BORN-AGAIN BRETHREN: HISTORY AS IDENTITY AND THEOLOGY IN THE CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF A ‘PLAIN PEOPLE’

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the ways in which one Protestant faith community has, over the course of the last six decades, deployed history as a means to form identity and shape practical theologies for daily living, in response to a particular transformation of its culture. Beginning in the middle decades of the twentieth century, the Brethren in Christ Church transformed from a small, separatist religious society into a growing mainstream evangelical denomination. Central to this transformation was the church’s increasing investment in the larger American evangelical movement. Since the 1970s, church members have hotly debated their denomination’s “evangelical turn.” While some see it as an inspiring story that captures the church’s missionary essence, others see it as a tale of acculturation to “worldly” society. This contestation, however, rests on a misunderstanding of the denomination’s “post-turn” history. By re-narrating the church’s “evangelical turn” and leveraging that narrative into a collaborative, web-based interpretive exhibit, I seek to empower the Brethren in Christ community to better understand its history. Ultimately, I conclude that throughout the last sixty years and into the present, members of the church have used and continue to use history to understand both who they are and how they should live—conclusions with significant implications for the practice of public history among faith communities.
Contrary to the popular perception of the historian as a reclusive scribe who diligently interprets the past amid stacks of books and musty-smelling documents, I set out to write this thesis in community—that is, among people for whom it might matter. I also wrote it to partially fulfill the requirements for my master's degree, and as such completed the project among a cohort of fellow scholars and mentors. Thus, a few words of thanks are in order.

First and foremost, I want to thank those who mentored me through this project. My advisor, Seth C. Bruggeman, deserves a great deal of the credit: he empowered me to see myself as a historian—particularly, as a public historian—and gave me the tools I needed to engage in this service. He also helped me to understand the great dearth of public history research on religion, a topic so crucial to American public discourse and yet surprisingly undertheorized within the discipline. Thanks is also owed to David H. Watt, who encouraged me as an aspiring scholar, taught me a great deal about North American religion, and helped me to understand more fully my perceived call to work as an intellectual among communities of faith. I also want to thank several of my (current and former) graduate student colleagues at Temple University, without whose support, encouragement, and bent ears I would not have been able to accomplish this project: Bayard Miller, Jenna Marrone, Emily Afflito, and Sara Borden. I am also grateful to those scholars who guided me through my graduate education at Temple University: Martin Levitt, LaDale Winling, and Ken Kusmer. Finally, many thanks to Beth Bensman for serving on my thesis committee.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In May 1911, scores of men, women, and children descended upon the bucolic hills and wheat fields of Highland County, Ohio, for the yearly General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church. Delegates to the meeting likely experienced days of warm fellowship, vigorous debate about denominational issues, and highly charged evangelistic preaching. And while the annual gathering produced no remarkable doctrinal statements or polity decisions, it did yield one important historic artifact: a photograph of early twentieth century church members (Figure 1) that vividly illustrates the visual culture of the Brethren in Christ community in this era.

As this photo intimates, the Brethren in Christ of the early twentieth century were a small, tightly-knit religious community stressing values like simplicity, pacifism, and separation from “the world”—values that decisively shaped members’ public religious practice and private lives. Members built and worshiped in simple, unadorned church buildings that often had neither steeple nor pulpit. As an outward expression of humility and a way of marking themselves off from “worldly” conceptions of fashion, they donned distinct clothing: women wore ankle-length dresses with a cape over the bodice and a covering or “prayer veiling” on the head, while men put on dark suits and upright collars with no ties. By refusing to join the military and by pursuing humanitarian service, they sought to follow literally the biblical mandate to “love thy enemy.”

For almost two centuries, the Brethren in Christ preserved the sanctity of their small fellowship—and the sanctity of their distinctive practices and doctrines—by
isolating themselves from external influences like higher education, government institutions, and other Protestant denominations. Yet, as a photo snapped during the church’s 1984 General Conference clearly demonstrates (Figure 2), the community of the late twentieth century had abandoned the outward manifestations of its nonconformist beliefs and had moved closer to the mainstream of “conservative Protestantism.” To borrow the language of evangelical soteriology, the Brethren in Christ of the postwar era were “born again”—converted from a plain, agrarian people to a predominantly affluent, suburban faith community.

Many factors spurred this change, including the church’s ecumenical contacts with the American evangelical movement. Beginning in the late 1940s, the Brethren in Christ Church formally affiliated with this broad Protestant movement by joining its
institutional arm, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). In short time, church members began to describe themselves as evangelicals; many participated in evangelical parachurch organizations, re-ad evangelical publications, and attended evangelical events. Such fraternization with American evangelicals has continued in subsequent decades, to the point that many members of the Brethren in Christ Church now consider their primary religious identity as “evangelical.”

This brief overview may suggest that the Brethren in Christ wholly view evangelicalism as a positive influence on church life. Yet since the 1970s, Brethren in Christ people have hotly contested their community’s “evangelical turn.” While some praise it as a necessary move that inspired numerical growth and cultivated a more
tolerant spirit among community members, others deride it as a capitulation to “worldly”
society and a betrayal of the church’s heritage.

These competing views of the community’s “evangelical turn” emerge out of
particular historical visions of the Brethren in Christ Church. Yet both rely on incomplete
historical narratives that fail to capture fully the complexities of the Brethren in Christ’s
encounters with postwar evangelicalism. Contrary to what both interpretative camps
claim, the mid-century church did not fully embrace the evangelical movement or its
cultural and social claims. How might a more nuanced interpretation of the church’s
“evangelical turn,” produced in collaboration with Brethren in Christ people and
disseminated in a popular format, contribute to contemporary discourse on church
identity? And what insights might such a project yield for the public history profession?
“Born-Again Brethren” endeavors to answer these questions.
CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

“Born-Again Brethren” developed not just out of my professional curiosities as a historian, but also through my confessional commitments as a member of the Brethren in Christ Church. Raised in a congregation with all the trappings of evangelical influence—a tremendous pressure to “win new souls for Christ,” a tacit endorsement of (Republican) political participation, and worship music that “sanctified” pop radio rhythms—I often wondered about the little old church ladies that wore doilies on their heads during worship. Why did these women choose to dress so strangely? Later, as I formally studied denominational history during my undergraduate career at the church school, Messiah College, I developed a fuller understanding of those little old ladies and their strange head coverings. But now I faced questions about my congregational culture. How could a religious community with such a distinctive background now fit so seamlessly into the larger evangelical movement? Suddenly, I became aware of the contested nature of my denomination’s past: while some praised the church’s “evangelical turn,” others lamented or condemned it. In time, I began to understand that these contestations had more to do with the present than the past. In their efforts to either dignify or to denounce evangelicalism, church members interpreted past events in order to make sense of their contemporary condition. How, these members ask, does our history with evangelicalism help us to articulate a clear Brethren in Christ identity today?

Such uses of the past within the contemporary Brethren in Christ Church corroborate what historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen have concluded more generally about Americans’ popular history-making: that “the most powerful meanings of
the past come out of the dialogue between the past and the present, out of the ways the past can be used to answer pressing current-day questions about relationships, identity, . . . and agency.”¹ Evangelical Christians in particular evince a high engagement with the past, particularly when it comes to crafting present-day identities.² Yet Rosenzweig and Thelen have little to say about evangelicals’ everyday purposes for these popular historical interpretations. Beyond identity formation, how do evangelicals use their excavations of the past?

As both a member of the Brethren in Christ Church and a public historian, I stand in a position to address the questions raised by both communities. By situating myself as an intermediary between the scholarly discourse of public history and the community needs of the Brethren in Christ, I seek to model public history theory and practice.

To do so, I first explore the dualistic ways in which the church’s “evangelical turn” has been deployed to ideological ends by church leaders, denominational intellectuals, and parishioners in the pew. I situate these ideological interpretations of history as “usable pasts” deployed by church members to make sense of communal experiences in ways that unify rather than separate. As cultural critic Van Wyck Brooks first asked in his seminal 1918 essay “On Creating a Usable Past,” and as generations of scholars have since demonstrated, the usability of history revolves around the answer to a central question: “What . . . ought we to elect to remember?”³ By posing the question in a


² Ibid., 121-123.

religious rather than political context, I seek to understand why Brethren in Christ people choose to remember—through praise or through condemnation—certain aspects of their past, while forgetting others. I contend that such usable pasts have been used to show church members where they are, with whom they belong, and how they should live.\(^4\) In other words, I conclude that these usable pasts provide members of the Brethren in Christ Church with competing senses of their specific communal identity, of their (dis)connections to larger Christian movements, and of their theological commitments in day-to-day life.

Second, I sketch a brief historical narrative that reveals the complex ways in which Brethren in Christ people responded to evangelicalism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Resisting both declension views as well as Whiggish interpretations, this revisionist narrative of the “evangelical turn” focuses on the complexities of cultural exchange between religious communities. In particular, it pays attention to Brethren in Christ peoples’ efforts both to resist and to reform evangelicalism. Contrary to what church members have written since the 1970s, not all postwar Brethren in Christ fully embraced evangelical affiliation. In both resisting evangelicalism and reforming evangelicalism, Brethren in Christ people drew on their nonconformist past to fashion contemporary identities and to construct practical theologies for everyday life.

Third, and finally, I draw on various denominational histories (including the preceding narrative) to implement a collaborative, web-based interpretive tool for a

\(^4\) On these first two points, I am indebted to David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 7ff. Glassberg contends that historical consciousness generally provides individuals and communities with “knowledge that helps [them] gain a sense of where [they] are . . . [and] a sense of with whom [they] belong, connecting our personal experiences and memories with those of a larger community, region, and nation.”
Brethren in Christ audience, with a goal of providing members with greater access to primary source documents and with a space for ongoing discussion about their community’s “evangelical turn.” As a collaborative effort with both the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives and an advisory committee of church constituents, the implementation of this tool constitutes an act of public service to the faith community I seek to serve.

As a scholarly project, however, “Born-Again Brethren” seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse in the public historical field regarding the popular uses of the past. In analyzing the ways in which a particular religious group has interpreted itself over a sixty-plus year period, I conclude that popular interpretations of the past provide not only the raw materials for identity formation, but also—in a religious context—supply the insights needed to construct practical theologies for daily living. In other words, religious people like the Brethren in Christ engage the past not only to understand who they are, but also how they should live.

A few operative definitions will provide the theoretical basis for this essay. As I deploy it here, the term “identity” refers to the sense of self or sense of community garnered by defining oneself or one’s community in opposition to other selves and other communities. Personal identity, for instance, is formed by the “commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which [one] can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what [one] endorse[s] or oppose[s].” See Charles Taylor, The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27. Social or communal identity is set by a label (i.e., “religious,” “Christian,” “evangelical,” “Presbyterian,” “Mennonite,” “agnostic,” etc.) and “distinguished by rules [or practices] deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes.” See James D. Fearon, “What is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?” unpublished paper, accessed February 21, 2012, www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf.

The term “theology” or “theologies,” as used in this essay, builds on David Weaver-Zercher’s assertion that theology “is the process of thinking about God and putting those ideas into words.” While affirming Zercher’s focus on theology as the “notions about the sacred power(s) that control, sustain, and/or give meaning to the universe,” I am more interested—in my deployment—in how those notions shape the ways religious people construct their worlds and function in those worlds. As Weaver-Zercher notes, “religious adherents . . . believe something about their position as human beings relative to [sacred power(s)]. Indeed, one of the chief concerns of all religious people is to orient themselves appropriately with respect to the powers that maintain the universe.” See David L. Weaver-Zercher, “Theologies,” in Themes in Religion and American Culture, ed. Philip Goff and Paul Harvey (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University
CHAPTER 3

HISTORY AS IDEOLOGY IN THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

In order to properly understand the Brethren in Christ community, its history, and its members’ uses of the past, a brief overview is in order. The Brethren in Christ represent one small Protestant denomination among many communities giving shape to religious life in North America today. Born during a period of Protestant revivalism that swept across Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the late eighteenth century, the Brethren in Christ began as the “River Brethren,” so called because many of them lived near the Susquehanna River. Denominational historians have often represented the group’s evolution as a quest to synthesize individualistic evangelical piety with corporately held religious values like pacifism, simplicity, humility, and mutual aid.6 Early members were


North Carolina Press, 2004), 5-6. Thus, as I use it in this essay, “theology” has more to do with those intellectual constructions of the divine that provide people with an understanding of how they should relate to their concept of the divine, to one another, and to the world around them.

Finally, I deploy the term “ideology” throughout this essay as a way to succinctly capture both “identity” and “theology” as byproducts of popular history-making. My usage reflects, though does not entirely conform to, that definition of ideology provided by Talcott Parsons: “[A] system of beliefs, held in common by the members of a collectivity, i.e., a society, or a sub-collectivity of one—including a movement deviant from the main culture of the society—a system of ideas which is oriented to the evaluative integration of the collectivity, by the interpretation of the empirical nature of the collectivity and of the situation in which it is placed, the processes by which its members are collectively oriented, and their relation to the future course of events.” See Parsons, The Social System (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951), 349. As members of the Brethren in Christ Church debate the “situation in which [they are] placed”—i.e., the larger world of conservative American Protestantism—and their place in that larger world, they construct ideologies—which incorporate but are not limited to including notions of identity and theology—that, as Parsons’ definition suggests, help them to successfully function within that particular situation and in future situations, and, moreover, that allow them to represent themselves corporately to other “collectivities.” A similarly useful definition of the term “ideology” is found in Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in Ideology and Discontent, ed. David E. Epter (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 47-75.
influenced by two theological traditions, Anabaptism and Pietism. From the Pietists the Brethren in Christ borrowed an emphasis on a personal, emotional conversion experience brought on by a sustained period of inner struggle; from the Anabaptists they borrowed the concept of the church as a “total community” of converted adults, unified, purified, and separated from the nation-state and the larger society. Later, the Brethren in Christ were influenced by the American holiness movement, which preached the possibility of attaining Christian perfection through an instantaneous personal experience of sanctification—a possibility that appealed to the community’s reviver tendencies and to its desire for personal and corporate purity in daily living.

Today, if asked, most contemporary Brethren in Christ would identify themselves as evangelicals or Anabaptists.⁷ In 2010, the church had more than 26,000 members in the United States and Canada, with almost 80,000 additional members worldwide.⁸ But in 1945, the year in which this study begins, the North American fellowship consisted of only 6,000 baptized members. Between 1945 and 1970, the church grew by more than 4,700 people; by 1990, it had reached about 20,400 members.⁹

By the mid-twentieth century, Brethren in Christ members lived in twenty U.S. states and two Canadian provinces. Their religious expression reflected larger trends in

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⁸ Pamela Arnold, parnold@bic-church.org, November 8, 2010, personal e-mail.

American Protestantism: they held an annual General Conference, conducted revival meetings, organized Sunday schools, and dispatched foreign missionaries to countries as diverse as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Japan, and Cuba. They operated three schools: Messiah College, in Grantham, Pennsylvania; Upland (formerly Beulah) College in Upland, California; and Niagara Christian Collegiate, a high school in Fort Erie, Ontario. They also published a church periodical, the *Evangelical Visitor*, which printed obituaries, individual testimonies, reports of visitation between community members, and news of congregational and missionary activity—items that brought the now-globalized Brethren in Christ community into individual members’ living rooms.  

Despite their institutional similarities to other Christian groups, the Brethren in Christ nevertheless considered themselves “set apart,” distinct from the rest of Christendom. Fomenting these feelings of distinctiveness were certain theological and cultural beliefs. Voluntarily adopted by church members, these beliefs had, by the mid-twentieth century, become codified as the doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance. More than just words on paper or creeds to be verbally affirmed, these doctrines—and members’ corporate and individual interpretations of them—affected the ways in which the Brethren in Christ chose to structure their personal and public lives.

Nonresistance, according to midcentury church doctrine, was an elaboration of pacifism rooted in the denomination’s reading of the New Testament witness of Jesus Christ. The doctrine had its roots in early members’ refusals to “take up the sword” for revenge or defense, to assume political office, or to exercise the franchise—all acts that

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10 From this point forward, I will refer to the publication by its informal name, the *Visitor*.

11 For an historical and theological treatment of the doctrine of nonresistance, see Wittlinger, 102-106, and A. W. Climenhaga, 302-306.
they believed compromised their foremost allegiance to the Kingdom of God. Later modifications of the doctrine redefined nonresistance primarily as a refusal to participate in or prepare for war and other forms of human life-taking. This countercultural position often put the community at odds with its neighbors and with the nation-state, especially during the two world wars of the early twentieth century.

Nonresistance was but an extension of a larger doctrine, nonconformity. Theologically, nonconformity was a social structural arrangement intended to mark off the Brethren in Christ community from the rest of society by means of alternative patterns of language, personal appearance, consumption, and entertainment. Practically, nonconformity manifested itself in both public and private practices that distinguished the Brethren in Christ from their North American neighbors, including other Christians. For instance, church members built and worshiped in simple, unadorned buildings that often

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12 See “A Copy of the Confession of Faith of the Brethren,” in Wittlinger, 554. This is a translation of an eighteenth-century document signed by early members/founders of the River Brethren community.


14 For more on the treatment of conscientious objectors during the First and Second World Wars, see M.J. Heisey, Peace and Persistence: Tracing the Brethren in Christ Peace Witness Through Three Generations (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003). For a first-hand account of one conscientious objector’s treatment at the hands of military officials during World War I, see E. J. Swalm, Nonresistance Under Test: The Experiences of a Conscientious Objector, as Encountered in the Late World War by the Author (Nappanee, Ind.: E.V. Publishing House, 1938). Similar stories from the Second World War can be found in Swalm, comp., Nonresistance Under Test: A Compilation of Experiences of Conscientious Objectors as Encountered in Two World Wars (Nappanee, Ind.: E.V. Publishing House, 1949). The title of a similar volume of stories about conscientious objectors, They Also Serve..., suggests an attempt by nonresistant Brethren in Christ to justify their non-military wartime service as equal to that of soldiers and noncombatants. See Wendell E. Harmon, ed., They Also Serve... (Nappanee, Ind.: Relief and Service Committee & the Board for Young People’s Work of the Brethren in Christ Church, 1947).

had neither steeple nor pulpit. They abstained from certain entertainments and forms of recreation that they considered “worldly,” refused to purchase life insurance, and—perhaps most remarkably—adopted a particular dress pattern as an outward expression of humility and a way of marking themselves off from “worldly” conceptions of fashion. Women wore ankle-length dresses with a cape (an additional vest) over the bodice and a covering or “prayer veiling” on the head, while men wore dark suits with upright collars while eschewing neckties. These sartorial decisions made community members visually distinct from their neighbors and coreligionists.

Yet contrary to what the preceding outline may imply, neither nonconformity nor nonresistance were practiced uniformly throughout the Brethren in Christ Church, especially in the early twentieth century. By the 1930s and 1940s, a grassroots diversification of religious practice had begun to sweep across some parts of the church community. A variety of factors contributed to this break from tradition. Industrialization and urban/suburbanization moved many members of the once-agrarian community off the farm and into new professions. Changing fashions and expectations for professional comportment challenged the way the Brethren in Christ physically embodied plainness in the day-to-day. Economically, many Brethren in Christ ascended into the burgeoning middle class, which increased their access to post-secondary education and professional careers; these new ventures, in turn, exposed members to new ideas and ways of thinking about the world. The ubiquity of new media in postwar life complicated members’ attempts to avoid “worldly” innovations like motion pictures and television. Moreover,

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global events like World War II caused confusion about and diversification of nonconformist thought and practice.\textsuperscript{18}

The close of World War II provided the denominational community with an opportunity to take stock of its situation. The diversity of practice, coupled with the sense of theological disagreement on a variety of topics, surprised and confused leaders and laypeople alike. But it was not the only problem besetting the postwar church. Stagnating from a lack of new members, succumbing to the lure of acculturation, and struggling to expand their network of schools, missions, and benevolent institutions, the Brethren in Christ Church had reached a tipping point.

Desperate for solutions to their community's crisis, Brethren in Christ leaders turned to other faith communities. In 1950, the church joined the National Holiness Association, an interdenominational agency for holiness churches.\textsuperscript{19} The previous year, it joined the National Association of Evangelicals, the institutional arm of the postwar evangelical movement.

Postwar evangelicalism, also known as “neo-evangelicalism” or “new evangelicalism,” coalesced in the early 1940s through the efforts of a number of self-proclaimed “moderate fundamentalists.”\textsuperscript{20} These moderates, discontent with their

\textsuperscript{17} For more on “nonconformity under stress,” see Wittlinger, 342-362.

\textsuperscript{18} For more on the diversification of nonresistant practice spurred by World War II, see Wittlinger, 387-393; Heisey, 49-75; and David L. Weaver-Zercher, “Open (to) Arms: The Status of the Peace Position in the Brethren in Christ Church,” \textit{Brethren in Christ History and Life} 22, no. 1 (April 1999), 90-115.

\textsuperscript{19} Wittlinger, 476-479.

movement’s development in recent years, endeavored initially to reform fundamentalism. Specifically, they reacted against fundamentalism’s ecclesiastical separatism and “uneasy” social conscience. By contrast, the moderates hoped to unite “Bible-believing” Protestants from all denominations for the purposes of evangelism and service—a goal they pursued with the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942. When traditionalist fundamentalists reacted with antagonism toward their more moderate interlocutors, and when progressive liberal

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21 To American religious historians, “fundamentalism” is understood as one of two factions that emerged out of nineteenth century Protestantism in response to changes in American social and cultural life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Militantly preoccupied with the defense of certain “fundamental” religious beliefs and with the conservation of “Christian America,” the Protestants who would become fundamentalists mounted campaigns to rid their churches of liberal theology and to combat the moral declension they saw in American society.

When these campaigns derailed, fundamentalists took a different tack: they withdrew from the mainline denominations and assumed as their primary focus the cultivation of a righteous, separatist subculture. In the 1930s and 1940s, fundamentalists established a vast network of independent religious institutions—nondenominational congregations, missionary societies, and schools, among other organizations—that enabled them to preach the Gospel and to relay their prophecies about the fast-approaching End Times, which they culled from their highly developed dispensational premillennialist eschatological system. Far from disappearing or disintegrating, as many critics claimed it would, fundamentalism thrived in these years—at least from an institutional perspective.

For more on the emergence of fundamentalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Ernest R. Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Marsden, Understanding..., 9-61. For its development into a thriving religious subculture in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, see Carpenter, Revive Us Again, 13-88; Marsden, Understanding..., 62-68.

22 My language here is, of course, deliberate: one of the seminal works of the new evangelical movement was Carl F.H. Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism (1945; repr., William B. Eerdmans, 2003).

Protestants dismissed them as “neo-fundamentalists,” the moderates adopted the name “new evangelicals” and began to systematically distance themselves from both fundamentalism and liberalism.\(^{24}\)

The recovery of the term “evangelical” was key to these reformers’ efforts. Since Protestantism’s fundamentalist-liberal split in the early twentieth century, the term had fallen out of use; neither side cared to claim it, since it had but lost its original meaning. In applying the descriptor to their new association—an association that was an explicit alternative to both fundamentalism and liberalism—the new evangelicals positioned themselves as the heirs of nineteenth century Protestantism.\(^{25}\)

Despite their differences from traditional fundamentalists, new evangelicals shared a great many qualities with their religious forebears. For instance, both groups were ardently committed to preserving doctrinal essentials like the authority of the Bible, the virgin birth, and the imminent return of Christ. And both possessed an “overriding preoccupation” with evangelism and revivalism, as well as a goal of “winning the world for Christ,” which the “new evangelicals” set about to achieve by forming institutions like Youth for Christ International and Campus Crusade for Christ.\(^{26}\)

Given their own preoccupation with such soul-saving, the Brethren in Christ found the end goal of the new evangelicalism quite appealing. As a result, despite their

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\(^{24}\) For more on new evangelicals’ efforts to distance themselves from fundamentalists, see Stone, 73-116. For more on their efforts to distance themselves from liberals, see Stone, 117-157.

\(^{25}\) On the reclamation of the term “evangelical,” see Stone, 109-111.

historic reticence from formal ecumenical partnerships,27 the Brethren in Christ quickly embraced their newfound evangelical allies. After joining the NAE in 1949, Brethren in Christ leaders wrote effusively about the benefits of affiliation.28 Many members began to describe their community as an “evangelical” denomination, an honorific that earlier generations had not given to their church.29 Soon, church members and leaders alike began to participate in other evangelical initiatives and parachurch organizations.30 Evangelical revivalist Billy Graham’s popular crusades drew many Brethren in Christ, bringing them into contact with their non-plain co-religionists.31 By the early 1950s, 

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29 See John N. Hostetter, “Point of Attack,” Evangelical Visitor, January 14, 1957, 2; John N. Hostetter, “1958,” Evangelical Visitor, December 30, 1957, 2. Another leader to apply this designation to the Brethren in Christ is Charlie B. Byers, “Faith or Fear,” Evangelical Visitor, July 14, 1958, 8-9. Zercher, 50-51, makes the point that while Brethren in Christ always saw themselves as “evangelical,” they did not see themselves as “evangelicals” until after their affiliation with the NAE.

30 Many people raised in the Brethren in Christ Church in the 1940s and 1950s recall attending Youth for Christ rallies in their local areas, and later (during undergraduate or graduate study) participating in campus ministries like InterVarsity or Campus Crusade for Christ. See Earl Engle, interview by author, October 14, 2011; Arlene B. Miller, interview by author, November 14, 2011; Beth (Ulrey) Saba, interview by author, October 22, 2011.

31 Engle, interview by author, October 14, 2011; Eber and Ruth (Myers) Dourte, interview by author, March 7, 2011; Robert B. and Eleanor (Heisey) Lehman, interview by author, February 18, 2012.
Brethren in Christ officials had assumed leadership roles within the NAE. Others took the helm of evangelical institutions, like Youth for Christ. And by 1964, a Brethren in Christ church member—Arthur Climenhaga—had become the executive director of the NAE.

Beginning in the 1970s, Brethren in Christ people began to ask questions about this “evangelical turn” in their community’s past. In the 1950s and 1960s, the church grew perceptibly more comfortable with evangelicalism. Meanwhile, the church experienced a continued decline in adherence to visible forms of nonconformity and nonresistance even as it expanded its membership rolls and number of congregations and mission stations. Gradually, members began to wonder, “How, if at all, were these developments related to our move toward evangelicalism?”

The first formal historical and theological analysis of the church’s “evangelical turn” appeared in 1978, with the publication of church historian Carlton O. Wittlinger’s *Quest for Piety and Obedience: The Story of the Brethren in Christ*. As the denomination’s first scholarly church history, *Quest for Piety and Obedience* attended to the scope of Brethren in Christ history. But it also focused on recent historical

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35 Throughout the remainder of this essay, I deploy the phrase “evangelical turn” as shorthand for the Brethren in Christ Church’s increasing familiarity with mainstream “new evangelicalism” after 1950.
developments, including the denomination’s 1949 affiliation with the NAE and the 1950 formation of the Church Review and Study Committee, a board that would ultimately lead the church through a formal reconsideration of its traditional beliefs and practices.

In a chapter titled “Quest for a New Identity,” Wittlinger first explored the factors contributing to the church’s NAE affiliation. That move, from Wittlinger’s perspective, was precipitated by two problems: slow numeric growth and evidence that fewer and fewer church youth were adopting the “ways of the Brethren,” including plain dress and nonresistance. The historian concluded that some church leaders sought “a solution to the problem [by moving] the brotherhood . . . closer to the main stream of contemporary evangelicalism.”

As represented by the NAE, this “main stream” offered three clear benefits: “strengthening the witness of the Brethren in Christ . . ., making the Brethren more widely known, and making available to them new sources of spiritual inspiration and fellowship.” While some “members perceived the prospect of formal affiliation with ‘worldly’ evangelical . . . churches to be a compromise of the group’s historic identity,” the vast majority saw NAE as a vitalizing partner, and endorsed the denomination’s application for membership. By and large, Wittlinger’s analysis concludes that the Brethren in Christ of the late 1940s and 1950s found NAE membership a positive, affirming addition to church life.

36 Wittlinger, 476.
37 Ibid., 476-477. Wittlinger notes that those tasked with investigating the Brethren in Christ’s affiliation with NAE “omitted any direct reference to possible disadvantages” of joining the coalition. Ibid., 477.
38 Ibid., 477.
39 Ibid., 477-479.
A year after the church concretized its ties to the emergent evangelical coalition, the Brethren in Christ embarked upon a new venture: a decade-long re-examination of their long-held doctrines and ordinances. This venture, as characterized by Wittlinger, resulted in the official abandonment or modification of aspects of the church’s “historic attitudes and practices.” Stirred to action by an impassioned keynote address, delegates to the church’s 1950 General Conference formed the Church Review and Study Committee, the denominationally sanctioned body that would ultimately lead the community in its reconfiguration of church life. Tasked with studying the “state, function, and work of the general church,” the committee would (over the course of a decade) bring to the conference floor a series of recommendations that changed the institutional and doctrinal dynamics of the Brethren in Christ Church. Among other reforms, Wittlinger focuses on the committee’s erasure of the prescribed church uniforms; their permitting of musical instruments in congregational worship; their authorization of the purchase of life insurance by church members; and their allowance of individuals to join the armed services without risk of disfellowship from the church.

By the time Wittlinger interpreted the work of the Church Review and Study Committee and the NAE affiliation in the late 1970s, most active church members knew about these dramatic upheavals in the life of their community. Far fewer saw the two as interrelated. Wittlinger drew this connection explicitly by narrating the story of church leaders’ participation in the 1950 NAE convention in Indianapolis, Indiana, a tale virtually

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40 Ibid., 481.
41 Quoted in Ibid., 483.
42 Ibid., 483-492.
unknown to most church members at the time. According to Wittlinger, the twelve Brethren in Christ leaders—bishops, ministers, and administrators—came to Indianapolis eager to rub shoulders with fellow Christian leaders, and “the spiritual enthusiasm and success orientation of the convention . . . moved them deeply.”43 As they compared the passion of these other churches against the staid traditionalism of their own fellowship, Wittlinger observed, the Brethren in Christ leaders became profoundly depressed and concerned. Following the evening service on the penultimate night of the convention, the Brethren in Christ delegates gathered to share “pent-up frustrations and doubts about the outcomes of their efforts.”44 This gathering, which lasted late into the night, would involve much conversation, weeping, and praying, but—in Wittlinger’s telling—would conclude with the participants’ renewed determination to re-invigorate the evangelistic spirit of their home denomination.

In interpreting this event as an historian, Wittlinger situated it as a watershed moment—“a catalyst for change in the life of the brotherhood.”45 In his view, the late-night gathering nurtured the sentiments of institutional dissatisfaction that would later germinate into the Church Review and Study Committee. By drawing a cause-and-effect connection between NAE affiliation and denominational transformation, Wittlinger proved evangelicalism’s implicit (and explicit) influence on the postwar changes to Brethren in Christ life and thought. His historical invention of the evangelical turn in the

43 Ibid., 479.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
Brethren in Christ Church helped church members make sense of their ties to the mainstream of conservative Protestantism.

In closing *Quest for Piety and Obedience*, Wittlinger spoke not as an “objective” historian but as a concerned churchman. Since the 1960s, he observed, the church had lost not only its visible symbols of nonconformity and nonresistance but, by and large, the principles undergirding these theological imperatives. From Wittlinger’s perspective, years of formal and informal affiliation with evangelicals had fueled this change in denominational identity. For evidence, he pointed to recent trends in church architecture: unlike the community’s early meetinghouses, which evinced in their design and furnishing principled commitments to values like community and simplicity, contemporary sanctuaries echoed the formalism and materialism of present-day evangelical Protestantism. 46 This “revolution in church architecture” represented but one of many changes in denominational life clearly influenced by evangelicalism; the bigger concern, from Wittlinger’s perspective, was the church’s loss of a clear sense of self. In abandoning its nonconformist symbols—those elements that visibly unified the community—as well as the counter-cultural values buttressing those symbols, the Brethren in Christ had suffered “the trauma of an uncertain identity.” 47 By default, the historian felt, the church had moved “toward a typical, evangelical-holiness position” 48—a position that Wittlinger saw as a betrayal of its historic theological identity. 49

46 Ibid., 492-495.

47 Ibid., 495.

48 Ibid., 498.

But not all denominational leaders shared Wittlinger’s confessional skepticism. Many characterized the church’s evangelical turn as a boon; some even situated it as the realization of the church’s true identity. Perhaps to Wittlinger’s dismay, these pro-evangelical leaders pointed to *Quest for Piety and Obedience*’s treatment of “Indianapolis ’50” to shore up their endorsement of evangelicalism. Writing in 1979, less than a year after Wittlinger published his church history, bishop and evangelist Charlie Byers also situated the 1950 NAE event as a watershed moment in the church’s turn from isolationist sectarianism to vital denominationalism. Byers, himself a participant in the late-night gathering, wrote that the meeting set in motion a number of “sweeping changes in the life of the church”—changes that, in Byers’ estimation, helped the church to fully realize its God-given mission of evangelism.\(^5^0\) Whereas the church prior to 1950 had struggled to assimilate new converts into its midst because of its “conservative dress and conduct codes,” the transformed church since 1950 has grown exponentially. Byers concluded that “God raised up the Brethren in Christ church two hundred years ago, and . . . in all of this transition [since 1950] He has been preparing the church to be in a better position to go out into the lanes of our cities and the world to [proclaim the Gospel].”\(^5^1\)

By situating this evangelical turn as the culmination of the Brethren in Christ’s search for an authentic identity, Byers proffered a radical historical interpretation of the Brethren in Christ past—one that emphasized its revivalistic tendencies over its separatistic character and corporate life.

Reflecting this positive view of evangelicalization, subsequent generations of


\(^5^1\) Ibid., 26.
church leaders have deployed the story of the 1950 NAE meeting as a usable past for the contemporary church. In the 2000s, one minister pointed to the gathering to support his claim that the church in every generation must alter its methods in order to effectively “reach the lost for Christ.” He modeled this “lesson” from Brethren in Christ history in his own congregational context by “call[ing] the church to a time of prayer” and asking them to name specific changes in church life that might stimulate growth. At the denominational level, in 2010, moderator Warren Hoffman used the story as a way to inspire formal changes in the church’s vision and mission goals. In a video posted to the denomination’s website, Hoffman told how the delegates to the 1950 NAE meeting felt inspired by what they had seen and heard; following an intense late-night prayer meeting, the leaders returned home “with a collective resolve to be a different kind of church.” Just as those mid-century leaders had welcomed changes for the sake of growth, Hoffman argued, so too should present-day church members welcome changes that will “strengthen our outreach and [help us] become a more embracing community.” For these church leaders, the evangelical turn represented not only the culmination of a particular community identity, but a viable way of living faithfully as Christians in the present.

Amid deployments of the evangelical turn as a usable past, some church members have contested the influence of evangelicalism on the Brethren in Christ. Specifically,


53 Ibid.


55 Ibid.
these commentators view the church’s turn toward evangelicalism as a betrayal of their community’s historical identity and theology.\textsuperscript{56} Their arguments rest on a complex historical vision not only of the church’s postwar evangelical turn but of the denomination’s origins. By first casting evangelicalism as a “corrupting” influence, and by then urging a return to denominational roots, these church members use history to craft a present-day identity for the Brethren in Christ as well as a practical theology by which to embody that identity.

For Luke L. Keefer, Jr., evangelicalism has corrupted the way the Brethren in Christ think about their faith. A theologian and church historian, Keefer, in a 1996 essay, narrated a history of the Brethren in Christ’s evangelical turn that focused primarily on the theological changes wrought by that event. His analysis proceeded from a historical vision of the church that emphasized its three “theological streams”: Anabaptism, a sixteenth-century reform movement originating in Switzerland among disenchanted Protestants; Pietism, a seventeenth-century renewal movement that began among German Lutherans and eventually spread among a broad swath of Protestants on the continent and in the North American colonies; and Wesleyan Holiness, a nineteenth-century American church movement that adapted the perfectionist theology of seventeenth-century Anglican cleric John Wesley to stateside concerns.\textsuperscript{57} These streams—which early church members successfully synthesized, according to Keefer’s narrative—provided the Brethren in Christ with a particular faith “heritage.” This heritage took seriously the importance of a “warm-hearted” conversion experience; established an ecclesiology

\textsuperscript{56} Such arguments reflect concerns first voiced by Wittlinger in the late 1970s.

based on devoted discipleship and passionate evangelism; and made total separation from a sinful “world” a fundamental aspect of religious faith. The influence since 1950 of evangelicalism, Keefer asserted, has muddied the waters of this tripartite theological stream.

Situating the church’s 1949 entrée into the NAE as “the symbolic harbinger of things to come,” Keefer argued that evangelicalism “does not domesticate readily to the Brethren in Christ heritage.” In prescribing a solution, he urged church members to “subject Evangelicalism [sic] to the thorough scrutiny we have never given it to separate the acceptable from the unacceptable.” In so doing, Keefer further argued, the church would need to preserve at all costs those theological principles implicit in the “Brethren in Christ heritage” and embrace only those aspects of evangelicalism compatible with the heritage. Only such a synthesis would enable the Brethren in Christ to develop a distinctive identity and live as faithful Christians in the present. Moreover, because today’s church “cannot just return to a previous age of Brethren in Christ identity,” and because evangelicalism has had some positive influence on the denomination, Keefer enjoined church members to “be Evangelicals [sic] with a difference”—that is, evangelicals who evince the classical theological vision of the Brethren in Christ Church.

While Keefer’s historical narrative focused on evangelicalism’s corruption of

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58 Ibid., 47-60.
59 Ibid., 38.
60 Ibid., 60.
61 Ibid., 61.
62 Ibid., 60.
Brethren in Christ thought, Arlene Miller articulated an historical narrative to explain how evangelicalism had corrupted Brethren in Christ practice. A religion scholar and denominational intellectual, Miller historicized evangelicalism as the conduit by which “secular” North American cultures infiltrated the Brethren in Christ Church and corrupted the historic “ethos of Brethren in Christ culture.” As an academic, she drew on historian David Harrington Watt’s 1991 study of twentieth-century evangelicalism to conclude that “the Brethren in Christ began participating in the American evangelical subculture as it was being shaped by powerful influences in American culture.” The denomination accommodated itself to that culture and, consequently, lost its distinctive identity.

As an antidote to this theological crisis, Miller prescribed the recovery of the classical Brethren in Christ “ethos.” Miller unpacked this ethos using a particular interpretation of her community’s past. Implicit in this “ethos” were expectations about contemporary community identity and daily Christian living. The Brethren in Christ of an earlier era, Miller argued, read the Bible corporately (not individually); understood the church as “a family of brother and sisters” that intentionally “gathered around [God’s] Word” and separated itself from the surrounding culture in a profound and visible way; and that recognized and accepted the “costly” nature of Christian discipleship. Miller supported her historical claims with appeals to youthful memories. At her small Brethren in Christ church near Canton, Ohio, for instance, Miller had participated in biannual

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64 Ibid., 196.

65 Ibid., 192-195.
“love feasts,” church gatherings that “provided . . . for [public expression of] confession and forgiveness” and thereby literalized the church’s emphasis on community and devotional purity.

The church’s evangelical turn, Miller suggested, had put an end to such expressions, largely because they seemed foreign to modern, individualistic North American culture. But such cultural “foreign-ness,” she further averred, was exactly the point. Situating the historic Brethren in Christ as “an outpost or colony of [God’s] Kingdom in a foreign land,”
Miller urged the church to recover this counter-cultural religious vision both because “the Scripture” demands it and because the larger evangelical church needs to see it in practice. “Rather than seeing [our historical ethos] as extraneous baggage to be jettisoned or to lose by neglect,” Miller concluded, “we need to see [it] as [a] treasure . . . not for pride of group but to share with fellow believers.”

By recapturing the historic Brethren in Christ ethos, Miller concluded, today’s church members could live more faithfully in the day-to-day while also coming to a better understanding of their religious raison d’être.

For commentators like Miller and Keefer, the Brethren in Christ Church’s postwar evangelical turn represents not a culmination of their community’s historical identity but a betrayal of it. Evangelicalism, they argue, diffused the theological insights of the church’s founders and thereby corrupted the church’s identity. In seeking solutions to this contemporary crisis, both authors point back to the church’s late eighteenth century origins as providing a truly usable past for the contemporary church: usable in the sense

66 Ibid., 194.
67 Ibid., 193.
68 Ibid., 197.
that it supplies both a sense of identity and a practical theology for day-to-day living.

This usable past, like the usable past proffered by Hoffman and others, serves both to locate the Brethren in Christ community along the Protestant spectrum and to provide it with a guide for faithful existence. Keefer’s and Miller’s usable past situates the Brethren in Christ as a distinctive denomination directed in daily living by specific counter-cultural religious commitments to the Bible, the gathered faith community, and “costly” discipleship. Hoffman’s usable past, in contrast, sees the Brethren in Christ as vitally connected to the larger conservative Protestant world and, by virtue of that connection, as an “embracing community” driven not by specific counter-cultural religious commitments but by a shared devotion to evangelism and outreach. Thus, for Hoffman, the evangelical turn has aided the Brethren in Christ; for Keefer and Miller, it has compromised them.
CHAPTER 4
RECONSIDERING THE EVANGELICAL TURN

While based on nuggets of historical truth, both these views of the Brethren in Christ Church’s evangelical turn oversimplify the cross-cultural complexities of the church’s postwar encounters with evangelicalism. Contrary to what previous historical accounts have argued, the plain-garbed Brethren who encountered evangelicalism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s did not embrace fully this form of Protestant Christianity. In fact, in the years after the church’s formal affiliation with the NAE and informal partnership in many new evangelical initiatives, a number of community members prescribed particular methods for their community’s encounters with evangelicalism. Some, concerned that evangelicalism might mute or already had muted elements of the church’s distinctive identity, urged resistance toward those aspects of evangelicalism less compatible with historic church doctrine. Others, recognizing the potential for interdenominational fellowship but insistent on preserving what they perceived as “distinctive” aspects of their church’s doctrine, called on their denomination to reform “worldly” evangelicalism. A more nuanced historical analysis of the church’s encounters with evangelicalism between 1945 and 1975, attentive to efforts toward resistance and reform, will not only provide contemporary church members with a more dynamic historical narrative but will also supply them with a greater array of tools for contemporary identity-making and theological formation.

Efforts to resist evangelicalism began shortly after the church’s formal affiliation with NAE. In August 1950, just a few months after church leaders’ “pivotal” late-night prayer meeting in Indianapolis, Henry N. Hostetter—a young bishop from Lancaster
Henry N. Hostetter sent a terse note to Clarence Z. Musser, director of the annual youth conference at Messiah College.

Drawing Musser’s attention to a recent announcement about the upcoming event, Hostetter chastened his contemporary for focusing too heavily on the keynote speaker, evangelical leader and World Vision founder Bob Pierce. “[I am] feeling that the announcement was a bit biased,” Hostetter declared sharply, “as all the emphasis was put on the outside man, which is already a current problem among many of our youth in that the outside looks so much better [that the Brethren in Christ Church].” While admitting that “I am much in harmony with the idea” of inviting Pierce to the conference, he expressed concerns about the stress placed on Pierce above denominational speakers.69

Although Musser rebuffed Hostetter’s objection, arguing that Pierce “is being used of God in a remarkable way” and therefore deserves the emphasis,70 the coverage of the youth conference in the church’s Sunday School Herald newspaper suggests that Hostetter’s fears may have been well-founded. “Everyone was [so] eager for a glimpse of Bob Pierce,” wrote attendee Leoda Climenhaga, “[that] when he finally walked onto the platform . . . we looked at him with the satisfaction one gains from seeing an international figure in the flesh.”71 Like some kind of evangelical celebrity, Bob Pierce—the “tall, stocky, curly-haired professor [with] a husky bass voice”—elicited cheers from the


70 C. Z. Musser to Bishop Henry N. Hostetter, August 14, 1950, Henry N. Hostetter Papers, MG 13 – 3.13, Folder “Personal correspondences, 1950,” Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).

assembled crowd.  

Hostetter’s concerns showcase a desire to preserve denominational loyalty—a desire no doubt born of the community’s historic emphasis on itself as a “peculiar people” with a distinctive identity. By continuing to define themselves in the present through a deployment of a past collective consciousness, Brethren in Christ members like Hostetter sought to temper what they perceived as evangelicalism’s capacity for theological homogenization. As early as 1947, Leah Dohner warned the Ohio-Kentucky Joint Council that fraternization with “workers from other denominations who do not teach holiness” has the possibility to weaken the church’s stand on holiness and, by extension, on separation from “the world.”  

“[C]overings will get smaller and smaller, bonnets become more like hats and dresses cut on more fashionable lines. . . . How must this look in God’s sight? Isn’t this trying to serve God and the mammon of fashion at the same time?” Luke L. Keefer, Sr., recalled in his autobiography that he initially opposed Brethren in Christ affiliation with the NAE because the group did not hold the church’s nonconformist doctrine; he worried that NAE’s influence might alter particular aspects of the church’s historic identity.  

Many Brethren in Christ objected to the changes in church life directly prescribed by the Church Review and Study Committee, and indirectly inspired by contact with evangelicals. They drew upon a particularly past-inspired identity to resist such changes,

72 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
and prescribed a return to this historic identity as a solution to the church’s present
diversity. Reacting negatively to a leader’s suggestion that she “be charitable in accepting
some changes [to Brethren in Christ doctrine] which must come for growth,” one church
member expressed concern. If she modified her “unalterable . . . standards” of personal
comportment, would she not forfeit her witness to her “circle of unsaved friends”?76 In a
1963 letter to Pennsylvania bishop C. N. Hostetter, Jr., one member condemned the
denomination’s changed stance on nonconformity as “welcom[ing] disobedience into the
church of Christ.” Sketching a rather mythic historic vision, he claimed that, in the past,
the church’s beliefs bore out clearly in daily, righteous living; today, by contrast, the
church’s recent “changes” in doctrine had resulted in uncertainty and confusion. After
describing how one female congregant in his church wore “lip stick[,] a nice gold
necklace[,] a ring and a small hat with cut hair” to a Sunday morning service, the writer
concluded with a question: “[H]ow am I to teach my girls [separation] with examples like
this before them?”77 Only by returning to the ways of the past, this member averred,
could the church seek to live faithfully in the present and future.

In these ways and others, church members drew on their community’s historic
identity to resist, both directly and indirectly, the perceived acculturation of the Brethren
in Christ. And yet despite such efforts, many Brethren in Christ continued to identify with
this transdenominational Protestant coalition. By the 1950s, church leaders

76 Emma Etterline to Henry N. Hostetter, March 5, 1952, Henry N. Hostetter Papers, MG 13 – 3.10, Folder
“General Correspondences,” Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).

77 Robert Dagen to C. N. Hostetter, Jr., March 25, 1963, C. N. Hostetter, Jr., Papers, MG 7 – 22.1, Folder
“Correspondence (A-H), 1960-1963,” Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.).
often described their community as “an entity of the evangelical movement.” In many instances, those same writers drew exact parallels between their community’s concerns and those concerns of the broader “conservative Protestant” world. The church had, in a profound way, joined the evangelical mainstream.

Faced with this reality, many of those Brethren in Christ who still felt somewhat ill at ease with a fully evangelical identity took a different tact: reformation. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into the 1970s, Brethren in Christ people drew on their historic “full Gospel” identity to challenge the new evangelicalism’s tendency to divorce ethics from theology. In particular, these Brethren in Christ disputed what they perceived as evangelicalism’s militaristic inclinations, as well as the group’s inattention to issues like poverty and social justice. Initially, such efforts earned Brethren in Christ people a reputation as troublemakers or—worse—liberals. By the 1960s, however, Brethren in Christ attempts to “reform evangelicalism” coincided with other evangelicals’ efforts to “recover” an evangelical social ethic. Interestingly, both groups drew on historical interpretations to convict postwar evangelicals of their “scandalous” social conscience and to sketch out practical theologies for faithful future living. By the 1970s, some Brethren in Christ, inspired by this historical meaning-making as well as by the emergent

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New Left in U.S. politics, joined in the institutional formation of a so-called “evangelical left.”

Among the many Brethren in Christ who would seek to reform evangelicalism after World War II, Pennsylvania bishop C. N. Hostetter, Jr., displayed the greatest initiative in contesting evangelicalism’s position on war. A prominent denominational advocate of nonresistance and a vocal proponent of international relief efforts, Hostetter had by the early 1950s earned the respect of both Anabaptists and evangelicals for his leadership in both the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the NAE’s World Relief Commission. While he credited the NAE with providing his denomination with an enlarged field for witness and service, Hostetter balked at evangelicals’ apparent embrace of just war theology as well as their perceived penchant for linking God and country. During the 1951 NAE convention, he noted delegates’ “almost hysterical” and “childish” reactions to the news that President Truman had fired General Douglas MacArthur. Later, he expressed his displeasure at the group’s inordinate preoccupation with “anti-communist propaganda.” And yet, unlike some of his less conciliatory

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81 Mennonite Central Committee was formed in 1920 as an outlet for Mennonites and Brethren in Christ to provide domestic and international relief and material aid. The Brethren in Christ became a full member of MCC in 1942. The agency played a vital role in Brethren in Christ service and relief endeavors after World War II. For more on the organization, see Wittlinger, 379, 385, 393, 396-398.

82 C. N. Hostetter, Jr., “NAE and the Church,” Evangelical Visitor, June 16, 1958, 2.

83 Quoted in Sider, Messenger, 211.

84 Diary, June 30, 1961, quoted in Sider, Messenger, 215.
Mennonite colleagues, Hostetter desired to engage with evangelicals; he believed that peace churches like the Brethren in Christ could make a considerable impact on evangelical groups, especially by drawing their attention to issues like peacemaking and poverty relief.85

Hostetter’s most direct attempt to reform evangelicalism came at the 1955 NAE convention. Displeased that an NAE-sponsored panel presentation on “Christianity and War in Our Time” would not include an advocate for Christian pacifism, Hostetter wrote to Carl F. H. Henry, the presentation organizer. “The inclination of evangelicals,” Hostetter charged, “is to take for granted that the Bible approves participation in war and [to] classify all opposition to it as identified with the pacifism espoused by liberals. The evangelical fellowship should be better informed.”86 He urged Henry to add another voice to the panel, but the request was denied. The conference proceedings confirmed Hostetter’s worst fears: General William K. Harrison, one of the panelists, gave a “ringing challenge to the Christians to do their duty to God and country.”87 Incensed, he conferred with a group of fellow nonresistant evangelicals, including leaders outside the Brethren in Christ tradition, who urged Hostetter to respond publicly to Harrison’s talk. Hostetter’s rejoinder drew on a historical understanding of the New Testament as opposing Christian participation in war.88 “By the grace of God the Christian can love his enemies,” Hostetter argued. “Following the example and teaching of Jesus[,] the


86 Quoted in Sider, Messenger, 212.

87 Sider, Messenger, 212.

Christian cannot kill, but it may be necessary for him to die as he overcomes evil with good.”\(^89\) By challenging the new evangelicalism’s dominant ideology of “just war” with a theology of peacemaking based exclusively in a historical interpretation of the New Testament, Hostetter sought to call evangelicals to a new vision of Christianity: one with a more distinctively counter-cultural perspective on war.

At other times, Hostetter joined his fellow Anabaptists in using church history as a tool for advocating Christian pacifism. In August 1961, Hostetter joined twelve Mennonite leaders for a private breakfast meeting with evangelical icon Billy Graham “concerning the New Testament ethic of love and nonresistance.”\(^90\) According to a report on the gathering, delegates drew upon a particular historical interpretation of Anabaptism to unpack the idea of Christian pacifism.\(^91\) Graham listened patiently to their presentation, and afterward surprisingly declared himself in agreement with “ninety-nine percent” of what he had heard.\(^92\) Although subsequent efforts with Graham floundered,\(^93\) Hostetter and his Mennonite co-religionists felt that such engagement with evangelicalism’s most prominent figurehead offered an opportunity to represent the Christian nonparticipation in war as a biblical imperative, not a “secondary doctrine,” as many evangelicals characterized it.

\(^89\) Ibid., 4.


\(^91\) Ibid.

\(^92\) Ibid.

\(^93\) Sider notes that Hostetter and Mennonite Elmer Neufeld were tapped to pursue further discussions with Graham on the peace issue, but their efforts to secure a 1962 meeting failed because of the evangelist’s busy schedule. “It does not appear that Hostetter was a part of any later interview that may have been arranged.” See Sider, *Messenger*, 216-217.
Even as he called evangelicals to what he saw as a more biblically comprehensive view of war and peace—a view drawn from various historical texts, including his own community’s history of nonresistance—Hostetter also reigned in those Mennonites who urged peace church withdrawal from new evangelical institutions. In 1960, he disputed the claims of John Howard Yoder, a prominent Mennonite theologian, who opposed peace group involvement in NAE on the basis of its militaristic propensities. Groups like the Mennonites and the Brethren in Christ, Hostetter averred, “have an obligation to the Christian world that we cannot afford to miss by too much abnegation.”\textsuperscript{94} While agreeing with Yoder that peace church groups should take a less confrontational tack in their efforts at dialogue, Hostetter felt that peace churches had the best chance of guiding evangelicals to better understanding of the biblical call to peacemaking.

As he moved on to other ministry endeavors in the mid- and late 1960s, Hostetter spent less and less time advocating for peace concerns among the new evangelicals. By this time, the evangelical coalition represented by the NAE was beginning to fragment. Internally riven by conflicts over a new wave of concerns about biblical authority,\textsuperscript{95} the coalition also “quivered with the reverberations of political and cultural protest” ringing throughout American society, as one historian put it.\textsuperscript{96} Divided in their response to

\textsuperscript{94} C. N. Hostetter, Jr., to John Howard Yoder, January 19, 1960, quoted in Sider, \textit{Messenger}, 216.


\textsuperscript{96} Bush, 42.
America’s “race problem” and to the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War, among other concerns, the new evangelicalism teetered on the brink of collapse.97

Simultaneously contributing to and emerging from this polarized religious climate, a generation of “young evangelicals” challenged what they perceived as the movement’s uncritical allegiance to conservative politics and preoccupation with individual conversion at the expense of social concern.98 Young evangelical apologist Richard Quebedeaux argued that his generation “believe[s] that [our] churches’ admirable attempt[s] to relieve the short-term sufferings of individuals . . . is merely treating the symptoms rather than curing the disease itself.”99 He, like other young evangelicals, advanced political action and corporate demonstrations as acceptable—even biblical—means of enacting an evangelical social conscience.100 Others took a primarily intellectual tack. Evangelical sociologist David Moberg drew on social and cultural interpretations of nineteenth-century church history to argue that “prior to the social gospel movement and the subsequent Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy, social

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97 On the collapse of the new evangelical coalition over social concerns, see Marsden, “Unity and Diversity,” 70-71, and Henry, Evangelicals in Search . . ., 57-64.


100 Ibid., 99-100, 118-123. Quebedeaux pointed to Democratic Senator Mark Hatfield, an unabashed evangelical, and Jim Wallis and his Post-American community as examples of those performing religion in such a way.
concern and evangelism tended to go hand in hand.” 101 As the title of his 1972 book suggested, Moberg believed evangelicals needed a “great reversal” of moral and religious vision that would bring them back to their historic faith. 102 In that same vein, theologian Donald W. Dayton—then married to Brethren in Christ church member Lucille Sider—also drew on historical interpretations to craft a “usable past” for contemporary evangelicals. 103 Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evangelicalism, Dayton argued, had an “egalitarian thrust [that] once manifested itself in feminism and abolitionism,” but had in the twentieth century “moved . . . toward more traditional patterns of church life and social views.” 104 Reared in the Free Methodist tradition, Dayton repeatedly pointed back to his own denomination’s nineteenth-century roots to inspire an evangelical social conscience in the present. 105

By the late 1960s and 1970s, many baby boomers in the Brethren in Christ Church would adopt the “usable past” approach exemplified by the young evangelicals. Educated at church schools by historians and church leaders who themselves saw the “Brethren in Christ heritage” as a viable tool for inspiring contemporary community identity, 106 these “young radicals” would draw on their understandings of denominational

101 Ibid., 100.


104 Ibid., 140.


106 During the 1960s and 1970s, a handful of Messiah College professors—Carlton O. Wittlinger, Martin H. Schrag, Owen H. Alderfer, and E. Morris Sider—actively drew upon their academic interpretations of denominational history to help shape a specific historical consciousness within their religious community.
history to call both the Brethren in Christ and the larger evangelical world to a more sustained attention to the social concerns of the day.

In some instances, church writers in Brethren in Christ periodicals articulated classical interpretations of nonresistance to stir church members toward confrontation with evangelicals. In 1968, college student LeRoy Walters, Jr., used the traditional nonresistant stance to reveal the inconsistencies implicit in evangelicalism’s nationalist proclivities. Expressing disappointment that Billy Graham had publicly supported President Johnson’s escalation of the U.S. military presence in Vietnam, Walters bluntly declared, “As Christians, [Graham and Johnson] should not . . . support the war effort. If they wish to support the [military occupation], then they should make very clear that they are not acting by Christian standards.”

Moreover, he called the Brethren in Christ, as “one of the Historic Peace Churches,” to publicly counter attitudes such as those expressed by Graham by boldly declaring their doctrine of nonresistance.

For more information on three of these figures, see their biographies in J. Norman Hostetter, Luke L. Keefer, Jr., and Daniel R. Chamberlain, Embracing Scholarship, Piety and Obedience: Biographies of Carlton O. Wittlinger, Martin H. Schrag, and Owen H. Alderfer (Grantham, Pa.: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 2009).


108 Despite Walters’ and other church members’ identification of the Brethren in Christ as one of the Historic Peace Churches, the small denomination technically was not a part of this group. The term “Historic Peace Churches” is used to refer to the three denominations—Mennonites, the Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Church of the Brethren—that participated in the “Conference of Historic Peace Churches” in North Newton, Kansas, in 1935. The Brethren in Christ did not participate in this initial gathering, although they did participate in later meetings. For more on the Historic Peace Churches, see Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, s.v. “Historic Peace Churches,” by Melvin Gingerich and Paul Peachey, accessed March 30, 2012, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/H59ME.html. For another instance of a Brethren in Christ person identifying his church as a fourth Historic Peace Church, see H.G. Brubaker, “Dr. Brubaker Attends Peace Convention,” [Beulah College] Echo, November 1940, 6.

109 Ibid.
Other young people also drew on the church’s traditional nonresistant position to challenge evangelicalism’s militaristic propensities. For John Zercher, the social unrest surrounding the Vietnam War provided the Brethren in Christ with a fresh opening for its “historic position” on nonresistance “as a way to confront evil and hatred.” Student members of Messiah College’s Peace Society drew on the Brethren in Christ nonresistant position in presenting a resolution to the American Association of Evangelical Students in 1969; after vigorous debate, the resolution was narrowly defeated by a 23-22 vote. In 1972, at the height of the national fervor over the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, several Brethren in Christ young people voiced their dissatisfaction with an NAE resolution that praised President Nixon for his “efforts . . . to restore peace in South Asia” without condemning the atrocities perpetuated by the military incursion. “How can our peace loving church belong to such a mixed up organization as NAE?” asked Mark Keller. Nancy Heisey advised the church to reconsider its advocacy on behalf of Christian pacifism in the NAE context. “In the light of our heritage and beliefs,” she wrote, “I sincerely believe that we as a church would do well to re-examine our ourselves and to pray for the Spirit’s leading as we continue such associations.” Drawing on historical interpretations of their community’s doctrine of nonresistance, these young Brethren in Christ challenged evangelicals to see peace as a Christian imperative, even as


111 Paul W. Nisly, Shared Faith, Bold Vision, Enduring Promise: The Maturing Years of Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.: Messiah College, 2010), 24-25.

112 For a report on the resolution, see “NAE Endorses Capital Punishment and Speaks to Social Issues,” Evangelical Visitor, May 25, 1972, 12.


they pressed their own community to a more diligent witness on peace issues.

In other instances, Brethren in Christ young people sought to reinterpret the church’s doctrine of nonconformity in order to challenge evangelicalism’s ambivalence on issues like racism and economic injustice. Seeing broader implications in a doctrine that had once merely insulated the Brethren in Christ from individual “evils” like movies and card-playing, these young people drew on the “spirit” of classical Brethren in Christ nonconformity while expanding its terms and present-day implications. A 1968 article by John K. Stoner, a young minister from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, typified this tendency. Arguing that earlier Brethren in Christ iterations of separation included prohibitions on “lesser matters,” Stoner contended for a separation that takes seriously “Jesus’ call to ‘justice, mercy, and faith’” and takes a definite position on issues like racism, economic justice, and nationalism.115 This redefinition of nonconformity enabled Stoner to critique what he viewed as evangelicalism’s cultural conformity. Since “the church in America has failed to be positively separate from the world in these issues,” Stoner urged Brethren in Christ people to live out a “Biblical doctrine . . . [that] will confront the racism, materials, and nationalism of our society.”116

Among those, like Stoner, who challenged evangelicals’ social ambivalence on the basis of the Brethren in Christ’s historic nonconformist identity, Ronald J. Sider was perhaps the most prominent. During the 1970s, Sider gained national attention for his outspoken condemnation of American affluence and ambivalence toward social and economic injustice—actions that, from his perspective, had corrupted the Christian


116 Ibid.
church and muted its prophetic witness. In his writings and in his speeches, Sider
frequently reinterpreted the classical Brethren in Christ doctrine of nonconformity in
order to urge evangelicals (as well as members of his natal denomination) “to resist
society’s call for conformity.”

The son of a Brethren in Christ minister from rural Stevensville, Ontario, Sider
would later recall the “guilty struggle” he experienced when he first parted his hair on the
side and wore a necktie. While earning a Ph.D. in Reformation history at Yale
University, Sider felt called to a career as an evangelical social activist. When Messiah
College, the school sponsored by his home denomination, called him in 1968 with an
invitation to run their new urban campus in North Philadelphia, Sider jumped at the
opportunity; it seemed an ideal way to merge his interests in history, theology, social
ethics, and the church. He soon became a licensed minister in the Brethren in Christ
Church and, in 1972, launched a “shoestring political organization” called Evangelicals
for McGovern—a somewhat unexpected endeavor for a freshly minted minister from a
denomination that had historically opposed political involvement.

During that same period, Sider started publishing books for popular Christian
audiences. His 1977 title, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger, condemned Western
affluence and its role in global economic inequality. “North Americans live on an affluent

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119 Ibid., 20.

120 Much of the information in this paragraphs is drawn from Ibid., and Randall Balmer, Encyclopedia of
Evangelicalism, s.v. “Sider, Ronald J.,” 625-626.
island amid a sea of starving humanity,” Sider intoned ominously.121 Critiquing legislative policy and corporate greed as systems leading the world toward economic collapse, Sider harshly chastened American Christians—and evangelicals in particular—for their apathy toward and complicity in this systematic injustice. “Christians frequently restrict the scope of ethics to a narrow class of ‘personal’ sins,” he argued. “But they fail to preach about the sins of institutionalized racism, unjust economic structures and militaristic institutions which destroy people just as much as do alcohol and drugs.”122 As historian David Swartz has shown, Sider’s “incorporation of the language of sin offered a uniquely evangelical contribution to broader debates on global poverty.”123 Moreover, his critique of evangelical inattention toward social issues, while built on the work of mid-century theologians like Carl F. H. Henry, pushed earlier arguments to their “logical conclusions” and thereby provided “one of the final clinches in evangelicals’ slow engagement of the social realm through the twentieth century.”124 Sider’s Rich Christians—“the most influential . . . of all [evangelicalism’s 1970s] statements on global injustice,” according to Swartz125—would sell over 350,000 copies and go through three re-printings by 1997.126

Though Rich Christians did not draw explicitly on the traditional nonconformist

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122 Ibid., 133.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., 143.
126 Ibid., 146.
identity of Sider’s natal denomination in its critique, Sider would later argue that his “Brethren in Christ background contributed to the book in a number of significant ways.”\textsuperscript{127} Sider credited his parents for his suspicion of materialism and his commitment to simplicity in daily living, and pointed to two Brethren in Christ church leaders, C. N. Hostetter, Jr., and E. J. Swalm, as the inspiration for his belief that opposition to war should include active, compassionate care for others.\textsuperscript{128} Even more, Sider credited his books’ emphasis on living counter-culturally to the Brethren in Christ notion of separation from “the world,” historically a major component of the church’s nonconformist stance. Writing expressly to a Brethren in Christ audience, he explained, “The church in our background (and also, I think, in the New Testament) is a new society of people who live fundamentally differently from the rest of surrounding society. . . . It is a new community . . . which refuses to live according to the accepted norms and values of the world.”\textsuperscript{129} He charged the contemporary church with having lost this conviction, to a large degree: “There is a desperate need to recover the heritage which we have as Brethren in Christ in our early history—namely the understanding of the church as a counter-culture which lives a set of values very different from the rest of society.” Rather than interpreting such a counter-culture as necessitating rigid dress standards or a complete divorce from the political realm, as an earlier generation had understood nonconformity, Sider advocated for “a separation from the materialism of our society.”\textsuperscript{130}


\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 36-37.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 38.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
Recovering this Brethren in Christ heritage, Sider believed, could provide the contemporary church with a clear identity—and a clear, practical theology of biblical living that challenged contemporary cultural conformity. Moreover, by jointly embodying this identity and theology, the Brethren in Christ could effectively draw their fellow evangelicals toward a similar religious counter-culturalism. In supplying both a sense of denominational self as well as a pattern for daily living, Sider’s historical vision stood both to realign the acculturated Brethren in Christ and to reform a “worldly” evangelicalism.

Sider’s desire to reform evangelicalism drew him, in the early 1970s, to join with other politically inclined, progressive evangelicals in drafting the Chicago Declaration, a manifesto for those “disenchanted with both the political apathy and conservatism of contemporary evangelical[ism].”131 Signed by a broad swath of evangelical leaders like Jim Wallis, activist and founder of Sojourners magazine, and Henry, the lion of evangelical social ethics, the booklet proved decisive for evangelical Christianity in America.132 As a writer of the Declaration, Sider’s voice shined through in its call. “[T]he evangelical community [should] take a new, far more critical look at all aspects of American society,” Sider contended in his introduction.133 Although not sanguine about “middle-class evangelicals . . . transcending their comfortable existence as part of the socioeconomic status quo in the richest nation on earth,” he called for his fellow Christians to practice a counter-cultural faith that identified “with the poor and the

131 Swartz, 2.
132 Ibid.
oppressed.”\textsuperscript{134} Even in the \textit{Chicago Declaration}, a document with virtually no connection to Sider’s natal denomination, echoes of a reinterpreted historical vision of Brethren in Christ nonconformity tinged the young activist’s polemic.

Ultimately, Sider’s involvement in an emergent evangelical left served to link the once-quietistic Brethren in Christ to a viable socio-political movement—a dramatic reversal for a denomination that had formerly threatened discipline for members who exercised the franchise. Moreover, his vocal activism helped to galvanize not only a generation of evangelicals but—more specifically—a generation of Brethren in Christ. Like Sider, these Brethren in Christ young people felt that the social apathy of their natal church and the political conservatism of the broader evangelicalism muted the activist impulse of the Gospel. And yet they saw value in their denomination’s history—a history that they interpreted as emphasizing peace, justice, community, and discipleship. By reconstructing their community’s past to speak to contemporary concerns, these Brethren in Christ young people articulated a clear denominational identity and a set of theological values for daily living. In so doing, they sought to reform both their natal denomination and the larger evangelical movement.

Contrary to what contemporary denominational discourse implicitly contends, not all Brethren in Christ in the postwar years uncritically embraced American evangelicalism. As the preceding historical narrative has shown, Brethren in Christ people both explicitly resisted evangelicalism and sought to reform it. A more complex rendering of the church’s evangelical turn has the potential to re-orient community discussions about the influence of conservative Protestantism. Moreover, it portends to

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
supply today’s church members with a greater array of tools for contemporary identity-making and theological reflection.
CHAPTER 5

REINTERPRETING THE EVANGELICAL TURN

Recognizing the Brethren in Christ community’s need for a more complete historical narrative concerning its mid-century evangelical turn, I set out to create an interpretive project that would communicate this history in an accessible and engaging way. As I initially envisioned it, this interpretive project would have three goals: (1) to meet the intellectual needs of the Brethren in Christ community regarding its “evangelical turn”; (2) to provide access to primary source documents related to this turn; and (3) to create a forum for ongoing dialogue about the influence of the evangelical movement on the Brethren in Christ Church. Moreover, I predicted that an assessment of this interpretive project might help me draw further conclusions about the uses of history in the Brethren in Christ Church.

From the outset, I envisioned this project as a collaborative endeavor, reflecting recent trends in public history practice. For this reason, I began my project work by convening an advisory committee. Seeking to emulate what historian Michael Frische has called “shared authority,” a metaphor for public historical work that complicates naturalized hierarchies governing intellectual authority, I envisioned this committee as constituting an authoritative core against which I might leverage my own academic expertise. In January 2012, I identified ten people with a stake in the Brethren in Christ Church—current and former members, as well as people from related denominations—and invited them to contribute to my research project in an advisory capacity. Of those ten, six responded in the affirmative. (For more on the convening of the advisory council, 135 Michael Frisch, A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990).)
see Appendix A.) To those six respondents, I sent a five-question survey seeking to gauge their interest in and expectations for a study examining the encounters between Brethren in Christ and evangelicals in the postwar years. Five respondents completed the survey. (For a list of the survey questions and responses, see Appendix B.)

The results of this survey provided key insights. First, respondents overwhelmingly affirmed the need for the project (100%) and interest in the project (80%). These results confirmed what my investigation of recent denominational discourse had concluded: that Brethren in Christ people remain interested in questions about their community’s relationship to the larger evangelical movement. Second, respondents overwhelmingly preferred three mediums for dissemination of project results: a popular journalistic article in In Part, a denominational magazine with a circulation of about 35,000 in the U.S. and Canada; a “video series distributed via the Internet”; and a “website with video, audio, and text elements.” Any one of these three media could allow for some form of access to both primary source documents and historical interpretive materials, and for ongoing dialogue about the topic, the two other goals of my project.

The latter of the three preferred media—the “history website”—seemed to me the option with the greatest possible popular accessibility and professional significance. From a popular perspective, a web-based tool has perhaps the greatest potential for broad reach and engagement. In 2009, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that more than 195,000,000 people over the age of 18 use the Internet either at home or at work.136

Moreover, as Forrester Research revealed in a 2010 report, Americans spend just as much time online as they do watching TV—approximately 13 hours per week, more time than they devote to any other recreational pursuit. These statistics suggest that web-based projects offer public historians with the opportunity to reach a diverse and already engaged audience.

Public historians—as well as academic historians and other history professionals, like archivists—seem well-aware of the potential for (and problems associated with) web-based interpretive historical projects. Since the Internet’s popular emergence in the early 1990s, each of these professional communities has demonstrated interest in the new media form as a tool for achieving professional ends: more accessible and more dynamic history-making, for historians; increased access opportunities, for archivists. Writing in 1997, public historians Michael O’Malley and Roy Rosenzweig expressed both apprehension and excitement about the new vistas opened to historians and other history-makers by the World Wide Web, ultimately concluding that academics “should insist on a role in this new ‘public space.’” Following up on the topic almost a decade later, Rosenzweig (writing this time with Daniel Cohen) noted seven possible benefits to doing “digital history,” as well as five potential pitfalls. Historians, Rosenzweig and

other factors. Race and ethnicity were not included in the statistical breakdown, although I suspect that these factors also affect use and access.


140 Ibid., 9-13.
Cohen argued, “need to critically and soberly assess where computers, networks, and digital media are and aren’t useful.” Archivists and other information professionals have made similar statements since 1993, when the first online library exhibit appeared. Archivist Anne Cuyler Salsich, for instance, has highlighted online exhibits’ ability to “win new constituents and dazzle potential donors.” Archival digitization initiatives, which often precede the creation of web-based exhibits, have the potential to provide users with “rapid, remote access to a growing array of sources that are easier to locate, view, analyze, and copy.” Contrastingly, librarian Martin R. Kalfatovic has noted the medium’s limitations: in online exhibits, “the picture of an object [or document, or photograph, etc.] does not have the same level of reality, the same gravitas, as the physical [item] itself has in front of a visitor’s eyes.” This mix of caution and anticipation in both archival and historical communities has not slowed the preponderance of web-based historical/archival projects, however.

141 Ibid., 3.
144 Margaret Hedstrom, “Electronic Archives: Integrity and Access in the Network Environment,” The American Archivist 58, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 312. Hedstrom also argues vociferously that increased access brings about a number of problems and risks for archivists. See Ibid., 313ff.
145 Ibid., xvi.
146 For a sense of the breadth and depth of the history- and archives-based websites, see Rosenzweig and Cohen, 18-50, and Smithsonian Institution Libraries, “Library and Archival Exhibitions on the Web,” http://www.sil.si.edu/SILPublications/Online-Exhibitions/. “Library and Archives Exhibitions on the Web,” begun in 1995 with links to a mere 350 web-based exhibitions, now includes “over 3,000 links to online exhibitions from libraries, archives, and museums around the world.” While this may seem a low number, the expansion of the site from 350 to “over 3,000” links in less than two decades suggests just how rapidly archives and manuscript repositories (not to mention libraries and museums) have adopted the use of web-based exhibits.
The professional interest in online exhibits, coupled with the insights gleaned from my advisory committee, compelled me to construct a web exhibit that would increase members’ access to both primary source documents and historical interpretive materials. Recognizing the need for collaboration in such an undertaking, I partnered with the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives, the central repository for all denominational records and most church-related manuscript collections. The repository is in the process of digitizing many of its collections, including collections that help to explain the church’s historic encounters with evangelicals. At present, a team of work-study students, college interns, and retired volunteers use PastPerfect content management software to scan and create metadata for assets in a variety of manuscript collections. In offering my aid to these endeavors, I digitized a number of archival assets related to my thesis research—assets I could then contextualize within my exhibit.

Having decided upon the web-based exhibit as the best medium for engaging Brethren in Christ people in an ongoing conversation about their community’s “evangelical turn,” I set about designing my site. Unfortunately, despite the rapid proliferation of web-based exhibits in recent years, “standards for on-line [sic] exhibition of archival materials lack significant supporting literature.”147 Project-based analysis constitutes the majority of this supporting literature.148 Few manuals or step-by-step guides for creating online exhibits have appeared specifically for archivists and

manuscripts curators. To date, only two such books have gained widespread use: Martin R. Kalfatovic’s 2002 guide *Creating a Winning Online Exhibition* and Sarah Goodwin Thiel’s 2007 *Build It Once: A Basic Primer for the Creation of Online Exhibits*.

In many ways, these manuals—though written by different kinds of cultural memory professionals at different periods in the development of the Internet—advance similar arguments about successful online exhibitions. In general, both manuals agree that effective web-based exhibits for archives and manuscript repositories will (1) follow standard best practices in basic web design; (2) contain a series of textual components (a script) that properly situate the exhibited material in a larger context (historical, literary, cultural, etc.); (3) employ multiple digital media in a variety of accessible and engaging ways; and (4) point users back to the repository whence came the digitally represented materials. A brief overview of these texts and other relevant supporting articles will provide insight into the creation of my web-based exhibit.

All online exhibitions have at least one component in common: they are created using the Internet. Given this obvious similarity, it should be equally obvious that

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149 I use the term “widespread use” rather reluctantly here, since I possess no statistics by which to judge how frequently the manuals written by Kalfatovic and Thiel have been used by practicing archivists and manuscript curators. I employ my terminology, however, based on two insights. First, both Kalfatovic’s and Thiel’s books have received favorable reviews in important journals in the field, including *The American Archivist* and the *Journal of the Society of Archivists*. Reviewer Philip Lord called Kalfatovic’s book “a very useful reference work for [both] the small [and large] library, archive or museum and for students in these disciplines”; Rose V. Roberto, who reviewed Thiel’s book, called the book a success that “shows exactly how the world of archives and special collections can thrive in the digital age and gain new audiences.” Philip Lord, review of *Creating a Winning Online Exhibition: A Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums* by Martin R. Kalfatovic, *Journal for the Society of Archivists* 25, no. 1 (2004), 96; Rose V. Roberto, review of *Build It Once: A Basic Primer for the Creation of Online Exhibitions* by Sarah Gordon Thiel, *The American Archivist* 71, no. 1 (2008), 273.

Second, I use the terms “widespread use” to reflect how well Kalfatovic’s book in particular has been embraced by the archives community. By way of example, the Academy of Certified Archivists includes Kalfatovic’s book in the sample reading list included in their *Handbook for Archival Certification*, suggesting its value for the archival profession. See Academy of Certified Archivists, *Handbook for Archival Certification*, accessed December 1, 2011, http://www.certifiedarchivists.org/images/forms/handbook.pdf.
successful online exhibitions will follow standard best practices in basic web design.\textsuperscript{150} Nevertheless, the two online exhibition creation manuals directed at cultural institutions take somewhat divergent stands on this matter. For Sarah Goodwin Thiel, who wrote her manual in 2007, simplicity of design trumps sophistication and technical proficiency; for Kalfatovic, writing in 2002, an accessible, efficient, and aesthetically pleasing interface is just as important as a well-written exhibit script and thoughtfully selected exhibit pieces.

In focusing on the simplicity of the web-based exhibit, Thiel argues that “the main task [of an exhibit] is to present material in a clean, understandable way.”\textsuperscript{151} She warns potential web exhibitors against devising “unduly complicated or overdone” layouts.\textsuperscript{152} While never explicitly defining these terms, she does note that “complicated animations or plug-ins” and complex webpage hierarchies may distract from the curatorial purpose of the exhibit.\textsuperscript{153} At the same time, she contends that archivists and other web exhibitors have a responsibility to learn and properly use web design tools (like Adobe Dreamweaver software) and techniques (like the use of HTML coding, cascading style sheets, tables, alternate text tags, and the like). She devotes much of her book to an


\textsuperscript{151} Sarah Goodwin Thiel, \textit{Build It Once: A Basic Primer for the Creation of Online Exhibitions} (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 2.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 13.
overview of these materials.\textsuperscript{154} In this way, she suggests (if not outrightly demands) that web exhibit creators follow standard best practices in basic web design.

Kalfatovic, in slight contrast to Thiel, devotes significant portions of his manual to introducing readers to web design tools, topics, and techniques. He balances the importance of traditional exhibit design elements—the script, the selected items for exhibition, etc.—against the value of a well-constructed site interface. “[T]hough you may have written the most intelligent and entertaining script ever and assembled the best objects,” he notes, “if you are unable to translate all of those into a design that works in an online environment, your visitors will be lost, or worse, will choose to go elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{155} In helping his readers to grasp the necessity of the well-designed interface, Kalfatovic devotes entire chapters of his manual to markup languages (the behind-the-scenes structures that constitute the look of the exhibit interface); HTML coding, scripts, databases, and issues of accessibility; and graphic design standards.\textsuperscript{156} In this way, Kalfatovic demonstrates the importance of following standard best practices in basic web design while creating online exhibits.

Many of the specific recommendations, resources, and techniques for web design put forward by Kalfatovic and Thiel have evolved or become obsolete in the years since these authors wrote; moreover, design has become somewhat more streamlined and simplified in recent years, with the appearance of platforms like Wordpress and plugin-ready content management systems like Drupal. Given the rapidity with which web tools

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 20-23, 51-53.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 72. Emphasis mine.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 54-62, 63-71, 72-87.
continue to evolve, proscribing specifics (especially in print!) can be an exercise in immediate superannuation. Nevertheless, the point remains: no web exhibit, no matter how well conceived and executed, can succeed without following up-to-date best practices in web design.

In constructing my web exhibit, I sought to follow the standards suggested in Kalfatovic and Thiel. At the same time, recognizing potentialities like timeframe, financial constraints, and limited access to server space, I opted for a Web 2.0 solution: hosting my exhibit on a Wordpress site. This free web tool provides an easy-to-use interface, a substantial storage cloud for high-resolution images, and attractive site templates that mitigate the need to design the interface from scratch, while still enabling me to tweak site elements through manipulation of HTML code. It also allowed me to incorporate user-friendly “widgets,” like a navigation bar. In using Wordpress, however, I lost the ability to adjust the overall site look through cascading style sheets (CSS), as this option would have required a pricy upgrade. Moreover, the Wordpress template I selected, Chateau, contained CSS elements that limited my full HTML range and ultimately made the design process more involved than initially expected. Despite such limitations, the Wordpress decision provided me with an affordable way to host my site without sacrificing the ability to follow best practices in web design.

While adherence to such design best practices plays a key role in determining the success of a web-based exhibit, other factors also contribute. As with gallery-based exhibits, web-based exhibits will contain a series of textual components (or script) that properly situates the exhibited material in a larger context (historical, literary, cultural, etc.). Some manual writers, like Kalfatovic, devote more attention to the textual
components; others, like Thiel, take such components for granted.

Thiel offers virtually no instruction on the creation or incorporation of textual components into the site. While she makes vague references to the “narrative text” needed to familiarize users with the “themes” of the exhibit, she does not coach her readers on how to generate such material.\textsuperscript{157} Thus, an aspiring archival web exhibitor who reads Thiel alone might conclude that his web exhibit could go online without any contextualizing information (save metadata).\textsuperscript{158} Kalfatovic takes a much different tack, one that suggests the essential nature of textual components in providing context and adding legitimacy to an online exhibition. In a chapter titled “Executing the Exhibit Idea,” the author dedicates several pages to an explanation of what he calls “the script,” a lengthy document that contains many textual components to be used throughout the exhibit. Writing this script, he argues, is the “real work” of the exhibit, after selecting an idea and preparing digital representations of exhibitable objects.\textsuperscript{159}

Kalfatovic breaks the script down into discrete textual components. The main component, the narrative, “both outlines and ties together the objects in the exhibition” by moving visitors through the exhibit or by providing transition between different segments of the exhibition. Moreover, according to Kalfatovic, this script reflects the research done and develops the overall theme of the exhibition.\textsuperscript{160} A second component,

\textsuperscript{157} Thiel, 16, 43.

\textsuperscript{158} Thiel devotes a considerable portion of her slim volume to describing the importance of metadata and instructing readers on effective web design strategies for incorporating metadata into page layout. While today many online exhibits interface with online archival collections to provide metadata for specific digital representations, Thiel’s emphasis serves to remind archivists of the importance of metadata. See Thiel, 16-17, 46-48, 88, 90.

\textsuperscript{159} Kalfatovic, 29.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 29-30.
pull quotes, are pithy or catchy snippets of text extracted from the narrative that “serve as transitions between portions of the narrative text.”  

Two interrelated textual components—the object caption and the object label—provide users with information about the visual representations of repository assets. The object caption offers “a brief summary that explains what the object is, where it comes from, and in some cases, its media and format.” The object label, on the other hand, “generally appear[s] as text located near the image of the object” and “provides more extensive and contextualized information about an object.” A fourth component—one that Kalfatovic sees as essential in creating online exhibitions—is the statement of authorship or responsibility. According to Kalfatovic, an online exhibition, “like an exhibition or other work of scholarly or entertainment value, draws its validity from who created it”; because of the inherently anonymous nature of the Internet, therefore, an authorship or responsibility statement becomes an important way of “establish[ing] identity and validity.” The fifth and final component, the credits and acknowledgements section, provides space for thanking those involved in the creation of the exhibit, from the project team to other staff and external contributors (if any).

In preparing my web exhibit, I followed closely Kalfatovic’s five-pronged approach to script production. My exhibit includes an overall narrative that guides users

161 Ibid., 30.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid., 31. Kalfatovic offers an extended discussion of object labels on 33-36.
165 Ibid., 32.
166 Ibid. Beyond this breakdown of the textual components necessary for a successful online exhibition, Kalfatovic offers extensive instruction on how best to integrate these components into the website design.
through a history of the Brethren in Christ Church’s encounters with evangelicals. Additionally, I use pull quotes from the text to emphasize important aspects of the narrative; I include both captions and labels on each digitally represented asset; and I emphasize the “About” section on the homepage as a way to increase the respectability of my exhibit.

While writing this script, I struggled to know how best to use text—a problem common to all web contributors. Given the Internet’s multimedia format, any use of (conventional) text in a virtual space must be well-reasoned and executed with care. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, several scholarly studies and university-based guides began to stress “the need for the reduction or ‘chunking’ of most text on the web for ease of use.” Arguing that “[d]iscrete chunks of information lend themselves to Web links,” web designers Patrick Lynch and Sarah Horton advised web writers to pen “specific unit[s] of relevant information, not a book’s worth of content.” Similarly, Santa Clara University’s Office of Communications and Marketing advised web writers to “keep content short and simple,” write single-sentence paragraphs, and “use words that are likely to be in the vernacular of the reader.” In other words, these web stylists thought that a little text could go a long way.

More recently, digital humanists and other professionals have contested this prevailing wisdom. Among the most vocal detractors of “chunking” are historians and digital humanists Daniel Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig. These scholars point out that rapid

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167 Cohen and Rosenzweig, 124.
168 Lynch and Horton, 24.
changes in technology have made the average web browser much more able to consume comfortably large chunks of online text. Yet they fear that, despite these developments, the “skepticism toward long-form text on the web” may persist within scholarly and professional discourses. If left unchallenged, Cohen and Rosenzweig contend, “the widespread agreement about the chunking of text may produce even less tolerance for long passages on the web as time goes by.” For this reason, these digital humanists challenge web writers not to fear the inclusion of lengthy textual passages.\textsuperscript{170}

What relevance do these “text wars” have for web-savvy archivists? For the most part, they urge archivists to remember why they create web-based exhibits. Unlike digital humanists, who produce websites as ways of sharing their scholarly research, and unlike marketers or public relations professionals, who utilize the Internet to disseminate pithy messages in a quick and efficient way, archivists use the Internet to provide access to their collections and to stimulate audience interest in their institution. With these goals in mind, archivists should naturally conclude that they need not kowtow to either end of the text war spectrum; rather, they should find the balance of text, image, and (as the next section of this essay will argue) other digital media that will best help them to accomplish their professional and institutional goals. Yet as both an archivist and a public historian attempting to digitally disseminate specific research, I felt compelled to strike a balance between the archivist and humanist paradigms for digital text. In crafting my exhibit script, I generally tried to keep each narrative section at or around 500 words, and each archival asset caption/label brief enough to communicate relevant data (collection information, additional contextual information, etc.) without overwhelming the page.

\textsuperscript{170} Cohen and Rosenzweig, 125.
design.

Beyond a well-written exhibit script, successful web-based exhibits also employ multiple digital media in a variety of accessible and engaging ways. Of course, not all archival professionals disagree on what constitutes “accessible and effective use of digital media.” Thiel, for instance, notes that “multi-media features are encouraged,” but worries that such “add-ons” might make sites inaccessible (because of software compatibility issues) or laborious to load with slow Internet connections.\(^{171}\) Given that Thiel expressed such an attitude in 2007, before broadband (high-speed) Internet connections became affordable,\(^ {172}\) such concerns about software compatibility and browsing speeds seem reasonable. Kalfatovic, writing five years earlier, had understandably similar reservations.\(^ {173}\) He notes that although “the Web offers the opportunity to supplement [the] online exhibition with multimedia,” exhibitors should “be fully aware of the pros and cons of filling [their] exhibition with too many whizbang effects.”\(^ {174}\)

In the decade since since Kalfatovic wrote, however, professionals in the archival field have departed from such concerns, noting the ubiquity of powerful web browser plugins (like Adobe Flash) as well as the number of Americans accessing the Internet via high-speed (or “broadband”) connections.\(^ {175}\) As a result, a growing literature emphasizes

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\(^{171}\) Thiel, 3.


\(^{173}\) Kalfatovic, 67.

\(^{174}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{175}\) According to a 2009 study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life project, 57 percent of people in the United States access the Internet at home via a high-speed or “broadband” connection; only
(often implicitly) the need to diversify the media forms exhibited online by archives and manuscript repositories.

One example of this emerging literature is Ian Craig Breaden’s 2006 article “Sound Practices: On-Line Audio Exhibits and the Cultural Heritage Archive.” In it, Breaden makes a strong case for the exhibition of digitized representations of audio holdings, arguing that the use of audio materials in online exhibits provides repositories with the chance to raise awareness of their diverse collection holdings.176 To be sure, Breaden also admits the problems of exhibiting such resources online.177 Yet by arguing for the inclusion of digital representations of archival audio assets into the traditionally text- and photograph-based online exhibition, professionals like Breaden seek to diversify the ways in which archivists and manuscript curators publicize their collections on the World Wide Web.178

Following Breaden’s lead, I sought to incorporate non-textual assets into my web exhibit. Because the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives currently does not have the equipment necessary to digitize its audio-visual holdings, I set out to create some audio materials of my own. Drawing on the oral histories I had collected as part of

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176 Ibid., 39.

177 Breaden is especially concerned by the fact that “there is no gold standard for presenting on-line audio.” For this reason, he worries about archivists’ ability to create ideal digital representations of archival audio assets. He addresses such drawbacks to online audio presentation by outlining basic best practices for web-based use of archival audio. See Ibid., 36, 54-58.

178 It should be made clear that Breaden’s purpose in writing is not just to diversify the traditional text- and photograph-based online exhibition, but to offer some best practices in the creation of audio-specific web exhibits. Nevertheless, his article does suggest the benefits of diversifying the types of archival materials exhibited via the web.
my research, I created a set of podcasts, both focused on church members’ interactions with and involvements in evangelical ministries like Youth for Christ and Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Unfortunately, the poor recording quality of both of the interviews severely lowered the overall quality of both podcasts—a flaw in the exhibit noted by several advisory committee members.\textsuperscript{179} Future development of the exhibit should seek to address these flaws, preferably in collaboration with audio archivists or other professionals more knowledgeable about such processes.

The fourth and final best practice in online exhibit design—pointing users back to the repository whence the exhibition originated—seems self-evident. As tools of access and education, web exhibits should provide users with resources for further study, and manuals for the creation of web exhibits consistently remind their readers of the importance of this technique. Thiel argues that “every page” of an online exhibit should point the user back to the originating institution, whether cognitively or through the use of hyperlinks. For instance, she urges exhibitors to “include the name of your institution and a graphic or logo [related to that institution’s identity]” on every page of the exhibit. This way, users will never forget the source of these digital representations.\textsuperscript{180} Moreover, by including in the exhibit a link to the website of the exhibit’s sponsoring institution(s), Thiel believes that exhibitors can draw interested users on to new discoveries. “[Y]ou never know,” she writes whimsically, “what might spark a reader’s interest and encourage him or her to search your site for more surprises!”\textsuperscript{181} Thiel also advises that

\textsuperscript{179} These critiques of the site were sent to me as personal email messages, rather than as public comments on the exhibit interface or as comments on the survey tool.

\textsuperscript{180} Thiel, 18.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
this link be placed on the exhibit site’s main navigation bar, so that users can click through to the sponsoring institution at any point during their visit to the exhibit.182

A final important part of institutional identification, according to Thiel, involves copyrights and permissions. She notes that the inclusion of a “copyright link” will “[l]et readers know immediately what their responsibilities are when accessing an online exhibition and what your institution’s intellectual property rights are.”183 (She suggests placing the copyright info on the exhibit homepage or table of contents, so that users see it right away.)184) By pointing back to their institution (and its rights) in this way, exhibitors further safeguard the collection being represented, and ensure their institution’s ability to protect its provenance and public usage.

Following this advice in the creation of my exhibit proved a bit difficult. Given the collaborative nature of the project, I offer users several links to the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives’ webpage, which includes information about the repository and its collection. Ideally, each digital asset used on the site would also have contained a link to the repository’s online catalog, where interested users could browse additional related materials. Unfortunately, the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives has not yet made its online catalog accessible. Future revisions to the site might provide these kinds of links.

Even as I sought to abide by these four best practices in online exhibit creation, I also endeavored to construct a virtual environment that could serve as a forum for

182 Ibid., 18, 26-27.
183 Ibid., 18.
184 Ibid.
ongoing dialogue about the influence of the evangelical movement on the Brethren in Christ Church. Such interactive features have become standard in many online exhibits, especially with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, as the scholarly literature attests. For example, Cohen and Rosenzweig encourage digital historians to provide opportunities for user feedback and contribution to the site and its content, whether through forums, page comment sections, or other add-ons.185 Similarly, archivists Gordon Daines III and Cory L. Nimer encourage the use of blogging platforms with commenting features that enable users to respond to, challenge, and amend the “primary” narrative in archival exhibits.186 These forms of digital interactivity challenge the traditional hierarchies of authority that govern print-based intellectual projects—a benefit for some, and a concern for others. For instance, some fear the “hijacking” of content via interactive features. In reflecting on a project launched by the Archives of the Coca-Cola Company, archivist Philip F. Mooney describes how corporation archivists patrolled the “the intellectual boundaries of the blog” by moderating all comments prior to their appearance on the site, in order to weed out any comments left by activists or corporate critics seeking to co-opt the site as a platform for their agenda.187 Not moderating user comments, however, resulted in a different kind of complication for the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, which found its YouTube channel cluttered with responses that had little

185 Cohen and Rosenzweig, 176-180.


to do with the content of the archival videos on display.\textsuperscript{188} Both examples show the complexities of navigating interactivity on the web.

Given these diverse views of online interactivity, I determined to make page-based Comments sections the primary means for users to engage with site content. This feature is an automatic add-on for all Wordpress.com blogs, though blog administrators may disable the feature on all or specific pages (as I did on the site homepage, which I did not view as requiring a comments section). Initially, I did not alter the Wordpress default, which requires administrator moderation of all comments before they appear on the blog; later, I disabled this feature, in an attempt to create a more open, less censored environment.\textsuperscript{189}

The launched site, “Born-Again Brethren: The Brethren in Christ and American Evangelicalism” [http://bornagainbrethren.wordpress.com/], features a visually inviting homepage (Figure 1.3) and eight sections, or “chapters,” that divide the narrative thematically. Drawing on the historical narrative from the preceding section of this essay, as well as previous scholarly studies of the denomination, the site provides background on both the Brethren in Christ and American evangelicals as well as interpretation of three distinct kinds of encounters between these two communities: embrace, resistance, and reformation. A final “Coda” page explicitly invites users to respond to the exhibit.

In an effort to assess the exhibit, I contacted the six members of the thesis advisory committee and invited them to visit the site. To streamline their feedback, I sent these members a 20-question survey, to which five members responded. To gather

\textsuperscript{188} Gwynneth C. Malin, Review of the U.S. National Archives YouTube channel, \textit{The Public Historian} 33, no. 1 (winter 2011), 124.

\textsuperscript{189} The four comments left on the site prior to disabling were quickly moderated to appear on the site.
Figure 3: Homepage for “Born-Again Brethren,” an interpretive web exhibit. Note the customized navigation buttons on the left-hand side of the page, below the page banner.

additional feedback, I also sent the site link and survey to a diverse group of church affiliates with varying degrees of interest in denominational history. In all, I received nine survey responses and seven emails reacting to site content, as well as several public comments on the exhibit pages themselves. (See Appendix C for the full results of the survey.)

The survey responses, as well as users’ public comments on the site, indicate that (by and large) the “Born-Again Brethren” exhibit met my goals for this interpretive project. First and foremost, the exhibit satisfied users’ intellectual needs with regard to the Brethren in Christ Church’s evangelical turn. More than seventy-seven percent of respondents indicated that they “learned some new information about the Brethren in Christ and American evangelicalism by viewing the exhibit”—an indication, perhaps,
that the exhibit offered a more complete history of the church’s evangelical turn than previous historical treatments of the subject. Additionally, over half (55.5 percent) of respondents indicated that they found “most interesting” those sections of the exhibit that narrated a new history of the evangelical turn—that is, those sections that examined Brethren in Christ people’s resistance to and reformation of evangelicalism. These results, as I read them, indicate that users will respond favorably to revisionist narratives that provide new interpretations of longstanding aspects of their community’s past.

Secondly, survey responses suggest that the exhibit succeeded in providing users with access to primary source documents related to the evangelical turn. While only one respondent indicated that she/he was “more interested in primary sources than narrative text,” all respondents (100 percent) affirmed the engaging nature of the primary source materials chosen for online exhibition. Moreover, more than eighty percent of respondents indicated that they clicked on and thoroughly read/listened to one or more of the primary source documents used in the exhibit, suggesting a moderate level of engagement with these materials.

Providing further confirmation of this moderate level of primary source engagement, several users drew on the exhibited archival materials to question publicly some of the exhibit’s conclusions. For instance, on the “Embracing Evangelicalism” chapter, exhibit user mudala1 posted a comment that expressly disputed my conclusions about the inspiration for John Climenhaga’s article “Unity in Diversity.” While I suggested that the article was prompted solely by Climenhaga’s interactions with a fellow Protestant minister, mudala1 (referring specifically to the digital representation of

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190 The majority of users indicated that they are “equally interested in both” primary source materials and narrative text. See Appendix C for the full results of the survey.
Climenhaga’s article exhibited on the site) contended, “A number of influences in addition to that of the minister may have come into play that led him to develop the theme.” Moreover, in the chapter “Resisting Evangelicalism,” user Alan & Beth charged me with taking one of my sources out of context to reach a conclusion in keeping with my argument—a conclusion based on their close reading of one of the exhibited documents. Such high levels of user engagement show that users enjoy interacting with and interpreting primary source materials in relation to exhibit narrative.

This finding should hearten both public historians and archivists. For the latter, this finding confirms the utility of digital access projects like online catalogs; for the former, it corroborates studies of audience interest in the past. For both professional communities, this finding should stimulate greater interest in collaborative projects. By leveraging digitally accessible primary sources into context-based interpretive projects that encourage user engagement, both archivists and public historians stand to widen their audience base and increase demand for their services.

Third, the exhibit effectively provided users with a forum for ongoing debate about the Brethren in Christ community’s evangelical turn. While not all site users chose to leave public comments, many did; in its first three weeks of existence, the exhibit

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garnered 14 public comments and two “pingbacks”\(^{193}\) from six different users—not a poor showing for a site with only 875 unique page views in that same time.

As they dialogued with me (as exhibit creator), with the exhibited materials, and with their fellow users, site users engaged history not just as a static record of the past but as a dynamic story with present-day implications—the same kind of utilization of the past that their religious predecessors have practiced for the last six decades. Like their fellow Brethren in Christ before them, many of these site users deployed history as a means for forming identities and shaping theologies. For instance, when asked to summarize in a few words the conclusions they drew from viewing this exhibit, several survey respondents connected the exhibit narrative to present debates about denominational identity. One noted that the church’s three historic “responses” to evangelicalism—embracing, resisting, and reforming—“should help us as we continue to wrestle with BIC\(^{194}\) identity today.” Another concluded that “the relationship between evangelicalism and the BIC Church is complex & is still being sorted”—a statement with clear implications for contemporary contests over Brethren in Christ identity. Beyond its utility in resolving current disputes, the exhibit provided respondents with a usable past for guiding the denomination into the future. Describing the exhibit narrative as a “helpful look at how a committed group of Christians can embrace change without spinning apart,” one survey respondent stated, “I feel the denomination is at such a point again. To what will leaders turn this time around?” Another saw the site’s “important historical perspective” as capable of providing today’s Brethren in Christ with “both a guideline

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\(^{193}\) Pingbacks are notifications bloggers receive from WordPress (and other similar blogging platforms) when another blogger links to a post or page on their blog.

\(^{194}\) “BIC” is an acronym for “Brethren in Christ” commonly used by members of the denomination.
and a challenge as we face . . . current trends.” A third made the narrative even more personal: the narrative, the respondent said, “made me want to engage in ‘late night prayer sessions’ at General Conference to seek God about how we accept/reject/reform aspects of our culture (both Christian culture and broader cultures) today.” Such comments reveal the intricate ways in which church members use the past (and interpretations of it) to make sense of the present and to predict the future—in other words, to determine a sense of collective identity.

While some respondents used the exhibit to address concerns about their community’s identity, others drew from it theological lessons based on the church’s past engagement with evangelicalism. On a public commented posted to the site, user benjaminpwhite concluded, “The best thing about the BIC throughout our history has been our adaptability and willingness to follow with what we believe the Spirit to be doing next.” Based on this insight, the user argued that today’s church must “discern and pray in order to sift out the good from the bad and keep forging ahead with the Spirit toward what is next. . . . Lord, lead us!”

From his particular interpretation of the past, this user drew not only insights about identity (“the best thing about the BIC”) but insights about the divine and the user’s practical connections to the divine in day-to-day life (“forging ahead with the Spirit toward what is next”). In drawing such a theological insight, this user demonstrates the potential for history beyond identity formation.

Thus, “Born-Again Brethren” succeeded in achieving each of the goals I set at its implementation: (1) to meet the intellectual needs of the Brethren in Christ community

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regarding its “evangelical turn”; (2) to provide access to primary source documents related to this turn; and (3) to create a forum for ongoing dialogue about the influence of the evangelical movement on the Brethren in Christ Church. Moreover, its assessment confirmed the pattern of popular history usage I documented across decades of Brethren in Christ life. By transforming static exhibit narrative into dynamic current-day answers to pressing questions, users of the site demonstrate that a more nuanced historical analysis of this turn, produced in collaboration with members of the church community, could have an effect on the ways in which this turn gets put to use in contemporary church discourse.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Ultimately, these responses to the exhibit confirm what the majority of this essay has contended: that the Brethren in Christ view history not only as a static record of the past but as a dynamic tool for understanding the present and shaping the future.

Throughout the last sixty-plus years, Brethren in Christ people have interpreted their community’s history in order to make sense of their “evangelical turn”—that is, their cultural transformation from a small, visibly separatist religious community to a growing, mainstream evangelical denomination. Specifically, Brethren in Christ people have interpreted this turn in order to form particular identities and shape practical theologies—ideologies that demonstrate the utility of the past in contemporary religious life.

As a case study of one religious community’s deployment of the past, this essay in part confirms what historians Rosenzweig and Thelen have concluded more generally about popular uses of the past in American life: namely, that Americans employ the past “to answer pressing current-day questions” about a variety of topics, including identity. At the same time, this essay presses beyond Rosenzweig and Thelen to conclude more specifically that, for evangelical Christians in America, the past is frequently deployed to make connections between the temporal and the transcendent, between the material and the numinous, between the secular and the divine. For evangelicals, history is a rich theological text, a record of saints and sinners whose lives provide useful models for today’s believers. By interpreting these pasts, evangelicals like the Brethren in Christ determine how to live faithfully in the present.

Such conclusions have major implications for the practice of public history—
especially today, in the midst of an ongoing culture war over the “Christian-ness” of the nation. For instance, this essay’s conclusions might provide public history practitioners with fruitful insights into the tenacity with which some evangelicals contend for America’s “Christian heritage.” Such believers interpret the nation’s past not only to locate themselves within a broader political and social context, but to figure out how their God wants them to live. For these evangelicals, the nation’s mythical “Christian heritage” is not only a political device but also a divinely ordained road map for daily living—a reality that should compel public historians to reconsider how they engage questions of “nation” in their museum halls, public programs, and history books.

If public historians take seriously the theological implications of history, they will come to recognize just how “intimate” the past can be. As Rosenzweig and Thelen note in their book, the past speaks most powerfully when conceived most intimately—family pasts, for instance, have more immediacy for most Americans than do, for instance, national pasts. For a large percentage of Americans, however, all pasts are intimate, because all pasts promise a connection to God. Public historians who recognize the practical implications of such an approach to the past stand prepared to speak more meaningfully to their evangelical audiences.

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APPENDIX A

ADVISORY COMMITTEE INVITATION

Dear ______________,

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, members of the Brethren in Christ Church began to alter the beliefs and practices that had defined their denomination for centuries. A number of factors spurred this change.

My Temple University master’s thesis research is an attempt to evoke if and how contact with American evangelicalism motivated or mobilized members of the Brethren in Christ to re-interpret, re-orient, and/or reject the doctrines of nonconformity and nonresistance—two of the hallmark theological prerogatives distinguishing the Brethren in Christ from their fellow conservative Protestants. American evangelicalism was a broad and diverse movement; individual Brethren in Christ people embraced it or rejected it in different ways.

Part of this thesis project will be a full-length scholarly essay. The other part of the project will be a tool that will help lay people understand the historical connections between our church community and the larger evangelical movement.

I am writing you today because I want your help in determining exactly what this “tool” will look like.

I invite you to assist me in my thesis project by agreeing to serve on my Thesis Advisory Committee. I envision this committee as an informal group of stakeholders--individuals with an important connection to the Brethren in Christ Church--who are willing and eager to provide me with insight into the needs and interests of our church community.

If you agree to serve on my Thesis Advisory Committee, I will ask you to fulfill the following obligations:

1. Take a brief (5-10 minute) survey that will help me strategize an initial vision for interpretive tool that will I develop as the second half of my thesis project.

2. Offer periodic feedback on the interpretive tool as I develop it.

3. Provide a brief formal evaluation of the completed interpretive tool.

I do not anticipate that these obligations will require much of a time commitment from you; however, the guidance and feedback you will provide will be invaluable as I pursue my thesis project.
Please let me know if you are willing to serve in this capacity by January 15, 2011. If you respond affirmatively, I will provide you with a link to the brief survey described in #1.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best,

Devin Manzullo-Thomas
APPENDIX B

ADVISORY COMMITTEE SURVEY RESPONSE RESULTS

1. Do you think that the Brethren in Christ community needs to know more about its historic and contemporary relationship to the American evangelical movement?

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<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
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</table>

answered question 5
skipped question 0

2. Do you think that the Brethren in Christ community desires to know more about its historic and contemporary relationship with the American evangelical movement?

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<th>Response</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

answered question 5
skipped question 0
3. What kind of information do you think a historically inclined Brethren in Christ person might want to know about her/his community’s historic relationship to the evangelical movement? (Check all that apply.)

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<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories of how BIC people (leaders and lay people) participated in the evangelical movement in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories of how BIC people (leaders and lay people) resisted the influence of the evangelical movement in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories about BIC women and the evangelical movement in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories about BIC teenagers/young people and the evangelical movement in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories of how BIC people were changed through the influence of the evangelical movement</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological differences between the BIC and mainstream evangelicalism</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
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answered question: 5
skipped question: 0
### APPENDIX C

EXHIBIT ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESPONSE RESULTS

1. In general, how would you characterize your knowledge level subsequent to viewing the exhibit?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned a great deal of new information about the Brethren in Christ and American evangelicalism by viewing the exhibit.</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned some new information about the Brethren in Christ and American evangelicalism by viewing the exhibit.</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned no new information about the Brethren in Christ and American evangelicalism by viewing the exhibit.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 9
Skipped question: 0

2. What section of the exhibit did you find most interesting? (Select one.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who Are The Brethren in Christ?</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Are The New Evangelicals?</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being &quot;Born Again&quot;</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encountering Evangelicalism</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embracing Evangelicalism</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting Evangelicalism</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reforming Evangelicalism</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answered question: 9
Skipped question: 0
3. In general, how would you characterize your intellectual satisfaction with the exhibit? (Select all that apply.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I left the exhibit with fewer questions about the history of the Brethren in Christ engagement with American evangelicalism.</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I left the exhibit with more questions about the history of the Brethren in Christ engagement with American evangelicalism.</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>strong disagree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I left the exhibit more interested in asking questions about the history of the Brethren in Christ engagement with American evangelicalism.</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>88.9% (8)</td>
<td>11.1% (1)</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exhibit focused too much on history and not enough on theology.</td>
<td>11.1% (1)</td>
<td>66.7% (6)</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exhibit focused too much on individuals and not enough on the group as a whole (grassroots vs. institutional).</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>55.6% (5)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exhibit focused too much on the group as a whole and not enough on individuals (institutional vs. grassroots).</td>
<td>33.3% (3)</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>44.4% (4)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

93
5. In a few words, please summarize the conclusions you drew from viewing this exhibit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  This important historical perspective is helpful in providing both a</td>
<td></td>
<td>Apr 3, 2012 9:41 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guideline and a challenge as we face the current trends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  It definitely made me want to know more and explore new areas! It</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 31, 2012 2:34 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made me want to engage in “late night prayer sessions” at General</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference to seek God about how we accept/reject/reform aspects of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our culture (both Christian culture and broader cultures) today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good balance of group and individuals, I thought. I also left lots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of comments on the page itself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Excellent. Thank you for putting it together.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 31, 2012 9:11 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  The Brethren were concerned about losing their young people. This</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 30, 2012 7:02 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>led them to embracing some of the principles of the “New” evangelicals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  -The relationship between evangelicalism and the BIC Church is</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 28, 2012 10:02 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex &amp; is still being sorted out.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  This is a helpful look at how a committed group of Christians</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 28, 2012 4:43 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can embrace change without spinning apart. I feel the denomination is</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at such a point again. To what will leaders turn this time around?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  The issues are complex! I appreciate the progression shown from one</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 28, 2012 8:24 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage to the next. I hadn't ever thought of it that way.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  This exhibit is an excellent resource. It is well-written and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 28, 2012 6:55 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well-presented. Thank you Devin!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  There were three different responses of the BIC to American</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 26, 2012 3:23 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelicalism: embracing, resisting, and reforming. Knowing this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should help us as we continue to wrestle with BIC identity today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Prior to this web exhibit, had you examined primary source documents (i.e., photographs, letters, diaries, articles, printed matter, etc.) related to Brethren in Christ history?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9

skipped question 0
7. Prior to this web exhibit, had you examined primary source documents (i.e., photographs, letters, diaries, articles, printed matter, etc.) related to Brethren in Christ history?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0

8. How engaging were the primary source documents on Brethren in Christ history (i.e., photographs, letters, printed materials, etc.) used in the exhibit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very interesting</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very interesting</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not examine them</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0
9. How engaging were the primary source documents on Brethren in Christ history (i.e., photographs, letters, printed materials, etc.) used in the exhibit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very engaging</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very engaging</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not examine it</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0

10. How would you characterize your engagement with the primary source documents in the exhibit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I clicked on each of them to read the materials on my own.</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I clicked on several of them to read the materials on my own.</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I clicked on one or two of them.</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I examined them only as thumbnails on the main exhibit page.</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not notice the primary source documents in the exhibit and read only the narrative text.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0
11. In general, how would you rank your interest in primary source documents and narrative text?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More interested in primary sources than narrative text - I prefer to draw my own conclusions about the past.</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally interested in both.</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More interested in narrative text than primary sources - I prefer to engage with someone else's interpretation, rather than my own.</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9

skipped question 0

12. In general, how would you describe the look and feel of the exhibit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-designed</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-designed with a few small errors / glitches</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-designed with a few major errors / glitches</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not well designed and containing several major errors / glitches</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments 3

answered question 9

skipped question 0
13. In general, how would you describe the narrative text in the exhibit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too much reading -- should have been shorter</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good balance of text and other materials (photos, video, audio)</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too little reading -- would have preferred more writing than other material (photos, video, audio)</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9

skipped question 0

14. How would you describe the relationship between the narrative text and the exhibited materials (photos, video, audio)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The text and the materials were well-related and built upon one another in a helpful and engaging way.</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text and the materials had some connection, but did not always build on one another in a useful way.</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text and the materials had few connections.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The text and the materials seemed entirely disconnected.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9

skipped question 0
### 15. In general, how would you describe the diversity of the exhibited materials -- photos, letters, printed matter, video, audio?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The exhibited materials were very diverse and offered multiple levels of engagement (visual, auditory, etc.)</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exhibited materials were somewhat diverse.</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was too much visual material (photos, printed matter) and not enough video and audio.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was too much video and audio and not enough visual material (photos, printed matter).</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0

### 16. Rank your response to the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strong disagree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understood that the exhibited materials came from the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives.</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>33.3% (3)</td>
<td>66.7% (6)</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strong disagree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After viewing this exhibit, I would be more likely to examine the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives’ digital collections and online catalog.</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>0.0% (0)</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>55.6% (5)</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0
17. Did you feel that the exhibit interface provided sufficient opportunities for visitor feedback / questions / comments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0

18. Did you feel encouraged, as a visitor, to leave feedback / questions / comments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0

19. Did you feel enabled, as a visitor, to question conclusions or respond to assertions in the exhibit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 9
skipped question 0
20. In your opinion, what other means might the exhibit use to engage visitors in an ongoing discussion about the Brethren in Christ and American evangelicalism?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>It's hard to think of anything except maybe some challenging questions related to current issues. Apr 3, 2012 9:44 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Could you have this available at General Conference this summer? Maybe some kind of a physical display that has copies of the primary sources referenced (and the narrative text too perhaps) with a laptop where people can view the site and leave comments? Mar 31, 2012 2:39 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Sider video clip was excellent. It was a good introduction to the exhibit. Perhaps additional high-quality clips could be incorporated. Mar 30, 2012 7:43 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Maybe a page devoted to discussion alone (a discussion forum—like a Yahoo! Answers page, where people can pose questions and others can provide input), rather than only a comment box at the end of each page. Mar 28, 2012 10:07 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It would be great if there were a way for people to record their own stories about BIC and American evangelicalism. You can't possibly touch base with everyone who has an interesting story to tell, but perhaps there is a way you can create a collection point for them. Mar 28, 2012 4:45 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>An interactive question-and-answer feature; embedded polls. Mar 28, 2012 8:26 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Open discussions are difficult to manage and control. I am therefore not sure how this could be done in a helpful way. Mar 28, 2012 6:59 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Luke Keefer Jr. has a great piece that deals significantly with American Evangelicalism and the BIC. He contrasts the ability of the BIC to synthesize Anabaptism, Pietism, and Wesleyan Holiness with being overrun by Evangelicalism. His article &quot;Three Streams in Our Heritage&quot; is included in the book Reflections on a Heritage. It was originally published in BIC History and Life, I think. Mar 26, 2012 3:35 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>