

Brethren In Christ

HISTORY and LIFE

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FROM THE EDITOR

In recent years, the Brethren in Christ and the Old Order River Brethren (sometimes called Yorkers) have rediscovered each other. In the mid-nineteenth century some River Brethren left their group, largely because of more conservative views, and formed their own smaller fellowship, the Old Order River Brethren. Being determined in their conservatism, over the years they retained the River Brethren dress and practices that the parent body continually modified and changed. The late church historian and archivist Carlton O. Wittlinger maintained that one could understand nineteenth century Brethren in Christ by studying the Old Order River Brethren in the present. In fact, he obtained numerous clues to earlier Brethren in Christ history for his writing of *Quest for Piety and Obedience* by his association with the Old Order River Brethren. His moving among this group is one of the main reasons the two bodies are rediscovering each other. The movement of his Old Order River Brethren counterpart, Myron Dietz, among the Brethren in Christ is another reason for the rediscovery. Dietz's arti-

cle in this issue is the best up-to-date account available of the history and current life of this member group of the River Brethren family.

To all who knew him, George Whisler was a special person. He was not an eloquent preacher, nor a forceful personality, nor a great church statesman. Rather, he attracted attention by his courteous manners and gracious spirit. In his later, retirement years, he wrote of his boyhood days in Ohio. In the excerpt printed here, he gives us some good pictures of church life in Southern Ohio in the 1890's and the years immediately following, and provides us with some understanding of the shifts in church patterns taking place at that time.

In the history of Brethren in Christ missions, Japan is one of the later chapters. Doyle and Thelma Book have been part of that history, going to Japan shortly after the mission was founded by Peter and Mary Willms. Book's doctoral dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary is a detailed account of the Japan mission. Chapters one and three have been largely lifted from the dissertation to form a major article in this issue. The article covers the beginning of the Brethren in Christ mission in Japan, and concludes at a point just before the arrival of the Books.

Founded by Sarah Bert and Abram Myers in 1894, the Chicago mission was the oldest organized mission work in the Brethren in Christ Church, and one of the most fascinating. Several years ago Joel and Faithe Carlson deposited in the

denominational archives two photograph albums that cover the many years of the mission's life. From these albums are drawn the photos for the pictorial essay that is the final article of this issue.

In a perceptive review, John Yeatts examines the strengths and weaknesses of the two books currently being widely used in Brethren in Christ membership classes and elsewhere. His suggestion that revisions would make the books even more valuable deserves a sympathetic hearing.

THE OLD ORDER RIVER BRETHREN

*By Myron Dietz**

Lift up your hearts Immanuel's friends,
And taste the pleasure Jesus sends;
Let nothing cause you to delay,
But hasten on the good old way.

Our conflicts here, though great they be,
Shall not prevent our victory,
If we but watch and strive and pray,
Like soldiers on the good old way.

O good old way, how sweet thou art!
May none of us from thee depart;
But may our actions always say,
We're marching on the good old way.

Though Satan may his power employ,
Our peace and comfort to destroy;
Yet never fear, we'll gain the day,
And triumph on the good old way.

This hymn very aptly describes the sentiment of the Old Order River Brethren during the first half of the twentieth century. Other churches, members thought, were changing and getting "worldly," but we, as true soldiers of the cross, would march and ultimately triumph on the good old

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way!

The Old Order River Brethren, or Yorkers as they were sometimes called, came from the struggles within the River Brethren fellowship (later called Brethren in Christ) in the mid-nineteenth century. Matthias Brinser, a River Brethren preacher in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, was excommunicated in 1855 for building a meeting house; his followers organized as the United Zion's Children (later United Zion). About the same time, the River Brethren in York County, under the leadership of Bishop Jacob Strickler, Jr., and some Lancaster members, withdrew from the River Brethren because of differences with members in Donegal Township, and perhaps because the River Brethren had appeared to be somewhat liberal in seeming to hesitate in excommunicating those who became the United Zion's Children. A few years later, Christian Hoover in Franklin County was also expelled from the main body, the River Brethren. He and his sympathizers united with the York brethren.

The new movement took the name Old Order River Brethren. Jacob Strickler was made bishop in York County and Joseph Strickler in Lancaster County, the latter assisted by Jacob Hostetter.

Three main centers developed in York, Franklin and Lancaster Counties. The brethren were also part of the western movement, and so a small fellowship developed in Canton, Ohio, under the leadership of preacher Daniel Paulus. (Another minister by the name of John Hurst preached there,



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Myron Dietz and his daughter Anna Lois, seated in their barn at a love feast.

but we have no other knowledge of him.) Daniel Paulus was my great grandfather; he was also the grandfather of Effie Rohrer, Brethren in Christ missionary to India, now living at Messiah Village, and her brother Emmanuel Rohrer. In his later years Daniel Paulus left the fellowship and united with the Seventh Day Adventists. His wife Mary, who died in 1921, remained faithful to the Old Order River Brethren all her days. In Darke County, Ohio, a larger group formed, led by Bishop Henry Etter. This Ohio fellowship was crippled by a later (Keller) division in 1930 and never recovered. Thus with the death of Bishop Jacob Etter in 1978, the community literally became extinct. Only two members are left in Ohio.

Other Old Order River Brethren settled around Dallas Center, Iowa. They held their first love feast in 1876. Martin Nissley was ordained their first bishop in 1898. The Iowa Church suffered numerous setbacks. Several families withdrew in 1920 and later moved back to Pennsylvania. Also in the mid-1940's, several young couples left to join the Brethren in Christ Church. This was followed by the loss of Bishop John Keller who also went over to the Brethren in Christ. Then, too, the Iowa community was seriously crippled with the untimely death of Peter Keller (brother to John) in 1954.

But the Iowa group gained strength when some members from the Dunkard Brethren joined in the late 1960's. Also the revival in the East, sparked by the merger in 1969 of the Keller and Strickler groups (see later), gave the Iowa church a new burst of energy. Dallas Center, Iowa, is the only community outside Pennsylvania that now identifies with the Old Order River Brethren.

A few members also settled in Indiana, led by preacher David Grissinger. Today one member, a granddaughter, remains in Winona Lake. An Old Order River Brethren community also existed in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. It once had eighteen members but today preacher George Arms, his wife Sarah, and Esther Landis are the only survivors.

The Old Order River Brethren had steady growth and stability until the early twentieth century. Bishop Daniel Hawbaker reported in the early 1900's that there were eight

bishops, twenty-two ministers, and six hundred members. This included the church districts in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Iowa, with some members in Indiana, Canada, and a few scattered elsewhere.

In the early years of the twentieth century, as modern technology came on the scene, many brethren opposed new things. Bishop Peter Williams in York County preached that "these handy things will deceive you." The telephone was forbidden. The first member to have a telephone (a Rohrer in Ohio) was excommunicated. The telephone was finally allowed when it was discovered that all the members in Iowa had phones. Thus rather than cut off the entire church, the telephone was permitted. The auto then became a great center of controversy. In 1919 the annual council decreed that any brother buying an automobile automatically excommunicated himself.

Two years later, in 1921, Bishop Simon Musser, concerned about laxity in the body, led a sizable group in Lancaster County out of the church. A second division occurred in 1930 when in Iowa, Bishop Keller (the father of John and Peter noted earlier) was excommunicated for permitting the automobile among his members. Those who went with him were known as the Kellers. This group in 1941 installed Daniel Hawbaker, Jr., as their bishop in Pennsylvania.

Thus there were now three groups of Old Order River Brethren: the Kellers, the progressives who drove automobiles and allowed the radio; the Mussers, mainly located

in Lancaster County; and the main body, concentrated in the Lancaster-York area, and in Franklin County, where they were led by Bishop Daniel Hawbaker, Jr., and John Wenger.

A fourth group emerged in 1948 when preacher John Strickler withdrew from Simon Musser. There were differences in biblical interpretation and a personality clash between the two leaders. This new group, known as Stricklers, permitted the automobile in 1954 after the Mussers had allowed it three years earlier. The Mussers, however, required an all-black station wagon, while the Stricklers were not so rigid about color and type of vehicle.

During the 1950's the automobile issue again emerged in the original body, which still insisted that the members must drive the horse and buggy. This body was led by Bishop Christian Myers and Daniel Meyers in Franklin County, and Bishop Jacob Horst in Lancaster County. In Franklin County, the Lincoln Highway was the dividing line, with those north of the highway considered lower district and those south the upper district. Many of the youth in the upper district united with the Church of the Brethren and some with other fellowships such as Brethren in Christ, Mennonite and United Brethren. On the other hand, some who were satisfied in following Christ in the way of the elders would accept Christ, dress in the order of the church and attend worship services but were unable to be baptised because they drove an automobile. A few joined the group but most remained only converts, some as long as twenty years.

The problem was compounded when some younger members discontinued driving the teams and purchased automobiles. These brethren were not expelled as formerly but were denied communion. By 1960 Bishop Jacob Horst felt commanded by God to open the communion to the brethren who drove automobiles. The Franklin bishops then no longer communed with Brother Horst. Thus by 1963, a fifth group had emerged as preacher Seth Meyers and David Wenger from Franklin County joined Jacob Horst. In the next several years most of the converts were baptised into the new group. The team group was now greatly reduced in size, and in 1978 their two aged bishops, Daniel Meyers and Christian Meyers, died within twelve hours of each other. Their youngest member is in his mid-fifties and most are beyond seventy.

As the 1960's dawned, the Old Order River Brethren seemed headed for extinction. There were five small groups. Four of these drove automobiles but their leadership was not cooperating with each other, and there was only limited intermingling in the meetings. However, at love feast time, there was more worshipping together, but no exchange of ministers or communion.

Finally in 1967, John Strickler, Jr., deacon of the Strickler group, approached Bishop Joseph Brechbill of the Keller group about the possibility of a merger. Brother Brechbill hesitated a full year before he brought it before the spring council in 1968, at the home of George Meyers in Franklin County. The idea received a mixed but positive

response. A phone call was made that evening to Lancaster County and a meeting was scheduled the following week with the two groups of elders. This was the first meeting of this kind ever held, since it included the brethren in the East as well as the elders in the West, led by Bishop Jacob Etter from Ohio. The meetings went very smoothly and a joint meeting was held at Bishop Joseph Brechbill's home that evening, with both ministers sharing the service for the first time.

Gradually the two groups began to worship together. The first full joint meeting of the Keller and Strickler groups was held in Andrew Siegrist's barn in Lancaster County in June of 1968. Abram Knisely of the Strickler group remarked that it had been forty-one years since he had attended a meeting in that barn.

Many tears of rejoicing were shed in those meetings as a spirit of love and forgiveness seemed to prevail. Both groups felt a new blessing in sharing their worship of God together. The joyful union was consummated at Brother Norman Bricker's meeting on Sunday morning, March 8, 1969 when Bishop Jacob Etter from Ohio, representing the Kellers, and Bishop John Strickler of the Stricklers confirmed the merger with the kiss of charity and all the members from both groups present rose to signify their affirmation of the historic event. One brother, later ordained to the ministry, testified that the disciples certainly could not have had more joy at Pentecost than he experienced at that meeting.

Another brother who had been out of fellowship for approximately thirty years, felt so moved that he almost stood himself. He and his wife a few years later were received back into fellowship.

The first love feast was shared the following Saturday evening at the home of preacher John D. Sauder, with representatives from Ohio and Iowa participating. Some brethren, whose fellowship had been disrupted in 1921, were now fully united in 1969. One old sister kept saying that she wanted to live long enough to see this merger completed, and now her wish was granted.

The week before the love feast, three young people made confessions of faith. On the Sunday of the love feast, as the closing hymn, "Just as I am without one plea," was sung, a young man from Iowa, living in Brother John Sauder's home but not with the fellowship, was so moved by the hymn that he made a new commitment and decided now to walk in the faith of his fathers. This young brother, Philip Funk, today shares the ministry in the Iowa Church. The following day, Monday the 16th, my father, Enos Dietz, was buried and after the funeral another young girl in her teens accepted the Lord.

During the summer, conversions were very commonplace; a number of young married couples and young teenagers took the way of the cross and surrendered to Christ. By the spring of 1971, fourteen were baptized in the Chambersburg area and nine in the Lancaster area, which was the largest baptism in the church for many years. This revival spread into the

Horst group as well, and youth in that fellowship also were added to the church.

In the following years, several problems developed because the Kellers and the Stricklers had different understandings about church government and the role of the full brotherhood in church decision making. Just as in any marriage, so in any church merger there are problems to be solved. Thus after a time, certain tensions developed, but the spirit of brotherhood was strong enough to keep the newly united fellowship together.

In October, 1969, John Sauder was ordained to the office of bishop to succeed his father-in-law, John Strickler, Sr. He proved to be a source of inspiration and challenge to the brotherhood.

Efforts were made to establish a working relationship with both the Musser and the Jacob Horst fellowship. But Bishop Horst was succeeded by Brother Seth Meyers and these efforts were not successful. By the mid 1970's, however, Bishop Simon Musser was in his nineties and a successor was appointed--Elmer Shirk, a brother-in-law to John Sauder. John Sauder approached Elmer Shirk about working together, and Brother Shirk replied, "I'm for being together. I never favored the division in the first place."

Thus another historic joint meeting was held, this time in the barn of Jacob Conley, in June of 1977. The Musser group came to the service. The Musser ministers did not participate but a spirit of good will prevailed and soon all the

meetings were joint meetings with full sharing in testimony and the ministry. An official merger was held at Brother John Sauder's home on December 11, 1977--twenty-nine years to the day when the Mussers and Stricklers had separated in 1948. James Strickler had been born on the day of the sad split in 1948; on his twenty-ninth birthday he saw the joyful merger of the two fellowships. The first combined love feast was held in March of 1978. This occasion saw some taking communion for the first time together in fifty-one years.

The number of Old Order River Brethren groups has thus now been reduced to three. It is hoped that within the next few years full unity can be brought into this small brotherhood, whose three groups total about 320 members.

Many changes have occurred among the Old Order River Brethren. Outwardly the garb seems to have remarkably weathered the storms of modernity. Some of the youth who identify with the church no longer wear the traditional bonnet and shawl, and the young men adopt the broad-rimmed hat very slowly. Farming is still the principal vocation in Franklin County, but in Lancaster County less than fifty percent are engaged in agriculture. Teaching, nursing, and business are popular substitutes for farming.

Contrary to most conservative groups, education beyond high school has not been forbidden. In recent years, some brethren have obtained their M.A. degrees; most are involved in teaching. One young brother in Iowa is studying to be a medical doctor. Higher education presents some problems,

since a few were unable to assimilate their new learning with their faith and are no longer members. This, however, included only a few, and other factors were also involved.

One of the biggest changes that has occurred within the brotherhood in the past fifty years has been in the relationship of the youth to the church. Prior to 1920, very few young people were members. Most couples married and then began to seek the Lord as adults. Many were permanently lost to the church.

The Strickler group (1948) was the most successful of all in holding their young people within the church. John Strickler, Sr., took a keen interest in the young people and this paid large dividends. Most of the youth accepted Christ and were baptised in or shortly before their early teens. When the Stricklers and Kellers merged in 1969, the Strickler youth were a great asset in encouraging young people in the Keller group to follow Christ in the way of their fathers. Persons aged fifteen to thirty-five once a month had a meeting of spiritual sharing and praise to God, and those thirteen and older once a month had a social time together in which they played games in a more relaxed manner. These meetings had major benefits: the socials were times of fun and relaxation in which friends and others were invited, and some of those from the outside eventually joined the fellowship; the spiritual gatherings, limited to members or converts, helped to tie the youth together in strong bands of spiritual fraternity.

Before the merger, many young people among the Stricklers were single, because they were too closely related for marriage. The Keller youth and the Horst youth who united with the new merger were now available as marriage partners. Within a few years many marriages were performed and a baby boom unprecedented in Old Order River Brethren history has developed.

The large number of children has presented a new challenge to the brotherhood--that of education. Prior to 1950 most children terminated schooling after the primary grades. Some took correspondence courses and obtained their diplomas through state tests. Later a few began going to high school. The few who went to college did so before they joined church. In Lancaster County only two families sent their children to Christian day schools. However, in the past thirty years nearly all the children have attended or are attending Christian schools.

In Lancaster County a concern exists because most children are attending basically three schools, each with a different Christian emphasis. This could eventually create problems for the unity of the brotherhood. Thus a school council has been selected to present plans to the church for a possible school in the future. The council has as its goal a school which would be unique by not duplicating what other schools are doing. Since this will take much preparation, 1984 is the earliest possible opening date for a school of our own.

The Old Order River Brethren understanding of Christianity remains fairly similar to that held in the past, but a new terminology and a new vision are developing. In 1930, the thinking of the church would have been as follows. A young person raised in the tradition would discover a conflict within himself. As his teen years approached, he would feel the call of God to repentance, but the way of the church seemed too demanding and so he would decide to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Usually the youth dressed very worldly, went to amusements, and paid little attention to God. Some would choose a life's partner (called companion) who was reared in the same tradition. Others would marry outside the tradition, either because they were not concerned about future church involvement or because they wanted an excuse to forever disavow the Old Order River Brethren. The old brethren often testified of the warm feelings toward God they felt in their youth, but which were usually left un-nurtured.

Thus a coolness would develop, which was often shattered by a traumatic experience of one sort or another. This experience would bring them face to face with God. The initial surrender to God was termed "making a beginning". The men allowed their beards to grow (the beard was considered the image of God) and the sisters would begin wearing the covering and make some plain-cut dresses. Many sisters testified that they felt their prayers were not heard until they were willing to wear the veiling (Old Order River Brethren

terminology for covering). They also testified that their pride became a burden; thus they were happy to change to the plain garb.

This initial step brought good news to the church community. The new convert was encouraged to continue on in this low and humble way and to "obey the grace of God". To obey the grace of God was understood as obedience in all the Lord showed the Christian through the Holy Spirit.

The next step was to make restitution for sins committed against better knowledge. These confessions were called "the works of the forerunner John", in reference to the teaching on repentance of John the Baptist.

As the new convert made confessions to parents, relatives, and acquaintances, he or she often experienced heartfelt joys, which were called "blessings". Members often used the expression, "In every act of obedience I received a blessing". They would also say, "Just as far as I walked away from God, that far I had to return back again." The process of confession, contrition and restoration often took time, depending on the age of the individual and how reckless a life he or she had lived. Many testified that they had tried to live a moral life, but confessed that "morality was not Christianity." Again the phrase was used repeatedly, "I wasn't willing to confess my sins, and I stood and looked so long at a particular sin before I was willing to confess."

Some brethren made a second trip to a person to ask forgiveness when they did not feel peace after the first act

of confession. One brother actually returned to the same man six times before he felt fully at peace with that person. While some may say this was "works Christianity", the brethren made it plain that this was not salvation. Usually after they had begun the process of repentance, they came to a position where they felt themselves utterly lost and undone and called upon the Lord for salvation. They often received dramatic outpourings of the Holy Spirit and "passed from death unto life," and felt a new burst of joy and happiness.

After "the love of God was now shed abroad in their hearts", the convert would request baptism, and if accepted by the community would make solemn promises before God and man to renounce the world, the devil, and all perverted things, and live faithful until death. The convert would also promise to give and receive counsel. Baptism by trine immersion was a time of great joy. The person baptised would be greeted with the holy kiss (brother to brother, sister to sister) as he or she came to the shore.

New members were expected to share their experiences in the testimony meetings and tell how the Lord had led unerringly. The following is part of a hymn which displays much Old Order River Brethren feeling, and thus is much used in our meetings:

When I set out for glory,
I left the world behind;
Determined for a city
That's out of sight to find.

I left my worldly honors;
I left my worldly fame;

I left my young companions,
And with them my good name

The Old Order River Brethren stand within the Anabaptist tradition in all major doctrines: believer's baptism, repentance and conversion, justification by faith, nonconformity to the world, nonresistance, nonswearing of oaths, divine inspiration of the Scriptures, Christ's second coming, belief in the trinity, final judgment, and a new heaven and earth.

The Wesleyan Holiness movement was never accepted by the Old Order River Brethren. Sanctification was not taught as a second work of grace. The brethren believed in progressive sanctification by the Spirit's power in transforming lives gradually. The teaching of assurance of salvation was rejected for "the hope of salvation". In support of this position, Romans 8:24 was often quoted: "For by hope are ye saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, what doth he yet hope for?" The brethren considered that hope was the ultimate experience for the believer: we have been regenerated by Christ's forgiveness but we are in the wilderness of life and we need to trust a gracious God. We will only be certain of salvation when we have passed through judgment and are safe in heaven. To say, "I know I am saved," was proud and boastful.

About thirty years ago, however, this belief began to change in the Keller branch, which commenced to teach assurance based on the promises of God. The Mussers and the

Stricklers preached assurance somewhat earlier. Today all branches of the Old Order River Brethren teach assurance based on God's promises but conditioned by faithful obedience.

The worship service has undergone a change in emphasis but not much in structure. Traditionally the brethren met Saturday evening for a testimony service. Brethren and sisters who came from a distance were given supper in the evening and stayed overnight. As a boy I was glad to see the brethren come Saturday evening and to listen to their stories before and after supper. Then about 7 p.m. the evening meeting began. The bishop or elder in charge would announce a hymn such as the following:

Then let us at our work begin
To magnify our Saviour.
And let us know that we are His
In action and behaviour.
Let us dear Jesus, Thy way see,
And not one moment idle be.
O give us light and wisdom.

Two lines would be read and then sung on a meter tune. The slow singing with many slurs would help emphasize the words.

The bishop would then tell his experience from youth to conversion to the present time. He would then "give further liberty" and another elder would follow the same procedure and lead in prayer. There would be a second prayer, the Lord's Prayer. The rest of the evening would follow the same order with brethren and sisters sharing their life's pilgrimages. Sometimes a few would speak in Pennsylvania Dutch and at times they would shed tears or sob very loudly

as they told their stories. Each brother or sister would line a hymn before his or her testimony. After about two hours, the elder would close the meeting with another kneeling prayer, and a deacon would line a closing hymn, such as the following:

The day is past and gone,
The evening shades appear,
O may we all remember well
The night of death draws near.

We lay our garments by,
Upon our beds to rest;
So death will soon disrobe us all
Of what we here possess.

Sunday morning the congregation would begin to arrive, and as early as 8:30 a.m., after breakfast was eaten and dishes washed and dried, the experience meeting would begin. The people would arrive at different times, some coming as late as 10 a.m., some even later. Non-Old Order River Brethren friends would attend Sunday school first in their own church and then come to the meeting. At 10:00 or 10:30 a.m., the elder would indicate that it was now time to change the order of the service. A minister would arise, line a hymn, and make an opening to the preaching. He would read a Psalm or a short passage of Scripture and then give a short message and lead in prayer.

After the Lord's Prayer, the second speaker would stand to give the major address. He would often share with the congregation his feeling of unworthiness, and his inability to speak to the people of the great things of the Lord. After singing a hymn, he would read the text, which was

usually an entire chapter in the Bible. John 3 or 15, Matthew 7, Romans 12, and stories of the parables were favorite passages. The speaker would then explain the text and often bring his experience into the sermon. After preaching from twenty to forty-five minutes, he would conclude his sermon by asking an interest in the prayers of the brethren and wishing further liberty. The next brother might spend five or more minutes commenting on a hymn he had chosen. A very common practice among the ministers was to weave hymns whole or in part into their messages.

After a closing prayer and the announcements, the deacon would line a closing hymn, such as the following:

Brethren and sisters we must part,
And to our callings go;
But let us all keep one in heart,
While we remain below.

We may but meet a few times more,
Till we shall meet above,
Where pain and parting are no more,
In that bright world above.

After the meeting, a light meal of cheese, bologna, bread, pickles, cake or pie or cookies, and coffee would be served. The congregation then would visit together, with the last persons leaving in late afternoon.

The meetings today follow a similar format, although most congregations have discontinued the Saturday evening meetings. The testimonies today are much shorter and usually deal with a current issue, problem or victory. One congregation still follows the traditional pattern of members giving their pilgrimage stories in the testimony meeting. The

preaching will cover a much wider range of topics and many Scriptures will be covered or perhaps the entire sermon will center on one or two verses. The lining of hymns has been dropped in most congregations and some more contemporary tunes are used along with the slow meter singing. Until 1980, no congregation owned a meeting house, but the Williamson meeting house was purchased from the Mennonites and is used once or twice a month.

Some brethren, however, still voice strong opposition to a meeting house, not so much because it is a church building, but rather because of a feeling that the benefits of the house church fellowship should not be abandoned. Today, most people arrive at meeting before 9 a.m. The preaching begins about 10:30 and by 12 noon the meeting is concluded with the brother who sponsors the meeting selecting the closing hymn.

One interesting development has been the revival of the prayer meeting. Apparently the church had prayer meetings until about 1900. The prayer meeting was replaced at that time by the Saturday evening testimony service. As a boy I remember the Saturday evening meeting being called prayer meeting, but it was a testimony service. When the first merger occurred in 1969, the prayer meeting was reinstated, with as many as four prayer periods in one evening. How some of the older members would react to this innovation was not certain, since many people did not remember prayer meetings. After the first prayer meeting, an aged sister re-

marked, "This is just the way the brethren did when I was a little girl." I checked with another older sister who said she remembered a bishop saying that he (the bishop) did "not know how to conduct prayer meetings like Jake Keller did." Jake Keller, York County bishop, died about 1910 at an advanced age. It seems that with his death the prayer meeting fell into decline and was forgotten.

The highlight of the church year is the love feast. At deacon Elias Good's farm in about 1897 near Manchester, Pennsylvania, several thousand were said to have been present and the brethren had preaching at three separate places on the premises. At my grandfather's love feast in 1913 near Wrightsville, Pennsylvania, 1300 people were reportedly fed for supper on Wednesday evening. Originally the brethren had love feasts on the weekends but the crowds grew so large that they changed to midweek meetings. Monday was preparation day, when the beef was killed, the barn was cleaned out, and benches set. The women filled chaff bags with straw for sleeping and prepared the house. Members brought fruit, red beets and cookies. In the afternoon the sisters prepared the unleavened bread for communion. Dinner was a delicious meal of potatoes, vegetables, homemade bread, fried liver, meat-loaf, and lots of fruit and cakes.

The meeting began on Wednesday morning with the entire morning devoted to testimony. At noon the sisters served a meal usually of delicious rice soup, sliced beef, coffee and mint tea, cookies and fruits. The meeting resumed about

1:30 p.m. Usually a visiting bishop would read and preach from Ephesians 4. Another bishop would read I. Corinthians 11. The prayer veiling and beard would usually be discussed and a stern warning given against eating and drinking the Lord's supper unworthily. After the preaching, time would again be given for testimony. By 4:30 p.m. the meeting was adjourned. More people gathered and hundreds were fed for supper.

After supper the meeting resumed. The long tables in the barn were covered with white cloths. The long-bearded brethren sat on one side of the gunwall (center partition on the barn floor) and the white-capped, pointed-caped sisters on the other. Friends and youth sat on straight benches on two extra barnfloors, usually one of which was partially filled with hay, with boards placed on the hay for seats.

The evening service began with the reading of John 13:1-17, which provided support for feet washing. Basins of water were brought in and the feet washing began, accompanied by admonition to each other. The second sermon, based on John 19, was on Christ's crucifixion. Then the bishop invited all the brethren and sisters to rise around the tables, and the kiss of charity was passed from brother to brother and sister to sister, with the words "beloved brother or beloved sister". When this was completed, the unleavened bread was blessed and passed around the tables. The words, "Beloved brother (sister) this bread which we break is the communion of the body of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,"

were spoken as brother (sister) broke bread with brother (sister). Appropriate hymns were sung while this occurred. When all had received bread, they sat down to eat it. The cup was blessed and passed from person to person. After a closing prayer and a hymn, they went out into the night.

Early Thursday morning those in charge of the food began cooking the meat in an open kettle. Love feast breakfast consisted of delicious meat pieces and gravy, fruit, meadow tea, and cookies. Before breakfast at 6:30, those assembled met in the barn for morning worship and then went to the tables for breakfast.

As the service began, the converts were placed in the front row before the ministers. During the experience meeting, the converts were given the privilege to tell how they were progressing in their Christian pilgrimage. After they were finished, an invitation to speak for the Lord was given to those who had never done so before. This was the only time a formal invitation was given for sinners to respond to the gospel message. The rest of the morning included several sermons with admonitions to repentance, conversion, and continuing faithful to the end.

After dinner at noon, the brethren and sisters worked together to wash the love feast dishes and pack them away in the boxes to be used two years later. The reason for the two year interval was that each district had services every other year; thus the next year the love feast would be in another district. As a young boy, I enjoyed going to the

preparation day and helping the brethren put away the love feast dishes.

Today the love feast follows similar forms except that preparation day is on a Friday and the services are over the weekend. Each of the three groups have an annual love feast, usually in late May or early June. The united group has two other love feasts, one in March and the other in September. The March love feast is held in a house.

Two other services of interest are the harvest meeting and the council meeting. The harvest meeting is usually held on a Saturday afternoon in August. Traditionally the host family prepared for those who came from a distance a huge dinner of cold ham, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, noodles, corn, fruit, red beets or pickles, and cake. They also gave a cold lunch for supper for everyone. The Saturday evening and Sunday morning meetings were held in another residence. Usually Ruth 2 or Deuteronomy 6 were the key Scriptures read, and the God who gave bounteous harvests was abundantly praised. Emphasis was placed on seedtime and harvest and the necessity of adequate preparation for the eternal harvest.

Today in the harvest meeting, a wider range of Scripture is touched on. The Saturday noon meal has been eliminated and one family hosts the Saturday afternoon and the Sunday morning meeting. Not all districts retain the Saturday evening meeting.

The annual council, traditionally held on a Monday

morning, is now usually held on Saturday in mid-March. The traditional meeting began with a Saturday evening experience meeting, and a Sunday morning and Sunday evening preaching service. This was the only Sunday evening service throughout the year. The young people would bring their dates to this meeting.

On Monday morning the council meeting would begin with a sermon on Phillipians 2. Several ministers would speak and then the meeting was open for any problem or question that existed in the brotherhood. Many issues were discussed and sometimes conflicts came out into the open. After a discussion the oldest bishop usually gave the final verdict. Over the last fifty years, the possession of automobiles was discussed frequently, as were such issues as voting, insurance, electricity, education, nonresistance, and the mustache. Usually sisters were expected to be silent but the order was not always observed. The final item of business was the place and date for the spring love feast.

Today the council is held on Saturday. One group meets Saturday morning and afternoon, while the others meet only on a Saturday afternoon. Traditionally the deacon brethren visited each home between council and love feast. The visit was a time for members to declare if they were still minded to travel in harmony on the way. Members often expressed a desire in these visits to share in the spring love feast. Today most deacon visits are before the council. In the united group, these visits no longer involve a testi-

mony; the time is used to resolve issues and to suggest topics for the annual council.

The ministers and deacons meet a day before council to share together on the matters to be discussed the following day. In the united group, Phillipians 2 is read and discussed in the morning and Romans 12 in the afternoon. Certain topics are discussed in sermon form by the ministry; time is then given for questions and further discussion. In matters where no decision is reached, the "servant body" (ministers and deacons) are expected to discuss the matter further and to propose a solution to the brotherhood.

Many issues face the Old Order River Brethren. Television is not allowed; a member in good standing would not own a set. The youth do not follow all the dress traditions of the elders. This creates a fear among some brethren that we will drift away from our outward separation and become worldly.

In some issues, individual conscience is allowed to decide. Such issues include the type and color of the auto, the possession of a radio and tape recorder, and higher education. Wide differences of opinion exist on these issues. A Bible study was begun a few years ago; this has been a controversial issue; some brethren are very sympathetic to the idea while others are more cautious or oppose it. The Bible study provides an opportunity for both ordained and unordained brethren to share in the teaching. Some very stimulating discussions have been held by the group.

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The Old Order River Brethren attitude toward missions is also undergoing change. Fifty years ago most brethren opposed missions because they believed that the great commission was fulfilled by the Apostles. Plain churches that support missions, they maintained, lost their plainness. One minister said that the early church was the time to propagate the gospel, and that today we need to preserve the gospel. The feeling was widespread that the Holy Spirit was all over the world and would convict sinners. If they would repent and seek God, they could be saved without the help of missions. The brethren considered that the gospel had been in these other lands and was lost. They did not believe the Lord ordered them to go again to these foreign countries.

Many brethren now consider that the great commission is a command for all times. Many youth read stories of great missionaries, and they feel a call to service which involves missions. About twenty years ago the brethren began to actively cooperate with the Mennonite Central Committee in providing food for the hungry. Two Old Order River Brethren are serving on the board of Gospel Light Mission (based in Wilmont, Ohio) which carries on work in Haiti. Three years ago several of the brethren made a trip to Haiti to help teach the gospel and church history. Each year since then some of the brethren have traveled to Haiti with the Gospel Light Mission. A native Haitian pastor addressed Old Order River Brethren meetings in the summer of 1982 in Franklin and Lancaster Counties. The church is giving support to a

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native Haitian at Hesston College who is gaining skills that will be helpful on his return to his native land.

Several groups have been to Mexico to aid Lois Raser in her work with the children. This past winter two bishops also traveled to Mexico to share in spiritual and physical labors. Recently one of these bishops preached in Haiti.

This summer a commissioning service was held in York County for a young sister, Anna Lois Dietz, who was going to Haiti on a short term volunteer basis. The older members surprised this young sister with their overwhelming show of support; their strong affirmation strengthened her appreciation for the fellowship. Sister Bonnie Helm (now Mrs. Dwaine Brechbill), several years ago spent a full year in voluntary service in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, under Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions. But the church is approaching missions cautiously; we do not want to move too rapidly lest we disturb our own foundations.

On various occasions, visiting college groups attend the meetings and share in question and answer periods afterward. Several all-Jewish groups have also been present at meetings. Individual members are sensing a greater need to communicate their faith with others who are seeking meaning in their lives.

Many Old Order River Brethren once considered that theirs was the only way. When a young brother made a beginning in 1951, he was told by an elder: "There used to be

many who used to believe this was the only way. There are still those who feel this way". One aged sister referred to this way as "the way of all ways". This attitude has changed greatly. Members will attend other services more readily, and ministers are ready to go elsewhere to preach the gospel.

While visiting non-Old Order River Brethren ministers so far usually speak only in special meetings, the testimony service is open to Christians from outside the group to share in praise to God. A spirit of brotherhood is growing, a recognition that we have no monopoly on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The late Carlton O. Wittlinger addressed the Lancaster fellowship some fifteen years ago. He said to us that we are about fifty years behind the Brethren in Christ. He advised us to examine closely the path the Brethren in Christ have taken. If we do not want to take the same route, there is still time for us to change direction. Brother Wittlinger was deeply loved and highly respected by many in our group. He visited our fellowship with a class from Messiah College a month before his death. In the afternoon fellowship time, he was asked his candid opinion of the Old Order River Brethren. After some hesitation he said that he did not believe that the Old Order River Brethren were really facing up to the times in which they lived. The Old Order River Brethren, as well as the Brethren in Christ, feel keenly the loss of this dear brother and servant of the Lord.

The question is asked: Will the Old Order River Brethren survive into the twenty-first century if the Lord tarries? The answer is "yes". Change is inevitable and we have the choice whether by the grace of God we will be able to direct the change into constructive avenues of creative discipleship, or whether we will succumb to pressures of the times and be tossed to and fro by the prevailing winds of modernity and liberalism.

Our services are open to visitors and if any of the readers of this journal care to worship with us, you are welcome.

SCENES OF CHURCH LIFE IN THE 1890'S: REMINISCENCES OF
GEORGE E. WHISLER

George Whisler was born in 1880 in Ashland County, Ohio. At the age of twenty-one, he became active in the ministry of the local Brethren in Christ congregation (Chestnut Grove). He later held pastorates in Abilene, Buffalo, and Saskatchewan. After his retirement from the ministry in 1952, he compiled a two-part history of the Samuel Whisler family. The second part begins with fourteen closely typed pages of Whisler's memories of his boyhood and adolescent days in Ohio. These memories provide us with some good pictures of church life in the 1890's. What follows are selections (with some editing) from this part of the family history.*

Saturday evening and Sunday church services were held at Chestnut Grove. On these occasions, our home would become "A House of Hospitality". When the church services were at Pleasant Grove, the homes of the church officials, Deacon

*A copy of George Whisler's family history was recently acquired by the Archives of the Brethren in Christ Church and Messiah College through the courtesy of Clark S. Whistler and Mary Rosselli.

Jacob Hoover, Elder B. F. Hoover, and John Kohler, would be the "Houses of Hospitality". These were occasions of mutual enjoyment, although we wonder now how our mothers stood up so courageously under the strain of it.

The fact that Pa Whisler was a warm-hearted, hospitable "Preacher Man" who was not ashamed of his family, were factors conducive to giving his children the pleasures and the advantages of acquaintance with the diversified types of his minister friends. One never-to-be-forgotten weekend for the people of the Chestnut Grove community was when the Rev. Jacob Frederick Eisenhower of Abilene, Kansas, was guest speaker at the church services. How differently would everyone have behaved that day had we known that back in the preacher's home in Abilene was his little toddler grandson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, destined to become a distinguished Military General, a household word all over the globe, and ultimately the President of the United States.

Of course, Brother Eisenhower would be the Whisler family's after-church guest, probably to repay a visit Brother Whisler had paid him when only a few years ago, while on a home-seeker's excursion in western Kansas, he stopped over in Abilene to visit his Zook cousins and his minister friends.

It was a mutual pleasure that the guest and his hostess could converse in German. Mother suggested to him the name of a refined spinster in the congregation, who she thought would make a good housekeeper for a man who was look-

ing for one. Our guest was at this time in his middle sixties, a widower. He was a good looking, well-groomed, elderly man, who kept his clothes well dusted and his boots shined. This may have prompted Mother's suggestion, but the fact that he lived single many years and never married again was his motive for personal tidiness.

It is easy to imagine some of the subjects of conversation between these preacher brothers that day. For one thing, about this time Father had been elected to the superintendency of the newly organized Chestnut Grove Sunday school, and he would be eagerly looking for counsel in matters pertaining to the discharge of his office. Then too, rumors were coming from the West that an unusual wave of spiritual revival was being experienced by the Brethren in Christ churches in Kansas. Father would undoubtedly make sincere inquiries as to the cause and effect of this, and we can imagine him saying, "We have dire need of a spiritual revival here, too."

[The author recalls taking Jacob Eisenhower in the family's top buggy to visit various families in the church, including those of Nathan Steigerwald and Mose Gipes. Mrs. Gipes did not seem to recognize Jacob Eisenhower and questioned the propriety of visitors arriving on a wash day.]

Our parents and their church contemporaries were in their thinking on church policy passing through a transitional period. Prior to this day, they had no Sunday school. The church services were held Saturday evenings and Sunday,

alternately at two churches [Chestnut Grove and Pleasant Grove]. The big event of the year to all, young and old, was the annual Spring Barn Love Feast, held on a Saturday and Sunday, late in May or early in June. Also, after the harvest was all gathered into the barn and before it was thrashed, a "Harvest Home" Service was held on a Saturday afternoon on a vacant barn floor. Of all traditional practices, this was a most suitable one.

All the members of the church who had bank barns and large houses took turns in entertaining the Spring Love Feast. Besides the very large attendance by local people, delegations of church folk came from other districts--from Wayne and Stark Counties, from Southern Ohio, and from Northern Indiana. Among these visitors there would generally be at least two or three ministers who would serve as guest speakers.

For several weeks in advance of the Love Feast, all members of the hostess family would have additional jobs to do, getting everything in first class order for the approaching great event. The fences around the premises, the several out-buildings, the trunks of fruit trees, even the cobble stones that garnished the flower beds and the graveled walks would get a fresh white-washing. The barn and barnyard would necessarily undergo more than an ordinary renovation. In the house, the "get-ready" duties would be considerably modified, because the general spring cleaning had recently been done.

The Thursday before the big meeting would be publicly announced as "Preparation Day". The able-bodied of the church

group would come in goodly number, making a day of fellowship and social enjoyment of what otherwise would have been a grievous burden. Young people filled the ticks and pillow bolsters with straw from the straw stack, and helped to make floor beds on all the available space in the house.

On Friday, the day before the meeting, our mothers and their daughters baked bread, snitz pies, and cookies in great quantities. There were other matters about which it was necessary to have a definite understanding. Unless some brother had volunteered to feed and have ready a fatted steer, the deacon brethren would need to look around to find such a creature.

There necessarily was some understanding as to who would meet the passenger trains. There must be provision for hostelers to unhitch, stable, and feed the horses of the brethren who came from a distance, and also to direct the general traffic to safe hitching places. Usually the sons of mature years who were familiar with the premises would serve as Chiefs of the Hostelters. At Kohler's, it would be Jacob and John, at Whisler's, David and Albert, at Roland's, Curtis and his choice of helpers, and of course at Bishop Hoover's, Marion and Dan.

The general plan for serving was simplified as much as possible. Everything was previously prepared for serving meals short-order, excepting hot coffee and soup at the Saturday supper. We were directed to take our places orderly at the tables, and we always sang a verse of grateful praise

and gave thanks before eating. At the end of the meal, we would again sing the verse of a hymn, and give thanks before leaving the table.

The barns presented a picture of awe-inspiring beauty when, during the twilight evening hours, our Christian parents with those of common faith gathered around two long tables, draped in white and adorned with flickering tallow candles. They observed the ordinance of feet washing and the Holy Communion as nearly as they could in Apostolic order, according to their understanding. Large crowds of spectators sat in the adjoining spaces of the barn, and stood around the open barn doors in the dim light of lanterns.

The 1896 meeting at B. F. Hoover's and the one in the following spring at Frank Hershey's farm were the last of the barn meetings in our community, except for the one held in connection with General Conference at Pavonia in 1915. From now on the barn meetings were transferred to the meeting houses that had recently been constructed. Our parents considered that the services could be more conveniently conducted in the meeting houses.

There was another consideration in this connection. The novelty of Saturday night barn meetings was increasingly drawing larger crowds of curious spectators, some of whom were rowdies whose behavior at times was so bad that unless a police force was there to maintain order, very unexpected things might happen. An example of this was an occasion at Smithville, when a young woman was fatally shot as she re-

turned home with a group of young people from a Barn meeting conducted by the Church of the Brethren. That was the last such meeting for that community, and undoubtedly its influence helped in the decision to discontinue ours.

A similar situation faced our preacher fathers in their traditional Saturday night church service. Since there was little going on in those days to engage the time and interest of young people over weekends, the Saturday evening church services, in which Benjamin Hoover, Daniel Kohler, and Samuel Whisler did the preaching, drew large crowds of young people, many of whom were their own sons and daughters. It seemed a very suitable place where "Jim" could meet "Joan". This presented a social situation characteristic of the horse and buggy days, and one that gave the preachers occasion to wonder whether the methods they were using were best adapted to render the Christian service which was their objective.

Furthermore, these Saturday night church services were also drawing groups of ruffians, sometimes intoxicated, who would sit in the back seats and spit tobacco juice on the floor, creating a gagging stench for the janitor whose duty it was to make the place clean and respectable for the worshippers at the Sunday morning service. At the dismissal of one evening service, a fellow notorious for his profanity, nearly got outside the door when he gave a whoop at the top of his voice, "Hurrah for Jeff Davis!" [the leader of the South in the Civil War]. The echo had hardly resounded when Preacher Sam Whisler caught the offender by the arm, reminding him of his

whereabouts and of the seriousness of his misdemeanor. It was noticeable ever after that this fellow very carefully guarded his speech when he knew Sam Whisler was within hearing distance.

The Saturday evening service also proved to be an occasion where boys could meet other boys, and in some cases, as in mine, the opportunity was provided for getting so well acquainted that at first what was a casual acquaintanceship grew to be a warm friendship. I was always very happy to have Emerson Kohler as my guest. I could feel at perfect ease in bringing him into the home, without the least concern that my sister might embarrass me by acting the tomboy. And there was no occasion to fear that I might be subjected to listening to obscene stories, or profane or vulgar language from a friend.

Younger than most of the boys, Emerson had the distinction of owning a rubber-tired top-buggy and a lightweight good trotter as a driver. On an Easter Sunday night Emerson drove my sister Harriet, Agnes Roland and me to a Communion Service at [the Church of the Brethren] Ashland College. In Emerson's nifty outfit we drove on another occasion to Massillon for a weekend with our friends, Dreve, Frank, and Archie Smith, whose home was the meeting place of a Barn Love Feast. The forty mile ride on a fair Friday afternoon was a glorious outing for two lads, neither of whom had ever been very far away from home before. The highlight of this trip was a half-way stop on the Sunday afternoon return trip, at the Ephraim Horst country home near Smithville. We had met this

very fine elderly gentleman and his two daughters, Effie and Lucy, at the meeting we attended, and we accepted their very generous invitation to stop over with them for a night's rest on our way home. [George Whisler later married Effie.]

In the winter months of 1895-96 father and his associate ministers reaped a great harvest from their years of prayerful seed-sowing. According to previous plans, a series of revival meetings was held in December in the Pleasant Grove church. Bishop John H. Smith of Smithville served as evangelist. Twelve or fifteen young people responded to the gospel message and were given the Right Hand of Fellowship by their happy parents on the closing night of the service. I was one of this group.

Later in the winter, nightly meetings were held at Chestnut Grove under the ministry of Bishop John A. Stump of Nappanee, Indiana. By the close of this second meeting, the number of converts had reached more than fifty. Again on the last night of the meeting, those who had professed made confession of faith by going forward to receive the Right Hand of Fellowship.

During a service late in the week, Frank Hershey, who, though not a member of the church, was serving as Sunday school superintendent, got up in the testimony meeting and declared his readiness to receive baptism if the church was ready to receive him upon the confession of his faith. Immediately his oldest daughter Mirty, who was the recognized leader among the young people, decided to accompany her father

in baptism. On the following Sunday winter day, these two were baptized in the Keever creek.

Only a week or two later in the same series of meetings, the church received the applications of thirteen young people who also wanted to be baptized. The most unique feature of the preparatory service at the church was when Mark Peters got up and raised the question as to the fitness of these young people to take this very important step.* I do not remember what objections were raised, or whether or not the congregation sung him down. I only remember that the order of service continued. When we were led for baptism to the cold waters of Whisler's Creek, there was Mark Peters in the willows in his broad brimmed hat, taking in the ceremony, and wondering about the propriety of what he saw.

The two officiating ministers were Bishops B. F. Hoover and John A. Stump. A fallen log lying across the pool from shore to shore aided the ministers in keeping to their side without interference with each other's movements. After the ceremony, we were each wrapped in blankets and helped into the bob-sleds that were waiting to take us home for a change of garments. Not one of us suffered any bad effects from the exposure.

As I remember, there were no high-pressure emotional appeals in these revival meetings. A simple gospel message,

*This is obviously a reference to the traditional view of the church that conversion and baptism should be experiences for adults, not children. This view was, at this time, under attack, as Whisler's account suggests.

closing with the tender pleadings of warm-hearted ministers, readily brought penitents to bow at the mourner's bench.

In these revivals, Bishop Hoover and Father were very happy. The revivals broke up a drinking ring about which we used to hear too much, and some of the men became deacons and leaders in the church. And among twenty-two persons baptized in May were Henry and Grace Steigerwald, who a few years later left for missionary work in Africa.

[The author suggests several reasons for these very successful revivals: a Sunday school had recently been organized to attract the interest of the young people; the death of several young people had affected the congregation emotionally; and some Canadian young people had been invited for a visit.] Tactfully, Bishop B. F. Hoover had invited a very fine group of young people from Canada to be his 1895 Christmas holiday guests. They came, a delegation of six, and readily made friendships with the Yankees. And they threw in their influence with the ministers in their endeavor to reach the young people. They were all members of the Canadian Tunker Church [as the Brethren in Christ were then called in Canada]. My brother was teaching the Pifer School at this time and the Canadian delegation had in their number a young school teacher, Solomon Climenhaga. These young pedagogues, the Canadian and the Yankee, got into some heated arguments as to who won the decisive battles in the wars which won our national freedom.

But that two young fellows from Dayton, William Boyer

and Willie Bets, should make their appearance on the scene at this particular time is even more meritorious of mention because of what came out of it. To what extent their presence was added fuel to the revival fires might be difficult to say, but at least the reports of the good meetings which were in progress at the Pleasant Grove church was the excuse given for their coming to share the blessing over the Christmas holidays. [William Boyer was to marry Whisler's sister Susie later in the year. Together, the Boyers spent many years as leaders of the Dayton Mission.]

THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST IN JAPAN: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW
ADVENTURE IN MISSIONS

*By Doyle Book**

Japan's defeat in World War II opened great opportunities for Christian missions in that country. Among the groups taking advantage of these opportunities was the Brethren in Christ Church. How the vision for Brethren in Christ missions in Japan was caught and how the work was begun are the subjects of what follows. Peter and Mary Willms are at the heart of the story.

The Young Missionaries

Peter A. Willms and Mary Guengerich began their adventure together with their first date in the fall of 1947. Mary lived in Upland, California with her parents, Erlis L. and Lois Guengerich, a brother and two sisters. Her parents had moved to Upland from an Iowa Mennonite community in 1937. She opened her life to Jesus Christ at the age of nine through the witness of her Sunday school teacher, Salina Armstrong. It was natural for her to attend Upland College, the Brethren

¹Doyle Book served in Japan from 1955 to 1972 as a church planter for the Brethren in Christ. He is now Director of the English Language Institute at Azusa Pacific University in California. He received a doctorate in missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1981. This article is the major part of chapters one and three of his dissertation on Brethren in Christ missions in Japan.

in Christ school located in the California town.¹

Leamington, Ontario, a small Canadian town near Detroit, became Pete's home at the age of nine. His parents, Peter and Elizabeth Willms, both had fled Russia and had begun their life together on a small Saskatchewan farm. The growing family struggled constantly for their livelihood. The only time the children knew the luxury of a piece of fruit was when they received an apple at the Christmas program of their Mennonite Brethren church.

The parents were strict in their demands upon the six children in matters of honesty, helpfulness, church life and family worship. The children sometimes rebelled inwardly at the discipline. Nevertheless the entire family took great pride in each other and expressed mutual respect and support.

At the age of twelve Pete attended an "evangelistic meeting" and was "saved." Both of these concepts were completely new in the Mennonite Brethren community at that time. When Pete later expressed stirrings toward the ministry, he heard for the first time that he had been dedicated as a child to the Lord for that purpose.

Peter enrolled in Ontario Bible School, a Brethren in Christ institution at Fort Erie, later to be named Niagara Christian College. He went there thinking he would get a two-year Bible diploma. However, Dorothy Sherk, one of the teachers, sensed his potential and urged him not to stop short of high school graduation. She worked with him until he was able to catch up in his class.

One day in history class another teacher, Pauline Herr, read General Douglas MacArthur's call for missionaries to post-war Japan.² Pete was so moved inwardly that he almost "fell off his chair." From that moment his heart was set on mission work in Japan. While wondering about further preparation, he heard about work and study opportunities in California from Alvin C. Burkholder, former pastor of the Upland church, who was preaching in the chapel services at Ontario Bible School. Pete enrolled at Upland College in the fall of 1947.

Although attracted to Pete, Mary was concerned because she felt no special call to Japan. Pete settled the matter for her one day when he suggested, "Maybe I'm your call!" They were married on July 18, 1950.³

Search and Decision

Two things perplexed young Willms about the call he felt at Ontario Bible School. The first was that his own church, the Mennonite Brethren, had no work in Japan at that time. The second was that at nineteen, he was sure he was too young for mission work. The first problem was answered by Phyllis Pye, on furlough in Canada from India in 1947 with her missionary husband, Arthur. In response to Pete's concern she said simply, "Maybe you should start a new work." The second problem was answered by a poem discovered in the school library. Each stanza of the poem ended with the line, "But surely it is time to strike!" Pete felt that God had cleared away his objections through these two incidents, and

he made his call known to his Canadian friends.

Marshall Winger had taken a special liking to this serious young man. While holding meetings in Upland in the spring of 1949, the Canadian evangelist talked to the California church about Pete's call to Japan. He urged the Brethren in Christ to consider opening the way for Pete's vision to be realized.⁴

Shortly after this, Youth For Christ made plans for a special evangelistic thrust in Japan for the summer of 1951. The plan was to send teams all over the country to preach and call people to decision. The teams were organized by Samuel F. Wolgemuth who, as pastor and bishop with the Brethren in Christ, was also working closely with Youth For Christ.

Three young men expressed an interest in the gospel teams. They were Pete Willms and Gordon Johnson, students at Upland College, and Royce Saltzman, a student at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania. The Men's Fellowship of the Upland church decided to sponsor the three in their evangelistic venture. At a meeting in the Upland College dining hall, Bishop Jesse F. Lady rose for the final challenge to the men: "It's time that we made some sacrifices. Let's get into our savings if necessary. This is a great opportunity for God's work!"⁵

Hundreds of team members from all over North America gathered in Tokyo in July. The teams, including interpreters and musicians, fanned out over the nation. Some of them campaigned on into the fall. Willms, Johnson and Saltzman

held meetings in Tokyo and Osaka, the prefectures of Yamagata and Akita, and on the island of Shikoku.

After the assigned schedule had been fulfilled, Saltzman returned to Messiah College and Johnson tarried in Shikoku for further preaching opportunities. Willms, at the request of the Brethren in Christ Foreign Mission Board, set out to visit other areas of Japan. The purpose was to try to discover suitable places for opening a mission work. Hearing that the North had little Christian witness, Willms journeyed to the tip of Honshu, northwest of Aomori. Since no passenger trains were available in that area, he secured rides on lumber trains that wound their way among the scattered towns to the coast. He returned to the United States to report that the north Japan Sea coast was indeed neglected. He added that he had heard the southern part of Japan had more missionaries per capita. He suggested that the Brethren in Christ focus on the North.⁶

But his report to the home church did not conclude so matter-of-factly. If Willms felt stirrings before, he was now overwhelmed with a sense of the spiritual needs of Japan. He called the church to action. He noted that authorities on Japan were fast coming to the conclusion that so far as a harvest of souls was concerned the best time for reaping might be rapidly passing. People were no longer as willing to hear the Gospel presentation as they had been immediately after World War II. He declared, "Our own church has all but missed even a share in the harvest."⁷

Pete appeared before the California Bible Conference convening in Upland in the fall of 1951 to challenge the church to its opportunities. In the spring of 1952 he and Mary spoke to various churches across the denomination.

Just at this time Bishop Samuel Wolgemuth announced his appointment as director of Japan Youth for Christ and invited Pete to assume the pastorate at Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. Pete thought that perhaps God was telling him that his call to Japan had been fulfilled through the gospel team thrust. He could not accept the invitation, however, because he had previously agreed to pastor the Pasadena, California, church at the request of Bishop Jesse F. Lady. The Willmses moved to Pasadena in July of 1952, and Samuel and Grace Wolgemuth moved to Toyko with their family in preparation for another great outreach planned for the following year.

The ministry in Pasadena was fulfilling to the Willmses. Invitations to join the staff also came to them from both Upland College and Jabbok Bible School in Oklahoma. These two things again made Pete wonder if his call to Japan had already been fulfilled. But there still remained the deep concern he had felt for that land and a strange drawing toward it.⁸

Events that would eventually press the Brethren in Christ into missions in Japan continued to build up. By this time the Foreign Mission Board was seriously considering opening a work there. In its report to the General Conference of 1952, the Board noted the significance of the participation

of the three young men in the gospel team project and presented a resolution to Conference that it give "consideration to entering mission work in Japan by approving further study of this field." In the resolution the door was left open for the Board to act should the study show the advisability of opening a work there.⁹

Carl J. Ulery was to play a significant role in the study and decision. He had joined the Foreign Mission Board in 1943 and was planning a trip in 1952 to the mission fields in Africa and India. The Board asked him to survey Japan on his way home and report to them about possible places for mission work. With no knowledge of Japan and no contacts there beside Samuel Wolgemuth, he felt very uneasy about the assignment as he arrived in Tokyo on December 1, 1952. But three events occurred that were to prove extremely significant. Two of these took place while he was waiting for Wolgemuth to finish conferences with missionaries and the visiting Billy Graham evangelistic team.

The first event was an unexpected encounter with Elmer Kilbourne of the Oriental Missionary Society. Ulery asked Kilbourne for suggestions on places to open mission work. Kilbourne told him that he should consider the western tip of Honshu on the coast behind Shimonoseki. He indicated that there was hardly any Christian work in the area and added that it was a very conservative area with entrenched traditional religions and many fishermen.

The second event also was an unexpected meeting.

Accompanying Wolgemuth to a luncheon with the Billy Graham team in Yokosuka, Ulery sat next to Kenny Joseph, a recent convert who had become an evangelist. Ulery asked him also for suggestions. Joseph indicated that he had been impressed with a place called Hagi while traveling in the western part of Honshu.¹ He urged Ulery to consider that area.

The third event followed shortly. Ulery determined that he must see the western end of Honshu that had been twice recommended. He and Samuel Wolgemuth flew to Osaka, then took an overnight train to Shimonoseki. With only a copy of the *Japan Christian Yearbook* in hand, they sought out Southern Baptist missionary Stanley Howard. Howard's reply to their request for advice was, "I have been working out from Shimonoseki only a few miles. But up the back coast is a place called Hagi. I would seriously consider that area."

Ulery became excited. Three times he had been urged to consider the same area. He and Wolgemuth set out for Hagi. The three hour ride up the Japan Sea coast from Shimonoseki was not the most pleasant. The train was jammed with people. Ulery and Wolgemuth placed their suitcases in the boarding area between two coaches and sat on them. Choking smoke swirled around them as the train passed through tunnel after tunnel. The train made frequent stops at small towns. Passengers stumbled past Ulery and Wolgemuth, glancing in surprise at the unusual pair. Finally the travelers were able to move inside one of the coaches and find a place on the plain wooden seats.

The adventurers got off the train where the platform sign said "Hagi" and found themselves on a lonely concrete platform. They gazed out over the drab black roofs and unpainted houses. Ulery recalls, "A very strange feeling came over me. I had been praying earnestly for the right place. The Spirit seemed to say, 'No further, this is the place.'" He turned to Wolgemuth and said, "Let's go back to Tokyo. We've found the place."¹⁰

They investigated the city as best they could in order to prepare a report to the Foreign Mission Board. The report was presented to the Board on January 6, 1953, as it met at Messiah Home in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

The Board acted: "It was decided that we take active steps to open a missionary program in Japan. . . . Decided to approach Bro. and Sr. Pete Willms and inform them of our desire to have them represent us in Japan."¹¹ Pete and Mary were approached. They accepted the invitation on the spot.

Preparation and Journey

The General Conference of 1953 approved a simple statement: "The Board recommends the confirmation of Brother and Sister Peter Willms as missionaries to Japan."¹² The statement was indeed simple. But the carrying out of the plan it proposed was to prove anything but easy.

The Willmses received the decision of the Board in January. Samuel Wolgemuth, anticipating the decision of the Board, had already urged them to send Pete and Mary in time for the World Congress on Evangelism which was to meet in

August. Only a few months were left for the couple to get ready, and many things had to be done. A transition for the Pasadena church needed to be arranged. Supplies had to be purchased. Language study was urgently needed.

Furthermore, it was not yet certain that Conference would approve their going to Japan. In the first place, conservatives might raise a voice in opposition to the \$8,000 budget or the possibility of "spreading ourselves too thin." Second, people might hear of the plans initiated before Conference and feel that the Willmses and the Board were pulling strings behind the scenes, especially in the unauthorized expenditure of money.¹³ Third, some questions had been raised concerning Pete's views on certain doctrines and practices within the church.

Board Secretary Henry H. Hostetter was concerned about the possibility of misunderstanding, especially since it had been decided to send a vehicle along with the Willmses. How was this vehicle to be secured in the absence of official approval of the Willmses? And what if they were not approved? Hostetter expressed his concern to the candidates about the uncertainty of their appointment and the purchase of a van: "Under these circumstances, a full announcement can hardly be made at present and the news will likely get well spread via the 'grapevine' before it can be officially announced."¹⁴

But Hostetter was also convinced that preparation had to be started immediately. The decision was made to go ahead and prepare. The Board purchased the van and the Willmses

packed as if already approved. Pete and Mary plunged into a brief time of language study at Pasadena City College and Pete entered Fuller Seminary for courses in History of Missions and Biblical Theology.¹⁵

The Willmses were approved, as we have already noted. The approval came at the General Conference which met, significantly, at Niagara Christian College where Pete had received his call six years earlier. The Conference members also enthusiastically gathered at an outdoor rally to dedicate the new van and pray upon the Willmses the blessing of the Lord. The rally took place at noon on Sunday just before the annual missions program.¹⁶ It was a high point in missions enthusiasm for the Brethren in Christ.

Pete and Mary left immediately for California in the van and quickly gathered and crated their belongings. They delivered them with the van to San Pedro Harbor one day and boarded ship for Japan the next. It was July 1, 1953.

The voyage was not without discomfort. As if to test the commitment of the youthful pair, a massive storm struck the freighter. The ship rolled dangerously, very close to capsizing, according to later reports from the crew. Much of the lumber which had been piled ten feet high on the deck was lost. The crash of galley dishes and the roar of the wind and waves were the couple's only companions as they tossed from side to side in their bunks.¹⁷

At last the boat docked in Tokyo harbor on July 16, and the Wolgemuth home provided comfort and respite for the

young travelers. Pete assisted Wolgemuth in some of the preparations for the World Congress on Evangelism. Fifteen hundred leaders concerned for world evangelism gathered for sessions of prayer and challenge from August 9-16. Preaching teams were then organized for campaigns in each of the forty-seven prefectures in Japan.¹⁸

Prior to the convening of the Congress, Pete embarked on a scouting trip to the place where he and Mary were to begin their new ministry. The main purpose for the trip was to find a suitable residence. Boarding a train for the day and night trip, he headed for Hagi, five hundred miles to the southwest. Changing trains in Shimonoseki, he proceeded along the coast to the north and east. As he viewed the fishing villages and small farming towns, he was suddenly overwhelmed by the thought that none of them had yet been visited by the message of Jesus Christ. Other thoughts pressed in: "Every one of those villages is my responsibility; the mission begins here!" But how could it happen, he wondered? What experiences lay ahead?

Pete peered from the platform of Hagi station at the same drab scene that Ulery and Wolgemuth had witnessed seven months earlier. "Is this the place?" he thought. "Why here?" He had seen many places throughout Japan that looked more promising than this. He began walking up the street that stretched north between two rows of tightly packed houses and occasional shops. "Is there nothing more to the town than this?" he complained inwardly.

After repeatedly asking directions, he found his way to the city hall. A clerk there arranged for Pete to be taken to the police station. There he met an interpreter who was stationed with the Hagi police to aid in contacts with the United States occupation forces. To the young missionary's relief, the man spoke good English and offered him a cordial welcome. The interpreter also led him to a large Japanese inn on a very narrow street just behind the main thoroughfare of downtown Hagi.¹⁹ It was the Tomoe Inn, the same one that would welcome Pete with his wife and their companion, Henry Ginder, just one month later.

Pete stayed at the Tomoe Inn three days. The time was filled with searching for a house to rent, with gathering information about the city and calling on people who were in positions of influence. Pete found that Hagi's population was fifty thousand. He discovered that there was a small Protestant church near the center of town and a larger Catholic church in another section of the city. With limited vocabulary, he nevertheless boldly called on both churches. To his frustration he found the Catholic church staffed by missionaries from Spain. He also found that the one person who might understand English and relay the purpose of his visit, a nun, had just begun her annual discipline of silence and would be unavailable for a week.²⁰

There were other frustrations. Pete was having supper his first night in the inn. He was looking forward to a quiet evening for recording his notes on the day's activities.

Suddenly a young man appeared and asked Pete to teach him English. His opening statement was, "Please give me a piece of your knowledge." Pete found that the boy's mother had seen the foreigner in town and had told her son about him. The boy correctly assumed that Pete was staying at the Tomoe Inn. Not wanting to risk offending someone in this new place of ministry, Pete proceeded to give him some of his knowledge--about Jesus! He also was able to glean some helpful information about Hagi from the young man. The "English lesson" lasted three hours, and Pete had to give up recording his notes for that night.²¹

Efforts to rent a house in Hagi at this time proved fruitless. Pete was introduced to a broker who was a member of the small Presbyterian Church in town. Mr. Takeshita was warm and helpful, but an extensive search revealed that there were no houses for rent. There was one place for sale, however, and Pete returned to Tokyo to write a detailed letter to the Board explaining the situation in Hagi and requesting an immediate decision about the possibility of purchasing the property.²²

To Hagi

After the World Congress had ended, the Willmses set about completing the necessary preparations for the trip to Hagi. It had been decided that Henry Ginder would accompany the Willmses and that together they would form the nucleus of one of the World Congress teams. Other members of the team were to join them in Hagi.

The first task was to get the Chevy "carryall" van through Japanese customs. This proved to be a more formidable task than anyone could have imagined. Pete was sent from one desk to another with no results. At last, the chief customs officer opened his drawer and handed the keys to Pete. It had taken fourteen separate signatures to release the van--not to mention several days of frustration for the foreigners!²³

The van was an awful sight. It had been coated with heavy oil to protect it from the salt spray on the ocean journey. Whitish salt crystals clung to the dirty oil. Henry Ginder wondered, "Will this thing ever start?" Pete tried the key and the engine started. "Of course," said Ginder, "It's a Chevy!"

It was on the way to Hagi that Pete and Mary's companion learned more about Japanese culture. After the first day of driving over narrow, dusty roads, they stopped for the night at a Japanese inn. The Japanese style bathroom with its huge tub of steaming water was a welcome sight. There were a half dozen low wooden stools and some tiny wooden tubs scattered about on the sloping concrete floor. Ginder grabbed the soap and prepared to step into the small pool. He was brought up short by Pete who explained that one must first wash off thoroughly outside the tub. "The little wooden tubs are for dipping and rinsing clean," he explained, and added, "The big tub is just for soaking." That was fine with Ginder, but then he began to think about what he had just

heard. "How many people took their baths in this tub before us?" he demanded. The reply sounded like a chuckle, "That's what we don't know!"

Pete's patience, though taxed by the problems with the van, was nevertheless in better supply than his language ability. Late one evening the party was very much in need of more gasoline. But they could find no place open. They finally found a passer-by and tried without success to ask directions to a gas station. Finally Pete led the man around the car, pointed to the gas cap and blurted, "I need something to put in that place!" The man led them around several corners and they soon had their gasoline.²⁴

After three days of bumpy roads and sudden stops to allow other vehicles to squeeze through frequent narrow places, the travelers turned the van inland from Ogori for the final two hour drive across the mountains to the Japan Sea coast. The roads here were no better, but the mountains were lush with green pines and thick undergrowth. The terraced rice fields, with stalks beginning to bend from the weight of newly forming heads, provided a picture of rare beauty. Finally the van began to descend along a wide river. Suddenly in the distance they saw Hagi, filling the delta between the two branches of the Abu River which divided at the point where the mountains gave way. On the far edge of the city where the coastline met the sea was the famous little bump of land proudly called "mountain" by the residents. This was the landmark of a former castle that had housed a

ruling daimyo--a district feudal lord.

Bathed in the evening sun, the scene was magnificent. But Mary's feelings soon changed as they came to the huge shrine on the outskirts of the city. A sense of darkness came over her, like an awful weight. She was filled with dread and then loneliness.²⁵ She saw that here there was no warmth of Christian fellowship. There was none of the brightness that grows out of the knowledge of Christ's love.

She began to realize that the shrine represented the lost condition of the people of Hagi. She did not realize, however, how often she would have to feel the struggle with darkness as the burden for the people without Christ grew within her.

The Tomoe Inn

The *shoji* moved quietly once again as the maid reappeared bearing ice-cold towels for the three travelers' sweaty faces and hands. She then placed cool tea and a tiny, sweet cake in front of each of them. While they savored their treat, she left the room and then reappeared with three thin, kimono-like *yukata* which were to serve as their robes for going to the bath and their gowns for sleeping.

They returned from a leisurely bath, perspiring but refreshed. Supper was being prepared on the low tables in their room. Each person's portion was carefully arranged at his place on eight or more colored dishes, some square, some round, each one containing a different item. There was fried fish, white steamed rice, raw fish slices with a hot, mustard-

like sauce, deep-fried vegetables, pungent pickles, and some other things they could not identify. Mary couldn't help thinking about the person who would have to wash all the dishes for an inn full of guests!

Shortly after supper, the papered doors next to the alcove were opened. Inside was a huge stack of thick bedding resembling over-stuffed comforters. They were brightly colored and looked most inviting to the weary travelers. The narrower, firmer pieces were laid out like mattresses on the woven mats which had served as their sitting space and dining room. The wider, softer pieces were spread like covers on top of these. The pillows looked like overgrown bean bags. Unfortunately they *felt* like bean bags too!

The missionaries would learn to enjoy sleeping on *futon* almost as much as western style beds. But their sleep that night was somewhat fitful. No doubt it was partly because the beds were still strange to them. The pillows were hard, and the *futon* given them as covers were much too thick for a summer night. Perhaps it was also because of the sounds that came through the open sliding doors and into the tent-like nets which protected them from the mosquitoes. The crickets chirped in grand chorus and the cicadas vied for notice with their harsh buzzing. But perhaps their restlessness was also because of a growing awareness that they were no longer visitors in this place. They were here to stay--there was no turning back. It was here they would spend the best years of their lives.

The Hagi Campaign

A feeling of excitement added spring to the steps of the three missionaries as they moved out into the narrow streets. They were glad to be together--they knew they were a special team. Each had the same thought: "This is it! This is where the work begins."²⁶

Pete and Mary were glad Henry Ginder had come. With him along, each moment seemed filled either with inspiration or laughter. Their business was serious, but days with Henry were always exciting. The following incidents illustrate this fact.

Ginder had arrived at the World Congress delighted that the church had approved a new mission field. As a church leader, he felt he must see the place on which the attention of the church would now be focused. He determined to make every effort to get to Hagi. He was willing to leave the Congress group flight and pay an extra fare, if necessary. He approached Sam Wolgemuth one day during the Congress. "Now, Brother Sam, you understand that just because you and I are both Brethren in Christ, you are under no obligation to me. I have no right to ask you to put me on the team to Hagi. But I will tell you that I'll not return to the United States until I have been there!"²⁷ Wolgemuth grinned, restraining a chuckle. Ginder was assigned to Hagi.

Ginder knew no more than a few words of Japanese. One day on the trip to Hagi he was driving the carryall. Shortly after crossing a railroad track, he was stopped by a police-

man. He was puzzled as to why he had been stopped. And he couldn't understand a word the man said! Pete and Mary sat absolutely still, fascinated. Ginder racked his memory for something to say. He thought of *sayonara* (goodbye!), but somehow that didn't seem quite appropriate. He became more and more uncomfortable. Finally in desperation he managed a cheerful smile and blurted out, *Arigato gozaimasu!* The policeman stared at him. And he waved him on! An enthusiastic "thank you" had done the trick!²⁸

There was reason to feel optimistic about the planned campaign. A number of people, including several city officials, had expressed interest in the mission venture on Pete's earlier visit. One of these was the police interpreter who assured Pete of a warm welcome in the city. Another was the police chief himself. He promised Pete that street meetings would be permitted and then asked him to explain the Christian faith. Pete did so through the interpreter. The chief then opened his drawer and took out a New Testament printed in Japanese. He explained that he had read it three times but could not understand it well.

The mayor also offered a warm welcome. He felt the new mission would be good for the city. He stated that he had listened to a Christian radio broadcast just the night before. Pete felt that these expressions were a sign that God was preparing a harvest.²⁹

On the other hand, there were also indications that the work would not be easy. Pete was already aware that the

Hagi area was extremely conservative. This meant that it was feudalistic, Shintoistic and intensely Buddhistic. In addition, two of Japan's three communist leaders had come from Hagi. Pete recognized that Satan's forces were arrayed against them. But he took the words of Hezekiah as his battle cry: "With us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles."³⁰

The last two members of the team arrived in Hagi. They were Vincent Gizzi of the Oriental Boat Mission and the interpreter, Takahashi, a Southern Baptist. Gizzi shared the speaking load and contributed music. Several members of Shimomoseki churches came to serve as counselors.

Preparations for the meetings included securing permission for holding open-air services and for announcing the meetings with the carryall's loud-speaking system. The requests were readily granted by the police department. At the city hall, the small auditorium was secured for the final night of the campaign.

The team moved up and down the streets each day in the van, announcing the evening services. It was not difficult to attract attention. People stared at the spectacle of the huge American car and the strange-featured passengers. The group stopped at busy corners to pass out tracts and leaflets which gave directions to the meetings. Mary attracted children at various locations with her flannelgraph stories.

The Lord worked with the evangelists in a variety of

ways. On one occasion the loudspeaker system stopped functioning. All attempts to restore it were futile. Finally the group laid hands on the equipment and asked God to heal it. They turned on the switch, and immediately it began to work.³¹

There was some anxiety about what the attendance might be. Takahashi suggested that perhaps twenty to fifty might come. He warned that Hagi was very conservative and strongly Buddhistic. The first night, however, more than one hundred gathered on the street corner that had been selected. The next night there were close to one hundred and fifty. Mothers came with babies on their backs. Each night a few people remained to inquire further of the counselors.³²

A bond of mutual appreciation developed between Ginder and Takahashi during the week. Each day Ginder explained the general direction of the message for that night. The two men then prayed. And they preached as a unit.

John and Nellie Hostetter and Mark Wolgemuth arrived for the final meeting from campaigns in Beppu and Shikoku. Charles and Kathryn Engle had hoped to be present, but their arrival in Hagi was delayed one week. The climaxing service was held in the city hall auditorium. It was a plain room with a sloping concrete floor. Fans suspended from the ceiling circled lazily in the warm air. Ginder's text for the last service was John 1:29: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." He poured his heart out, and Takahashi echoed his fervency. A small group remained for counseling and prayer.³³

The day for Ginder's farewell arrived. Mary was totally unprepared for the feeling which suddenly came over her. Ginder was her last tie with America. All of a sudden, she wanted to be back home. Just before Ginder's departure she broke down: "You're going home! I'm stuck here for another five years!" Ginder opened his Bible to Psalm 37: "Trust in the Lord . . . so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed Delight thyself also in the Lord Commit thy way unto the Lord Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Comforted, Mary and Pete said goodbye to their friend and companion in adventure.³⁴

A Small Beginning

A fascinating account of the appearance of the foreigners is found in the *Hagi Residential News*. This was a small newspaper published every three weeks by the real estate broker, Takeshita, whom Pete had met on his first visit to Hagi. The article was entitled, "Self-sacrificing Young Missionary Couple Do Evangelistic Work."

We bow our heads as we watch the august figures of young Rev. and Mrs. Peter Alfred Willms preaching Christ's message at various street corners of Hagi with a shapelessly dark-green car and a loudspeaker. They have come to purify the minds of the people. . . . This couple is planning to devote their whole lives to the evangelization of Hagi We citizens of Hagi welcome them heartily, as we hear such a lofty determination. Here is Mr. Willms' message to citizens of Hagi: 'Jesus Christ told His followers to go everywhere and preach the Gospel My wife and I came to Hagi . . . to tell you about Christ and give you the opportunity to decide whether you will accept Him or not. The Bible says that those who accept Christ will receive the eternal blessing of God We pray that you will trust Jesus. We

plan to buy a house and live in this wonderful place permanently I am very glad if you will accept us.³⁵

The Willmses were gradually accepted by the town. And a few of its people accepted the Savior whom they proclaimed. Many others showed an interest in their teaching, or at least in the foreigners themselves. Pete wrote to the church in America that the immediate response of the Japanese people was heartening. He acknowledged that foreigners approaching a cultured and religious people of another faith can ask for nothing more than a courteous reception. This was graciously extended. He declared that some had placed their faith in Jesus and were growing remarkably in spiritual matters. He said, "There is every reason to believe that they know the meaning of the new birth."³⁶

Time was to confirm Pete's evaluation. A small group of converts from this first meeting became the early leaders of the Brethren in Christ Church in Japan. Most of them remained faithful over the years in fellowship and in witness.

Pete and Mary made the Tomoe Inn their home for about one month. For several weeks following the campaign they could not find a suitable place for meeting with those who had responded. They invited the seekers to a followup meeting in their room at the inn on Thursday, September 3. The next meeting was the following Sunday morning. India missionaries Charles and Kathryn Engle had arrived from their World Congress involvement. Five young ladies met with the four missionaries. The next Sunday there were ten adults.³⁷

Finally they were able to rent a house on the main street of Hagi, some distance south of the center of town. It was near the Hashimoto bridge that Pete had crossed on his first long trek from Hagi station. The Charles Engles provided encouragement for the younger missionaries by helping them move into their first residence.

On September 15 Pete sent a letter to those who had responded during the meetings. The letter was translated into Japanese by a high school boy who had professed faith. It began: "You are one of the many people who have decided recently to become Christians . . . or at least . . . to learn more about Jesus Christ. The angels in heaven are very happy about your decision." Pete reminded them that he had promised to invite them to Christian meetings when he and his wife found a place to live. The place they found would serve both as residence and meeting place. He informed them that the meeting would consist of prayer, Bible reading, singing together, and answering questions. He added: "Many Christians are praying for you that you will become very good and very happy Christians. God bless you."³⁸

The new Hagi believers met in their first church location on Sunday, September 20, at 10:00 A.M. The place was No. 28 Hashimoto. Twenty-one people gathered for the meeting, including the police interpreter. Others appeared at subsequent weekly meetings. Six new faces were seen on September 27, and sixteen others appeared on the next four occasions.³⁹

The building where the first meetings were held was

fronted by a store named Ogiya, which sold cloth for kimonos. The Willmses were able to rent the rear part of the first floor, which they used for meetings, and the second floor, which became their residence. Interestingly, the building was originally the home of the doctor of the feudal lord Mori. The *daimyo* himself lived in the castle which stood at that time beside the bump of land called Shizuki mountain.⁴⁰

In addition to the Sunday morning gatherings, Bible classes and English conversation classes were begun. An interest in English caused many people to seek out the foreigner in the first few months. Some of these contacts turned into lasting personal relationships. Some became fruit for the Kingdom.⁴¹

Three of the first seekers who became closely attached to the Willmses were Tomoichi Sakamoto, Emine Katsura, and Uno Ichikawa. Mr. Sakamoto was an intelligent, eager high school student from a poor fishing family on the west side of Hagi. He showed remarkable ability in the English language. He immediately began to help Pete with followup letters and with visitation. He also became one of Pete's interpreters for the church services. Pete was to develop a deep concern and love for this young man. He was also later to suffer much grief on account of him.

Miss Katsura had worked on one of the American military installations following the war. She now lived with her mother in Hagi. In time she became the housekeeper for the

Willmses and was to provide great help during times of busyness and illness.

Mrs. Ichikawa was in her sixties. She and her husband had no children, much to their disappointment. However, she always had a merry twinkle in her eye. She made a firm commitment to Christ and was one of the first to be baptized the following year.⁴²

Others soon became a regular part of the fellowship. One was Ritsu Iwakura. Now in her fifties, she had been baptized as a young woman while attending a small school in Osaka operated by Disciples of Christ missionaries. Classes were in English, and she gained skills in translation and typing. After working in Kyushu during the war years she returned to Hagi to care for her aging mother. She opened a private school in her home where she taught English grammar and typing. She became a faithful supporter of the ministry and served on many occasions as interpreter.⁴³

A curious fact began to emerge in relation to the early converts in Hagi: Most of those who responded to the Gospel had either lived in a foreign country during the days of Japan's expansion or had otherwise been removed from their traditional environment for a time. This was true of Koichiro Sugiyama. Sugiyama grew up in Manchuria where he had the tragic misfortune of being treated by an incompetent eye doctor. He almost lost his sight, and was never able to get a job or make his own way in life. He became bitter and very lonely. He later declared, after an evening of relaxed

fellowship and hot chocolate with Pete in the Willmses' home, "This has been the happiest moment of my life."⁴⁴

Sugiyama had a brilliant intellect. He taught himself German, Russian, and English which he spoke and wrote almost flawlessly. He was self-taught also in higher mathematics. He had a critical mind, but he responded readily and simply to truth when he saw its reasonableness.

Sugiyama indicated that his father was a die-hard Buddhist. He brought a priest to their home every month, and Sugiyama had to attend the meetings. But he was very perceptive. He saw the illogic of the Buddhist teaching on re-incarnation. He saw also the inconsistency of other Buddhist teachings and of the hypocritical life of his father. He rejected Buddhism. Sugiyama admits that he went to the city hall meeting for two reasons. One was sheer curiosity. The other was that he wanted to hear some real English!⁴⁵ That night was the beginning of a close relationship with the mission. It also was the beginning of a changed life that soon led him to baptism. He interpreted occasionally for the mission and served as treasurer and leader in the Hagi church.⁴⁶

God was working to form the little flock in Hagi. Another man appeared on the scene through some unusual circumstances. He was to become a source of joy and encouragement to the missionaries, and a loyal servant of the church. His story deserves to be told in some detail.

Seiichiro Aburatani had been working in the local tax

office. One day he noticed an advertisement in the *Hagi Residential News* which stated that a Rev. Peter Willms was in need of an interpreter in English. To Pete's surprise, Aburatani appeared at his door, applying for the job. Pete was surprised because he had not placed the ad. It turned out that Mr. Takeshita, the real estate broker, had written the notice. Aburatani gives his view of this first meeting with the missionary in his own unique style:

One afternoon probably in the month of September, 1953, this writer made his first visit to the said missionary's evangelical meeting place inside the old but pretty spacious Japanese second-story house, and he could exchange a customary polite greeting with Rev. and Mrs. Peter and Mary Willms in English and he informed them about his true intention to visit here frankly and without reservation. The young couple was very pleased to hear that and they frankly persuaded him to come and help them through his good English speaking, reading and especially writing very well. This was the first encounter between this writer and the young missionary couple, namely, Rev. and Mrs. Peter and Mary Willms here in Hagi City.⁴⁷

Pete hired him for occasional help on written material and in interpreting. However, a serious stomach disorder, brought on in part no doubt by the pressures of his work, hospitalized him for almost a year. It required major surgery. Pete visited him in the hospital and prayed for him.⁴⁸ Weakened by the surgery and faced with a long recovery, Aburatani quit his job. Pete encouraged him to open a private English school in his own home. It was a hard struggle at first. It took a long time for word to get around to students who needed extra help in their studies. Aburatani was later greatly encouraged by the coming of the first vol-

untary service worker who helped draw many students to his classes.

Church in the Home

Meetings continued in the back of the store for almost three months. The situation, however, was far from satisfactory. It was difficult to heat the old house whose walls were full of cracks. There was little privacy--not only was the front of the building a place of business, but in addition, the back part of the house was shared by two other families. The one bathroom and the kitchen were shared by all three parties.⁴⁹

On Pete's first visit to Hagi it was evident that suitable facilities were not available for rent. But a house had been discovered for sale. It was on Tokaichi Street in a quiet residential area. Although somewhat far from the main streets of town, at least it was in a different part of town from the other two churches. Pete wrote the Board immediately upon his return to the World Congress, stating that the property would wonderfully meet their needs and asking for permission to buy. He included drawings to show that the house was large enough to provide both meeting rooms and family privacy. A two-deck storage building and a one-room cottage adjoined the main house. The U-shaped building complex enclosed a traditional Japanese garden with ornamental trees, a fish pond, and huge moss-covered rocks. The back of the lot was an open piece of land, about fifty by fifty feet. This was unusual for a residence in Japan.

Pete assured the Board that the 250 *tsubo* property with 40 *tsubo* in the main house was an exceptionally good buy at \$3,200.⁵⁰ The Board agreed, advanced the money from emergency funds and appealed to the church for support for the project.⁵¹

The transaction for the house was not completed without some obstacles. The promised money did not arrive on time and, when it did arrive, the local banks hesitated to handle a check which represented such a large amount of foreign currency. Furthermore, when it came time to sign the documents, Pete discovered that the owner was asking him to sign a receipt for much less than the actual purchase price. The owner's intent was to save a great deal of tax on the sale by reporting the smaller amount. Pete refused to comply. He declared that he could not sign an untrue statement because he was a Christian. He waited, wondering if his refusal might mean the end of the negotiations. Finally, the owner acquiesced. On November 24, 1953, the Brethren in Christ Church became the owner of its first property in Japan. The missionaries moved into the house by the end of the month.⁵²

The building had been a restaurant named *Akaishi* (Red Rock). Most of the inside walls consisted of the white *shoji* and other sliding partitions, which were covered with a heavier, patterned paper. These were called *fusuma*. The partitions could be removed from their grooves, thus enlarging the meeting space. The Sunday morning services and the various classes immediately began meeting in the mission resi-

dence.

Pete reported to the Board that, during December, twenty-five to thirty adults met regularly for service. He indicated that attendance should increase visibly since they had settled into a new meeting place, were initiating a more aggressive program, and were able to heat the rooms to a comfortable temperature. Mary had begun a Sunday school in the rented Hashimoto house on October 4. Miss Katsura served as her interpreter. Seventeen children had attended the final Sunday in that location. Since moving to Tokaichi, however, at least forty children were attending.

Pete went on to report that an English Bible class met on Thursday nights with an attendance of fifteen or more. Colored slides on the New Testament were used for this class, and interest was high. On Sunday evenings during September and October, Pete and Mary attended the Presbyterian Church on Tamachi Street. Since the church had no pastor at that time, Pete was usually asked to preach. The lawyer, Takeda, who had helped in the purchase of the property, interpreted. Pete noted that Sunday night attendance increased during this time. The church people spoke appreciatively of his help. After the new pastor arrived, the Willmses began their own Sunday night Bible study. Nine people attended the first service on November 1. A regular mid-week prayer meeting was started on Wednesday, November 25. Eight came to the first service, and the average soon increased to twelve.⁵³

It soon became evident that very few seekers remained

from the Ginder meetings of the previous summer. But a faithful core of believers had formed out of that campaign. Several reasons for the drop-off in attendance seemed evident. First, many of those who responded did not claim to be making decisions; they were only expressing interest. Second, lack of a ready place to hold meetings and lack of a capable interpreter for follow-up made people lose interest. Third, many addresses which had been collected were incomplete, and follow-up information sent to those addresses returned unopened.⁵⁴

The services were always led through interpreters. Miss Katsura had helped in the very beginning. Miss Iwakura then became available. Sakamoto, Aburatani, Sugiyama and Yasuo Miyamoto all helped at times. Pete gave much of his attention to the training of these and other leaders, urging them gradually into positions of responsibility for the services and the activities of the church. He worked much with the student Sakamoto. He was sure that young man would develop into an excellent interpreter and, perhaps, into a pastor. Pete and Mary considered him their "Timothy."⁵⁵ Sakamoto responded to Pete's guidance and became the interpreter for the next special evangelistic meeting.

The Visit of John Z. Martin

With the sending of the missionaries in 1953, the Board had also acted to provide adequate guidance for the new mission. A committee was appointed to counsel and advise the Willmses. Carl Ulery and Henry Ginder were appointed to the

committee, and John Z. Martin, president of Upland College and member of the Board, was also asked to serve. One of the committee's duties was to consider doctrinal issues in relation to the new culture. Martin, who served on the Board from 1950 to 1958, worked closely with the Willmses in certain areas such as the purchase of equipment.⁵⁶

In the summer of 1954 Martin went to Japan to encourage the Willmses and to discuss with them the formation of a policy for the field. Pete joined him in Tokyo, and the two men proceeded to visit several missions in various parts of the country. Their main purpose was to try to discover insights that would help in formulating a policy for their own mission. They first interviewed leaders of the Japan Inland Pioneer Mission and visited their work near Tokyo. They found that the mission depended largely on a Bible school for training converts. Martin noted, however, that the school was not doing well, even though the mission offered to provide all expenses for those who wanted to attend. He also observed that congregations could not be built on students because they were too unstable. Positively, he noted that the mission emphasized indigenous church principles by turning the leadership of the churches entirely over to the Japanese.

Martin and Willms then journeyed north to Hokkaido where they visited with Mennonite missionaries and toured their churches. They found that the missionaries tried to identify with the people in modest housing and by sending

their children to Japanese schools. They were told that the mission explained to the church the biblical teaching on certain doctrinal matters, such as the prayer veiling, and then left the application of those doctrines up to the church itself.⁵⁷

Following the Hokkaido visit, the men stopped briefly in Osaka for talks with Mennonite Brethren personnel who were just opening mission work in that city. Later, after a time in Hagi, they traveled to the southern part of Kyushu where the General Conference Mennonite work was located.

Hoping to utilize Martin's visit in the most effective way, Pete had planned an evangelistic campaign in Hagi. He purchased a 30 by 16 foot war surplus tent that was equipped with new poles, ropes and pins. The cost was just over one hundred dollars.⁵⁸ Some wooden benches were made and permission was secured to pitch the tent on a vacant lot in Shinkawa, just north of the center of town.

The Chevy van was once again put to good use in broadcasting news of the meetings and in distributing tracts. The unusual size and shape of the foreign vehicle, together with the fact that unheeding pedestrians often had to be honked out of the way, caused no little embarrassment to the missionaries. They felt like intruders under the curious stares of the people. But the believers joined enthusiastically in the effort. Little Mrs. Ichikawa sang over the loudspeaker in her quavering voice. She passed out tracts and information about the meetings to children and instructed them to take

the material straight to their mothers. The carryall, though embarrassingly conspicuous, continued to be an aid in outreach and a great blessing to the Japanese Christians personally.⁵⁹

The meetings with John Martin continued from July 6 to 13. Each evening music and testimonies in Japanese were broadcast at 7:20 from the carryall which was parked beside the tent. The time for the meeting was set for 8:00 P.M. in hopes that farmers would attend after finishing their work. From 8:00 to 8:30 P.M. pictures of the life of Christ were shown. Explanation of the pictures was given in Japanese by the young Sakamoto who evidenced the gift of teaching. The pictures attracted many children, but adults also gradually entered the tent. Martin began preaching by 8:30. Each night the tent was jammed with close to one hundred and thirty people. Many responded to the invitation to enroll in the Navigator's Bible study course. Fifteen of these declared that they wanted to believe in Christianity and receive more information.

Approximately one week later, a second meeting was held in Nago, a fishing town north of Hagi. It took thirty minutes each day to travel the ten miles of country road which wound among the rice fields and squeezed through crowded villages. The meetings were held in the town's recreation hall. Martin describes the building as resembling the old one-room school houses of Pennsylvania. The wooden benches used in the Hagi meeting provided seating for adults. The

children were asked to sit on mats similar to those which cover *tatami* in houses. Adults were very slow to enter the building for such an unusual occasion. The children, however, eagerly filled the space on the mats and listened to the Bible stories. Sakamoto and Katsura taught them. A Sunday school was formed in Nago, which was carried on for several years by Katsura and other members of the Hagi church. Eighteen young people and adults expressed some interest in Christianity. In his report to the Board, Martin expressed hope that a church might also be founded in Nago.⁶⁰

During the week between the two meetings, John and Pete took a group of the Hagi young people seven hundred miles south to Miyazaki. There they participated in a youth camp sponsored by the General Conference Mennonites. The bulky tent was taken along for their nighttime shelter. It became shelter, however, for the Kyushu group also as rain poured down during much of the conference. The Hagi people benefited greatly from the fellowship and teaching. This fact stimulated Pete to plan similar activities in the Hagi area as soon as possible.⁶¹

Martin's report to the Board concerning his Japan experiences included a number of recommendations for formulating a beginning policy for the Japan mission. One recommendation outlined the concept of "two distinct types" of Brethren in Christ in Japan. One type was the mission which should be the outreach arm of the church, should nurture the Christians, and should train leaders to take over the church

as quickly as possible. The second type was the church composed of the Japanese themselves. This group was to carry on evangelism, conduct worship and fellowship meetings, and provide education through Sunday schools and other types of teaching. Although the idea was similar to policies on the denomination's other mission fields, Martin felt that it needed to be developed more clearly. He also suggested that the American church should put very little money into church buildings initially. It should rather encourage Christians to stress evangelism and pastoral support and to rent a hall for meetings.⁶²

The faithful nucleus of believers which met in the Tokaichi house slowly began to grow. Pete listed twenty-eight names as "decisions" of the Hagi meetings with Martin. Sixteen of the names had a special mark beside them, perhaps an indication of special interest. On July 31, 1954, he sent a letter to the people on the list. He informed them that almost thirty had come to Christ, or, at least, "began coming to Christ." He urged them to come to a special meeting on Sunday, August 1st, at 8:00 P.M. He pointed out the necessity of continuing in the faith so they would "not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel." This letter was followed by a similar one on October 23rd.⁶³

Some came in response to the followup, and a few remained, growing in the fellowship of the Gospel. New faces began to appear also. Many of these were high school students. Attendance of students was boosted by the work of Yasuo

Miyamoto, an English teacher in one of the city's high schools. Miyamoto had been baptized some years earlier and occasionally attended the church on Tamachi Street. He became very warm toward Pete and Mary and began attending services with his wife, Kikuyo. He told many of his students about the English and Bible classes and he also urged them to attend church.

Jihichi Oba also began coming to the fellowship. An older man, he kept himself busy with odd jobs and with his favorite activity, fishing for eels among the holes in the rock walls that bordered Hagi's rivers and ocean front. Oba was always cheerful and willing to help in any task. He was later to render invaluable assistance in the incorporation of the mission and in the purchase of the Nagato property.

October 3, 1954, marked a day of special significance. Happy missionaries celebrated the first baptismal service of the little church. Those who testified to new life in Christ were Mrs. Ichikawa, young Sakamoto, and a young lady, Tomiyo Kawakami. Miss Iwakura interpreted in the regular worship service and Mr. Miyamoto assisted Pete in the baptismal service which followed at the seashore.

Pete recorded the events of that memorable occasion in a letter to those who had received baptism. He said that he thought they might want to remember the details of their special day. Among other things, the letter indicates that Pete spoke on forgiveness from Psalm 32. The group sang "O Happy Day" from the Japanese hymnal and then moved toward the

beach in the van and by bicycle. On the way to the beach, rain began to fall. The rain stopped, however, upon their arrival at the beach, and the warm rays of the sun broke through the clouds, lending cheer to the occasion. The sea was surprisingly smooth for October. The group sang, "Lord Jesus, I Long To Be Perfectly Whole." Mr. Miyamoto then read Mark 1:9-13, the story of the baptism of Jesus. Pete spoke of the death of the old life and newness in Christ. He warned of temptations which may come. After the last candidate rose from the water, the believers sang, "My Jesus, I Love Thee." As the service closed, it began to rain once again.

Pete closed the letter by expressing his personal joy on the occasion. He regretted that he had not been able to instruct them or pray for them in their own tongue that day. In spite of this lack, their response to God, he declared, was proof that the Spirit of God was mightily living in them.⁶⁴

NOTES

¹Interview with Peter and Mary Willms, June 24, 1980.

²He also requested ten million gospel portions in Japanese. See William Woodward, *The Allied Occupation of Japan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 242 (Plate IV), 243, 357, 359. See also Footnote 13 in Chapter 2.

³Willms interview.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Interview with Wendell E. Harmon, October 17, 1980. Harmon was president of the Men's Fellowship in 1951. See also *Evangelical Visitor*, July 9, 1951, p. 9.

⁶Willms interview.

⁷Peter Willms, "Have We Lost Our Opportunity in Japan?" *Evangelical Visitor*, January 7, 1952, p. 4.

⁸Willms interview.

⁹*General Conference Minutes*, 1952, pp. 83, 89.

¹⁰Taped report by Carl J. Ulery, June 1980.

¹¹Board Minutes, June 6-9, 1953.

¹²*General Conference Minutes*, 1953, p. 79.

¹³Interview with Henry N. Hostetter, June 30, 1980; Willms interview.

¹⁴Henry Hostetter to Peter Willms, March 1, 1953.

¹⁵Peter Willms to Henry Hostetter, March 11, 1953.

¹⁶Board Minutes, June 8-15, 1953.

¹⁷Willms interview.

¹⁸Samuel Wolgemuth, "Japan to be Host of 1953 World Congress on Evangelism," *Evangelical Visitor*, February 2, 1953, p. 3.

¹⁹Willms interview.

²⁰Peter Willms, "My First Visit to Hagi," *Evangelical Visitor*, August 17, 1953, p. 10.

²¹Peter Willms to families, July 27, 1953.

²²Peter Willms letter to Hostetter, Ulery and Martin, July 27, 1953.

²³Interview with Henry N. Ginder, July 2, 1980; Willms interview.

²⁴Ginder interview.

²⁵Willms interview.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Ginder interview.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Peter Willms, "My First Visit to Hagi," *Evangelical Visitor*, August 17, 1953, p. 10.

³⁰2 Chron. 32:8b; *General Conference Minutes*, 1954, p. 13.

³¹Ginder interview.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Willms interview.

³⁵*Hagi Residential News*, September 13, 1953. Adapted from a translation by Koichiro Sugiyama.

³⁶*Handbook of Missions*, 1954, p. 102.

³⁷Peter Willms, "Report to Foreign Mission Board," December 18, 1953.

³⁸Peter Willms, notes, September 15, 1953, "Hagi" file.

³⁹Peter Willms diary, September to November, 1953.

⁴⁰Interview with Uno Ichikawa, July 19, 1980.

⁴¹Willms interview.

⁴²1980 found Mrs. Ichikawa, at age 90, living in Tokyo with her 95-year-old husband. The author and his wife had the delight of visiting the elderly couple on July 19. Both were mentally alert and reasonably well physically. At the time of this writing, all the original members of the Japan Church were still living.

⁴³Interview with Ritsu Iwakura, August 6, 1980.

⁴⁴Peter Willms, "Our Christian Witness in Hagi," *Mennonite Life*, October 1957, p. 173.

⁴⁵Interview with Koichiro Sugiyama, July 20, 1980.

⁴⁶See *Handbook*, 1959, p. 45.

⁴⁷From the personal journal of Seiichiro Aburatani, in 12 volumes (unnumbered) and written in English.

⁴⁸*Ibid.* Mr. Aburatani records this experience as follows: "The missionary made his earnest and fervent prayer for the Aburatani, especially for Mr. Aburatani, lying in a sick bed. This second encounter between all the [family] members of Mr. Aburatani and Rev. Peter A. Willms gave the unusual strong impression, in a very good sense, upon Mr. Seiichiro Aburatani and his whole family about his personality and, especially about the teaching of Christianity through his behavior and conduct based on the love teaching of Jesus Christ upon all our human beings on this earth. This second encounter also opened the eyes of Mr. Aburatani's towards the existence of a true church and its evangelical works and activities for all the ungodly people in the city of Hagi and its vicinity to the greatest extent that he had ever thought of through his whole life up to that time."

⁴⁹Peter Willms, "Buying a House in a Strange Land," *Evangelical Visitor*, November 23, 1953, p. 7.

⁵⁰Peter Willms letter "To Hostetter, Ulery and Wolgemuth," July 27, 1953; Peter Willms "Report to Foreign Mission Board," December 18, 1953. One *tsubo* is approximately six feet by six feet or thirty-six square feet. Thus a 250 *tsubo* plot is about nine thousand square feet, or the equivalent of a 60 x 150 foot lot.

⁵¹See *Evangelical Visitor*, September 9, 1953.

⁵²See *Evangelical Visitor*, November 23, 1953, and Willms Report, December 18, 1953.

⁵³Willms Report, December 18, 1953.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵See *Evangelical Visitor*, May 24, 1954, p. 7, and *Handbook*, 1954, p. 103.

⁵⁶Board Minutes, January 6-9, 1953, and June 8-15, 1953.

⁵⁷John Z. Martin, "General Report to the Foreign Mission Board," August 1954, pp. 3, 4.

⁵⁸Peter Willms, "Report to the Foreign Mission Board," circa July 1954.

⁵⁹Iwakura, Ichikawa and Willms interviews.

⁶⁰Martin Report, p. 6.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶²*Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.

⁶³Peter Willms notes, July 31, 1954, "Hagi" file.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

THE CHICAGO MISSION: AN ALBUM

The first continuous mission work in the Brethren in Christ Church began in Chicago in 1894. Its founders were Abram Myers and Sarah Bert.

Sarah Bert was born near Chambersburg, Pennsylvania in 1860. While still in her teens she moved with her family to a farm near Abilene, Kansas, where she became a member of the Bethel congregation. At the age of thirty-five, she felt strangely drawn to Chicago. The pretext for her trip was a visit to her sister and brother-in-law, Lizzie and Ben Brubaker. While there, however, she met Abram Myers of Freeport, Illinois, who had come to Chicago on one of his trips to explore the possibility of opening a mission. He persuaded Sarah to join him.

The two began their work in an old hall on Peoria Street, he serving as superintendent and she as almost everything else. Myers resigned the following year because of ill health; his place was taken by a succession of men, including J. W. Hoover of Ontario, Canada, Henry Shirk, and Henry Byer. In 1905, Sarah herself, at the age of forty-five, became

superintendent, the first woman to be given a major leadership position in the denomination. She remained in that office until 1941, and continued to play a leading role in the mission until her death in 1948.

The mission soon outgrew its first home. It was relocated three times, finally in a building on Halstead Street, where it remained until the close of the mission in 1968. This last location included a vacant lot which the mission workers, virtually all originally from farms, used to good advantage as a garden.

Sister Sarah, as everyone called her, sensed that mission work in a city called for new and more flexible methods than the denomination generally practiced. Thus to attract and retain young people, she bought an organ and soon began a choir; both were undoubtedly the first of their kind in the Brethren in Christ Church. A visit from the denomination's General Executive Board to persuade her to discontinue both organ and choir was singularly unsuccessful.

Picnics, frowned on, if not explicitly forbidden, virtually everywhere in the denomination, were another innovation. Sister Sarah arranged for many of them, and always for one on July 4 in one of the city parks.

Every Wednesday after school the mission conducted a Bible class for children. Bible stories (taught by object lessons and frequently acted out), singing, and lessons in conduct brought children to the mission in large numbers.

Mission workers each usually had a Sunday school class.

From all accounts, students and teachers formed strong attachments to each other. Teachers gave parties for their classes at the end of the year, often a full meal in fancy style (one teacher served potatoes made pink by food coloring).

To the mission over the years came families that in time were well known to the rest of the church. These included the Carlsons (Carl and Joel became ministers, and Carl succeeded Sister Sarah as superintendent of the mission), and the Smiths (Frances married Joseph Smith, son of Messiah College founder S. R. Smith; her children include Elbert, Donald, and Robert).

The following photos of the Chicago Mission are from photo albums compiled while Sister Sarah was still living and with her help. The albums were recently deposited in the denominational archives at Messiah College by members of the Carlson family.

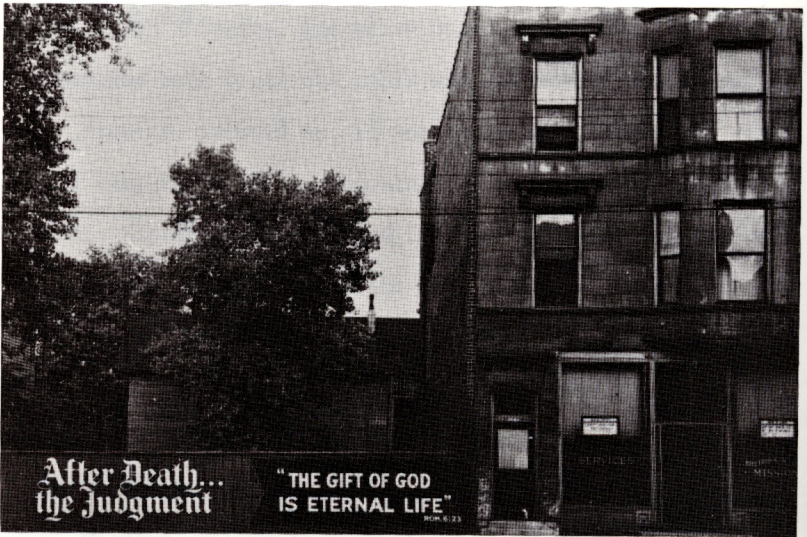
E.M.S.



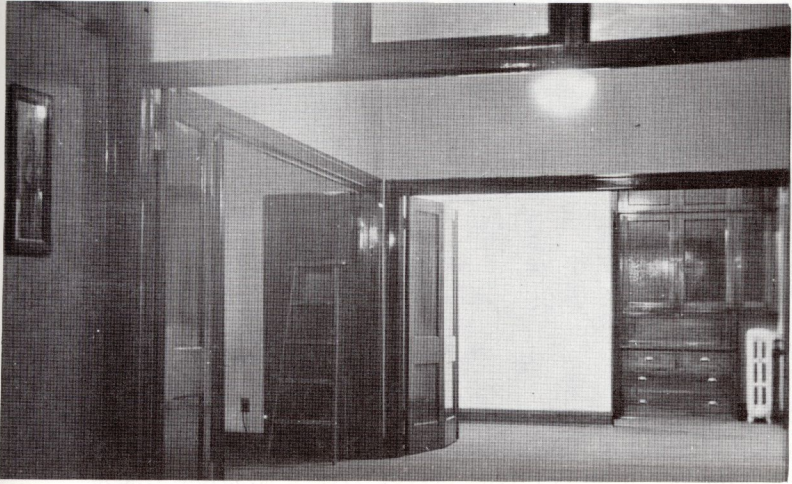
Sarah Bert in 1896



Abram Myers



Fourth Mission building



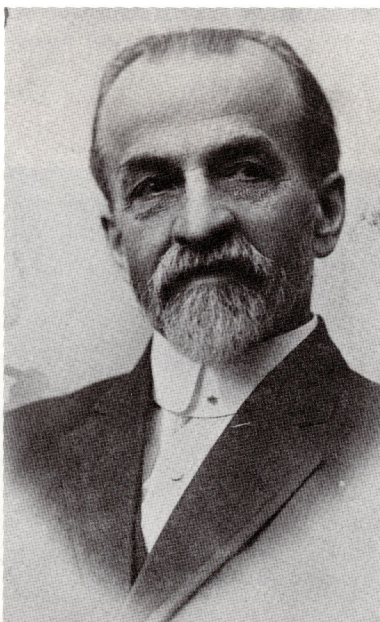
Mission Sunday school rooms



Mission garden



Looking north on Halstead Street from a mission window



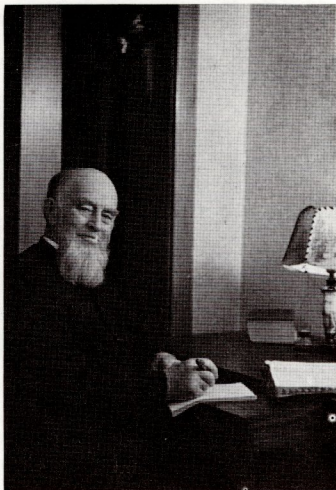
Ben Brubaker



Elizabeth (Lizzie) Brubaker



Henry Shirk



J. H. Byer



John W. and Harriet Hoover



The Bert Sisters (all workers at the mission)
Left to right Lizzie (Brubaker), Anna, Sarah



Picnic in the park





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Mission choir



Sarah Bert and Sunday school class of girls



The Smith Sisters: left to right Ruth (Keisling), Frances (Smith, Burkholder), Helen (Collins, Herr), Pearl (Powell), Ethel (Earle), Faye, Catherine (Wingerd)





Junior Bible Class, 1933



The Carlson family. In the front row, Carl is the man to the left (his wife Avas holds their son Paul), Joel is the man to the right (he holds his son Robert, and his wife Faithe is seated next to him).

BOOK REVIEWS

WARREN HOFFMAN, *On Your Way*. Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Press, 1980. B. E. THUMA, ed. *On Being Brethren in Christ*. Nappanee, Inc.: Evangel Press, n.d.

*Reviewed by John R. Yeatts**

In the mid-1970's, the Commission on Christian Education (CCEL) felt a need to "expand and update Brethren in Christ membership education material" (*On Being Brethren in Christ*, The Leader's Guide). A subsequent survey of Church pastors confirmed the existence of this need. In 1975, CCEL adopted a proposal for thirteen sessions to be developed for youth and adults. The main outline was to be based on the *Manual of Doctrine and Government*. Six subjects, addressed by six different writers, were developed into thirteen lessons.

Several years later, CCEL considered the issue of updating *On Your Way*, membership education material for junior high age. This time it was decided that one author should

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do all the writing; Warren Hoffman was chosen. Again six different subjects were addressed in thirteen lessons. The product is, not so much a revision of *On Your Way*, as a completely new piece under the same title.

The acceptance of these two publications has been quite remarkable. The Publication Board reports that sales for both pieces have been strong. The Publisher says that at present the sales are holding steady. This is particularly remarkable due to a rather high purchase price (\$4.95) and a considerable amount of dated material in *On Being Brethren in Christ*. It should be noted that that price includes a durable and attractive binder.

When comparing the two volumes, one finds that four general topics are included in each--doctrine, Christian experience and growth, Christian lifestyle, and history. The doctrinal section of *On Being Brethren in Christ* (OBBIC) is quite comprehensive, dealing with God, the Scriptures, salvation, the ordinances, and some doctrinal distinctions of the Brethren in Christ. *On Your Way* (OYW) deals only with the doctrine of God and develops three chapters around the trinity. Although this intensive treatment of the nature of God is helpful, the approach eliminates a number of important issues. While issues like salvation and baptism are considered elsewhere in *OYW*, the reader misses a comprehensive treatment of communion, feet washing, child dedication, divine healing, marriage, and other issues covered in *OBBIC*. Both volumes deal adequately with issues of Christian experi-

ence and growth, Christian lifestyle and history. *OBBIC* includes units on church policy and missions, which are omitted from *OYW*. It would seem that these topics could have been presented meaningfully to junior high school students. *OYW* begins with a session on the Good News and ends with one on baptism and church membership. These chapters tend to make the volume a more useful tool for church membership classes.

The volumes differ in a number of other areas. The language of each is adapted to the age level intended. *OYW* includes a variety of activities for the students. *OBBIC* includes a leader's guide with suggestions for using the material. Because the two publications are so different, a careful review of each is necessary.

On Being Brethren in Christ is a proven tool for introducing adults to the church. It deals responsibly and comprehensively with the relevant issues. For the most part, the issues are considered in sufficient detail. Overall the presentations are sound theologically and consistent with what the Brethren in Christ believe.

Yet, *OBBIC* has some overall limitations. The most serious limitation is that much of the material is dated. An obvious example is the biographical statements on each of the authors. Indeed, the document will be even more out of date after the 1984 restructure of the denominational agencies. At that point, lesson eleven ("Neither Episcopal nor Congregational") will need to be completely rewritten.

Nevertheless, the difficulty is not limited to one lesson. For example, in the first paragraph of lesson one, the statement of the aim of the denomination will need revision.

Several less important limitations need to be mentioned. Authorship by a variety of persons causes unevenness in quality, discontinuity in style and structure, and considerable repetition in content. One also gets the impression that the reading level of the material is too advanced. An irritating feature is the number of typographical errors in the publication.

It is instructive to look in greater detail at the content of *OBBIC*, beginning with the unit on doctrine. Lesson one is a fine layman's treatment of Brethren in Christ hermeneutics. Basic issues like the priority of the incarnate Christ over the biblical record, the priority of the New Testament over the Old, and the place of natural revelation are considered. That prospective church members are being confronted with these issues should challenge scholars in the church to address these issues in a responsible manner. Lesson two deals maturely with some of the major concepts related to salvation. Yet, several important concepts to the Brethren in Christ, the new birth, repentance, and restitution, are not considered. This seems to be a critical omission for a Brethren in Christ understanding of salvation.

Lesson three is a fine treatment of the ordinances, baptism, and communion. Yet, it raises three questions that

could have been treated in greater detail: Are there any theological formulations that the prospective member must accept? What is to be done with the new church member who was baptized as an infant? What specifically is the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament? Expansion on these unanswered questions would strengthen the chapter.

Lesson four on principles and practices is the weakest in this unit. It begins by implying that our doctrinal principles are in the mainstream of protestant orthodoxy but that there is room for a great deal of latitude in practice. This implies that orthodoxy is more important than orthopraxy (correct practice). This attitude may be responsible for the variety of practices prevalent in the denomination. Indeed, it seems that this chapter has an exceeding amount of dated material, probably because practices have changed so rapidly. It appears to be the time to elevate orthopraxy at least to the level of orthodoxy.

The unit on Christian growth and experience, a readable, logical unit, is marred by considerable repetition of the material in the first unit. Lesson five includes a solid definition of salvation, including the important issues of repentance and restitution. Nevertheless, the section on sanctification leaves too many unanswered questions: What is sin? Willful transgression? Transgressing knowingly? If sanctification does not mean that the person never sins again, what does it mean? Is sanctification a second definite work of grace? Must everyone experience it? Lesson six

on Christian growth is good, but one looks in vain for the idea of service as a stimulus for growth.

The unit on Christian lifestyle includes good content, raises some tough issues, and is quite practical. Although many will question the specifics of the Christian lifestyle, the ideas presented are important. Careful consideration of issues like separation, the lordship of Christ, stewardship, and relationships should help us to forge a lifestyle that is distinctively Brethren in Christ. The limitation of this unit is the language; it seems particularly difficult. For example, the following discussion questions could certainly be stated more simply. "What is true religion? What is the relationship between the religion of the sanctuary and the religion of right behavior in daily life?"

The unit on history is a particularly strong one. Although the charge of superficiality could be leveled, it seems that the essence has been distilled in a skillful manner. This unit could be improved by a method of highlighting the major issues in each section. The several important points in each section need to stand out for the reader.

The unit on polity is interesting and clear. Yet, this unit probably contains more dated material than any other. The chapters need to be completely rewritten to be consistent with Renewal 2000.

The last unit, which is one lesson on missions, is a

systematic history of Brethren in Christ missions. While this is important and helpful, it would be good to include in the last chapter some incentives for the individual to become involved in mission. The author of this chapter also wrote *The Church in Mission*, a Heritage Series book. Some of the practical ideas for involvement in missions presented in that book would improve this unit.

A Leader's Guide has been developed for *OBBC*. Unfortunately, this Guide is woefully inadequate. There are only a few suggestions for each lesson, and these suggestions give little direction. For example, in one lesson, a series of questions is stated, but the leader is not told what to do with the questions. Another lesson instructs the leader to discuss the Reformation period, study the Anabaptist movement and give special attention to John Wesley. These directions are much too vague. Still another lesson suggests that the leader trace the movement of the Brethren in Christ westward, but no materials or sources are provided for the leader to accomplish the task.

The other volume, *On Your Way*, has very rapidly developed into a popular resource for teaching prospective church members of junior high age. The real genius of the work is the author's ability to communicate profound ideas in simple language. An excellent example is "Like a Rose" in lesson one. For the most part, Brethren in Christ theology is accurately presented in an interesting and readable form appropriate to the intended audience. Although the artwork

and graphics are not elaborate, they do make the publication more attractive.

Two limitations of the overall work should be noted. Some readers will want more in-depth content, but that criticism will probably not come from the youth themselves. The depth is about right for them. A more serious limitation of the work deals with its usability. Unfortunately, there is no leader's guide as there is for *OBBIIC*. Although there is an activity section in each lesson called "For You To Do," that section is not of much use to a person teaching the material. With several exceptions, the section has activities for the students to do on their own. Indeed, *OYW* seems to be more a self-study guide than a text for a church membership class. Yet, the creative teacher will find it quite adaptable.

More specifically, lesson one is a presentation on the Bible. Although the lesson is quite clear, the rather lengthy section called "Good News" would benefit from an obvious outline highlighted for the reader. A particularly strong aspect of this lesson is the fine, creative class activities which are suggested.

The next unit is on the trinity. These lessons present theological ideas in an interesting manner; at points, however, it seems that some of the language may be so folksy that the youth will be turned off. For example in speaking on the Holy Spirit the manual says: "Does all this sound too good to be true? Well it isn't. The Holy Spirit

will do all of these things for us. . . . Do you feel a shiver of excitement?"

The next unit, the orange unit in the rather unclear color coordinating scheme, seems to be on the topics of conversion and growth. In the session on conversion, the banquet imagery may be too abstract for early adolescents. The level of abstraction involved in thinking of conversion as an invitation to a banquet table is probably beyond them. Yet the understanding of conversion portrayed here is excellent. The emphasis is rightly placed, not on belief, but on repentance and turning from wrongdoing. This is a welcome corrective of the easy believerism so prevalent among us today.

The definition of sin in the lesson on the new life, however, is inadequate. It is defined as wrongdoing rather than the more comprehensive falling short of God's perfection. The lesson on growth is interesting and practical, but it only considers personal piety. Are not service, study, and dialogue valid means of stimulating Christian growth?

The lesson on the Spirit's transformation makes too strong a statement regarding the perfection of Christians. The reader is told that the Holy Spirit can rid the believer of every last impurity. In the language of one story used, the cart will never jump the track again. Indeed several lessons earlier, the statement is made that with Jesus' help all problems will disappear, one by one. This seems

to be a stronger statement than even devout advocates of Christian holiness would be willing to make. Moreover, the attitude tends to promote duplicity and hypocrisy among youth.

The green unit on Christian lifestyle is superb. It includes a comprehensive, interesting, and practical treatment of obedience and discipleship. In the section on money, it might be helpful to indicate what is accomplished through money given to the church. The lesson on brotherhood is a bit superficial and contains some dated material, yet it is quite effective.

The last two lessons form two separate units--one on history and the other on commitment to the church. The lesson on history is readable and quite interesting. The last chapter provides a fitting conclusion: it speaks of the baptism and church membership, which usually take place upon completion of the course. The last session would benefit from a clear statement of the relationship between baptism and church membership. This could avert some practical problems, such as the practice of baptising small children but waiting until later to receive them into the church.

What has been said here should not detract from the overall excellence of the manual. This rather detailed critique will hopefully be useful in the revision of these resources. Such revision of *On Being Brethren in Christ* will certainly need to be done soon or the publication will become obsolete. Although immediate revision of *On Your Way*

is not necessary, its usefulness should be periodically evaluated with a view toward revision. This process will continue to make these church membership manuals valuable resources for our pastors and Christian educators.

NEWS AND NOTES

The Brethren in Christ Historical Society will be sponsoring two events in June of this year. On Sunday, June 5, at 3 p.m. in the Ringgold Meeting House, the Society will conduct a worship service patterned after those of earlier years. Henry Ginder will preach the sermon.

The Ringgold Meeting House, erected in 1871, is one of the first church buildings constructed in the denomination and one of the oldest still standing, although a congregation is no longer associated with it. The building has been restored to its original condition.

Before and following the one-hour service, visitors may walk through the building to observe, among other things, in the basement a table set for a love feast, and above the main meeting room the sleeping quarters (including rope-bottom beds) that were used by overnight guests at the love feast.

Directions to the Ringgold Meeting House near Hagerstown, Maryland, may be obtained by writing to the Brethren in Christ Historical Society, Messiah College, Grantham, PA 17027, or to Avery Zook, 6080 Cumberland Highway, Chambersburg, PA 17201

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The second of the Brethren in Christ Historical Society's June events--the annual meeting--takes place on June 16 at 7:30 p.m. in the Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church. The event will include a brief business meeting, a slide presentation on Brethren in Christ church architecture by Ray Zercher, and a talk on the value of the house church by Myron Dietz. Ray Zercher's presentation is an expansion and illustration of his article in the December, 1981, issue of this journal. Myron Dietz will be speaking out of the context of the historic and continuing house church of his Old Order River Brethren fellowship.

