

Oral History Interview
Rev. Ray I. Witter
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MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, why did the members of the Brethren in Christ Church decide to move to Kansas when they did?

REV. WITTER: Well, they came in from other places as well, the price of land to get homes was one thing, land was cheap here in Kansas. I remember my father stating some quarters now that would be worth some twenty thousand could be bought as low as twelve hundred and Kansas had some good years. It looked pretty good to buy such cheap land and make a living out here and when the land in Pennsylvania was so high and hard to get started in, a home and a farm so, it was quite a nucleus got together and came to Kansas and bought up these farms in Dickinson county and started the six churches here in this area.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, when did the first River Brethren come to Kansas and where did they settle?

REV. WITTER: Well, to any amount, in 1879—was why they were called the “79er’s.” There were a few had come before, pioneers, and through their influence others joined and their settling was not only south of Abilene but north, here in the county different directions had progressed, why they took in pretty well the north and south of the river and in Dickinson County it was confined largely there. However, there was a group of German settlers up in Clay County and there was another group up in Brown County in the northeast part of the state and there was, also, a small group settled down in Sedgwick County and these were the places which were settled in those early days and they set up their homes and later built churches.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, there was an Eisenhower in the first party that came to Dickinson County and settled here; do you remember who he was, what and how you are related to him?

REV. WITTER: Yes, it was Jacob Eisenhower. He was the father of the president's father, David, and he settled south of Abilene. He was in that early group.

MR. BARBASH: Was he a River Brethren minister and if he was, did he do any preaching in this area?

REV. WITTER: Yes, he could preach either in German or English. I have the Bible that he preached German out of and he was a minister and preached in this area.