other content and conversation from the Historical Society. We are currently working to collect emails from those who are interested in learning about what's happening. Even if you're not a member of the Historical Society, we invite you to submit your email address using the QR code or emailing Karen Ulery, our treasurer and new administrative coordinator at treasurer@bic-history.org.



Our Anabaptist stream invites us into rich community with one another, and we hope as the work of the Society moves forward we can play a role in contributing to that community conversation.

Mark Your Calendars!

Join us on Sunday, June 1, 2025, at 3:00 p.m. for the **Annual Heritage Service** at the Ringgold Meetinghouse, 14426 Misty Meadow Rd., Smithburg, MD 21783. This year, 2025, marks the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Anabaptist movement. The Brethren in Christ Church emerged out of the Anabaptist movement more than 250 years later. Joshua Nolt, senior pastor of the Lancaster (PA) Brethren in Christ Church and the Historical Society's new executive director, will share about the Anabaptist practice

of a community hermeneutic (method for studying and interpreting the Bible).

The **2025 Annual Meeting** will take place on Saturday, October 4, at 12:00 p.m. at the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church (note the new time). This year's Annual Meeting is happening during Homecoming Weekend at Messiah University. This is appropriate as we will be celebrating the release of Devin Manzullo-Thomas's new biography of E. Morris and Leone Sider. Morris spent his professional career at Messiah and served as the university and denominational archivist for

many years. A catered meal will be provided at the Grantham Church, including the tradition of homemade pies for dessert. The program will honor Morris's life as a storyteller (see page 2). Copies of the biography will be available. Following the meeting, all are invited to the open house being held during Messiah University's Homecoming at the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives. Watch for more information about how to register for the annual meeting in the Summer 2025 edition of this newsletter or on our website.

Historical Society to Publish Sider Biography

This fall, the Brethren in Christ Historical Society will publish *Storyteller: The Life and Times of E. Morris Sider*, a biography of the foremost historian of the Brethren in Christ Church and one of the Society's founders. The biography describes Sider's family background as well as his work as a professor, archivist, administrator, author or editor of more than thirty books, and more. It emphasizes the important role of storytelling in Sider's ministry and the way he used stories to make Brethren in Christ history "come alive" for many readers.

Importantly, *Storyteller* is also a biography of Leone Sider, Morris's life partner of more than seventy years. Though not a public figure like her husband, Leone made possible Morris's ministry on behalf of the church. She was his constant conversation partner and a participant in the production of his historical work; she was the keeper of their home as well as the mother of their two daughters; and she was a gracious host and compassionate servant, caring for others in their home church, Grantham Brethren in Christ, and beyond.

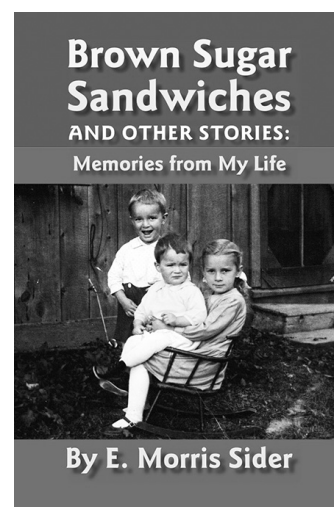
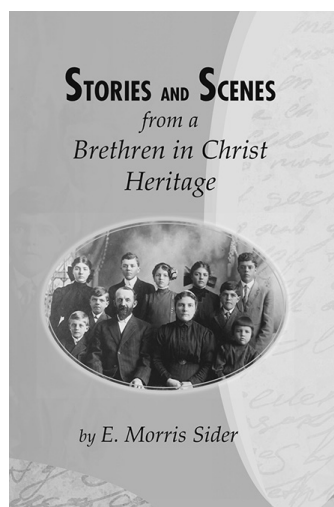
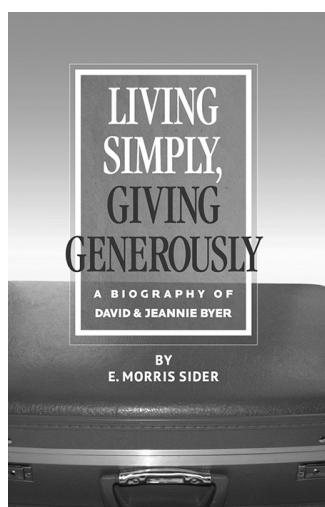
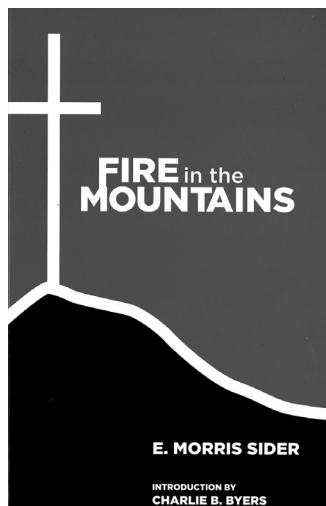
The biography was written by Devin Manzullo-Thomas,

Messiah University professor and director of the Sider Institute for Anabaptist, Pietist, and Wesleyan Studies, which was named in honor of Morris and Leone at its inception in 1999. "Writing *Storyteller* was an opportunity to pay tribute to two individuals whose lives both shaped and were shaped by the North American Brethren in Christ Church in significant ways," says Manzullo-Thomas. "It was a privilege to write this book."

The Historical Society will release the book during its 2025 annual meeting on October 4, 2025. Thanks to generous donors, all members of the Society will receive a copy of the biography. Additional copies will be available for sale.

Special Sale on Books by E. Morris Sider

The Historical Society has copies of many of Morris's books in our inventory, including the four listed below. As a special sale to readers of the newsletter, we are offering any of these books for \$5 US each, plus postage. Use the order form, or contact Harriet Sider Bicksler at editor@bic-history.org.



Book Order Form

- Fire in the Mountains: The Story of the Revival Movement in Central Pennsylvania* (2010): _____ (# of copies)
- Living Simply, Giving Generously: A Biography of David and Jeannie Byer* (2015): _____ (# of copies)
- Stories and Scenes from a Brethren in Christ Heritage* (2018): _____ (# of copies)
- Brown Sugar Sandwiches and Other Stories: Memories from My Life* (2021): _____ (# of copies)

Postage: \$4.65 for one book; add \$1 for each additional book. Postage rates to Canada are higher. Please send this form with your check made payable to the **Brethren in Christ Historical Society**

News and Notes

From the Brethren in Christ Historical Library & Archives

New Collection Offers Glimpse of Brethren in Christ Church Musical History

By Dwight W. Thomas*

Nelson Wingert's musical talents were widely known among Brethren in Christ in the United States and Canada, and now his personal papers—recently donated to the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives—will illuminate a significant period of the church's musical history for future researchers.

Wingert's collection includes various music books, sheet music, cassette tapes, and personal documents. Altogether, these materials document a productive artistic life. The youngest child and only son of Emma (Hess)

and Laban W. Wingert, a Pennsylvania bishop also known for his musical talent, Nelson was assisting his father at singing schools by age 19—activity that is documented in his materials. His tenor voice was featured in Messiah College recordings from the 1960s, under the direction of Prof. Earl Miller. His later collaboration with Ronald R. Sider and the Grantham Oratorio Society is also captured in various cassette recordings, as is his work as a featured soloist at Brethren in Christ weddings.

Wingert's role at Messiah Village also emerges from these materials. In addition to conducting the Messiah Village Singing Men and helping with Messiah Village worship music, he apparently participated in non-religious musical activities. One humorous document in the

collection is a set of spoof lyrics set to the tune of "My Favorite Things" from the musical *The Sound of Music*. It has been falsely claimed that this parody was sung by Julie Andrews herself, and while that's not true, it does seem that Wingert reprised the song for Village residents, no doubt to their great amusement.

In short, this collection of Nelson Wingert materials offers a glimpse into some of the artistic work of an avocational Brethren in Christ musician who lived during the latter half of the twentieth century. Thank you to the family for donating these items! They add yet more knowledge to our understanding of Brethren in Christ musical history during this period.

*Dwight W. Thomas is a retired music professor from Messiah University. He is the author of *Blest Be The Tie That Binds: Studies in Brethren in Christ Faith and Culture*



This book is on display in the Archives.

650 ATTEND SINGING SCHOOL RALLY HERE

Approximately 650 persons from a 140-mile radius of Chambersburg attended a singing school rally held at the Central Junior High School Saturday evening.

The rally, conducted along the lines of singing schools which once flourished in rural areas of Franklin County, was termed a success by Mrs. Lester Peckman, R. R. 4, who arranged the event. Her brother, Nelson Wingert, R. R. 2, Mechanicsburg, a student at Messiah College, Grantham, conducted the singing.

The rally consisted mainly of group singing. A Bible reading was given by Wilma Young and an octet, composed of Mary Wingert, Beula Knepper, Miriam Peckman, Emma Jane Hostetter, Paul Wingert, Avery Wingert, John Hostetter and Merle Wingert, sang.

A news article from the February 23, 1959 edition of the Chambersburg Public Opinion reporting that 650 people attended a "singing school rally" with Nelson Wingert, a student at Messiah College, conducting the singing.

THE THIRD ANNUAL
TIME & TUNE SINGING SCHOOL RALLY
TO BE HELD
SATURDAY, MARCH 11th — 7:30 P. M.
AT THE
CENTRAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
EAST QUEEN STREET, CHAMBERSBURG
EVERYBODY WELCOME!

An advertisement from the March 9, 1961 edition of the Chambersburg Public Opinion prompting the "Third Annual Time & Tune Singing School Rally."



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Images from the Past

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

When we think of Brethren in Christ “hubs” in North America, the US state of Oregon doesn’t typically come to mind. But Brethren in Christ have been active in the Beaver State since the 1940s. In that decade, several Brethren in Christ families from Upland, California, relocated to the Pacific Northwest, seeking economic opportunities. The need for a spiritual ministry was great, so the California church dispatched Benjamin and Priscilla Books as a pastoral couple. In 1945, they established a small mission congregation: Redwood Country Church, near Grants Pass, Oregon.

In the 1946 *Handbook of Missions*, Books reported on the progress of the new ministry in these words: “The church being located in a rural section, two miles from town, provides many opportunities. . . . Our people are not or have not been known here before and as a consequence our plainness raises a question



The Redwood Country Church building and congregation in the late 1940s.

in the minds of some. But to say the least we have an opportunity here to testify to the grace of God and to the simplicity in conduct and modesty in dress.”

To learn more about the early history of this congregation, see Mark Chamberlain’s biography of Benjamin and Priscilla Books in the August 2014 issue of *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.