



CHURCH & RELIGION:

“Everybody I Knew Went to Church”

The schools were three in number; churches abounded. From memory alone I can identify seven and everybody I knew went to church. (The only exception were people we thought of as the toughs—poolroom sharks, we called them.) Social life was centered around the churches. Church picnics, usually held on the riverbank, were an opportunity to gorge on fried chicken, potato salad, and apple pie. The men pitched horseshoes, the women knitted and talked, the youngsters fished, and everyone recovered from the meal.

--Dwight D. Eisenhower

Sunday morning, in the small, Midwestern town of 1900, echoed with the pealing of church bells—a reminder to go to worship. Sunday was devoted to church. Services began in the morning with Sunday School, followed by the regular service, and ended with an evening service. All dressed in their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, and children were on their best behavior, even when the sermon was long and beyond their understanding. Hymns were a popular part of the service, and among the favorites were “Beulah Land,” “Shall We Gather at the River,” and “Sweet Bye and Bye.” Wednesday night was reserved for the midweek prayer meeting and special church group meetings. “Family worship” was stressed, and it was not uncommon to see babies sleeping in the back pews during evening services.

Sunday School began with teachers presenting a lesson from the Scriptures. Older children took turns reading verses from the Bible, and younger children enjoyed Bible picture cards and religious scenes on the walls. The Sunday School secretary moved from class to class to collect the offering. At the conclusion of Sunday School, the day’s attendance and the amount of

the offering were announced. Adults attended their own Sunday School classes where they studied maps of the Holy Land and verses from the Bible.

The vast majority of small-town Midwesterners were white, middle-class, and Protestant. Their religious beliefs dictated the prevailing standards of community morality. Gambling, card playing, dancing, smoking, and drinking liquor were prohibited. Profanity, immodest dress, and immoral behavior aroused strong public condemnation. The lower class—termed “ne’er-do-wells”—generally ignored the rules of a society they didn’t fit into, and the upper-middle class suffered no real consequences for breaking the code as long as it did not flaunt violations publicly. In word, at least, all “good” citizens condemned evil practices, and yet many towns had as many saloons as churches.

Newspapers printed articles that promoted proper conduct for boys and girls. Respectable young men were to practice personal cleanliness and get to bed early; avoid bad company, drinking, smoking, or chewing; attend church; and dress and act modestly. To do otherwise was to be a “fast young man.” Girls were to conduct themselves with modesty, seriousness, and thoughtfulness in preparation for marriage and motherhood. Nonetheless, many girls loved their stylish clothes and showed off using the latest, risky expressions such as “I thought I should die!” and “Now you’re real mean!” One small community was concerned about the “bicycle problem”—groups of young people riding bicycles to neighboring towns to visit on Sunday afternoons—a clear violation of the Sabbath.

Ministers enjoyed a position of dignity and respect in the community. Few had a formal education, and a minister’s salary was low and undependable. There was little or no social life

outside church activities. Ministers sometimes performed up to six Sunday services in addition to the midweek prayer meeting. They performed weddings, baptisms, and funerals and made calls to the bedsides of the sick and dying. Ministers were expected to preside over ice cream socials, W.C.T.U. (Women's Christian Temperance Union) meetings, and holidays such as July 4th celebrations and Decoration Day. Small fees were paid for funeral and wedding services, and some ministers substitute taught in the local schools.

In 1900, the churches were the center of social life for the community. Church was a proper place for boys to get to meet girls and walk them home after church. Church festivals presented entertainment programs to raise money; at Church fairs, women sold food and auctioned off donated items. Some churches even held lotteries, despite the anticipated complaints. Church picnics and ice cream socials were well-attended summer pastimes, and covered-dish or potluck dinners were held year round.

Summer time brought a wave of popular revival meetings. They were a much anticipated annual event for many parishioners. Visiting evangelists preached "fire-and-brimstone" sermons in tents set up on the outskirts of town. Members of the audience "testified" about their religious experiences and how they had been "saved." "Sinners" were encouraged to come forward to pray for their salvation.

By the 1920s and 30s, the central role of the churches in the community would undergo serious outside challenges. The moral code was weakening, and people were less inclined to follow the example of ministers and churches. Many blamed the aftermath of the Great War (World War I) for the decline in public morality. Whatever the reason, the churches now had competition for social activities, and, for good or bad, technological progress brought the rest of the world to the small Midwestern town.

Jacob and Rebecca Eisenhower and their children—including Dwight's father, David—came to Dickinson County, Kansas, from the Susquehanna Valley of Pennsylvania in 1879. They were members of a well-organized, prosperous, religious group called the Brethren in Christ. A sect of the Mennonites, they called themselves the "Plain People." In Dickinson County, they were more commonly known as the River Brethren. A devout, hard-working, self-sufficient group, they preferred to live in a close-knit community. They were respected throughout the county for their many fine qualities, but their distinctive clothing set them apart.

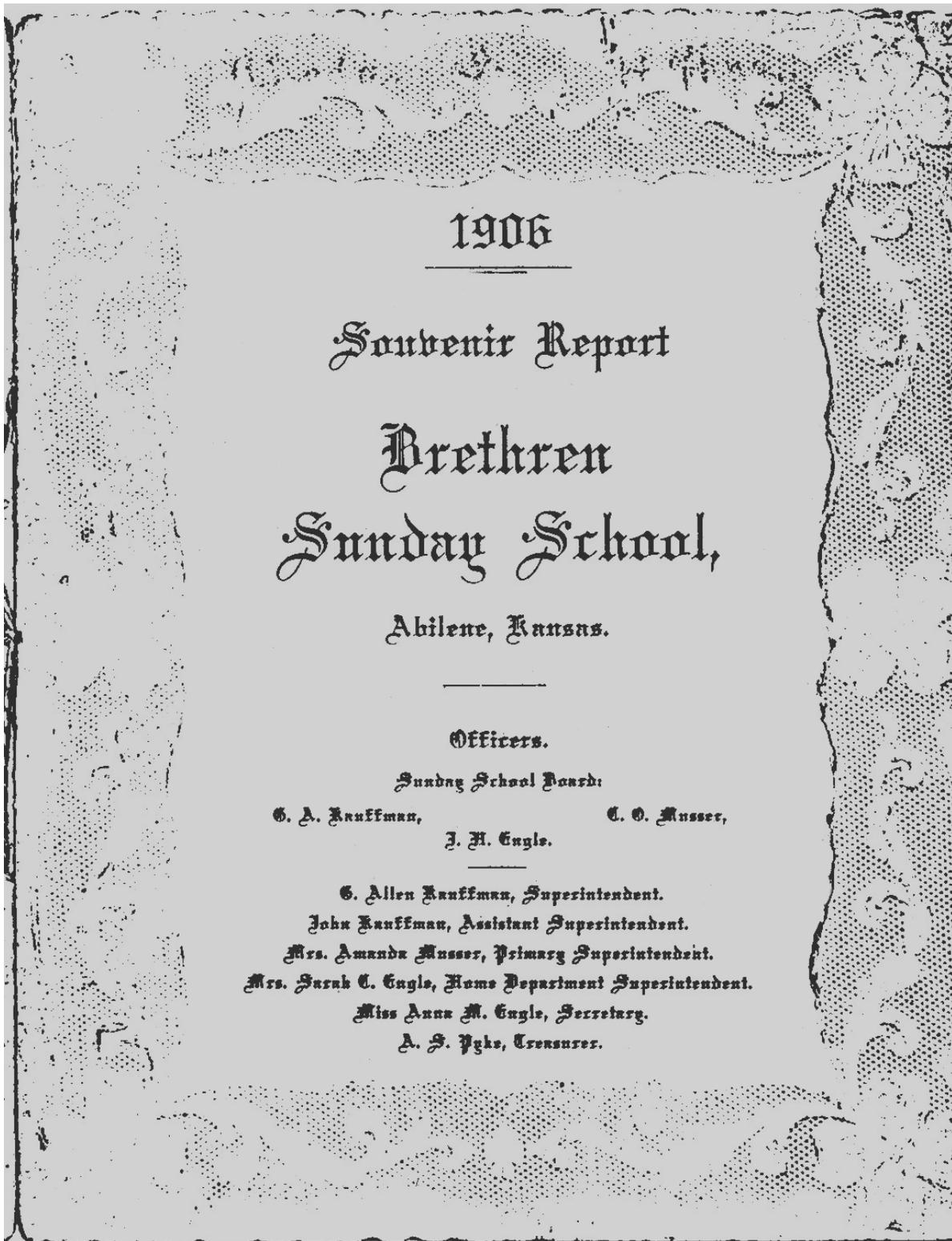
The men dressed in black and wore black felt hats. They grew heavy beards and wore their hair long and combed straight back. Women wore long black dresses, avoiding decoration of any kind. On their heads, women wore a covering called a "prayer veiling," and, when outside the home, they put on a large black bonnet with a long, gathered skirting along the bottom.

Growing up, Dwight and his brothers attended Sunday School at the Church of the Brethren in Christ in Abilene. Grandfather Jacob and two of David's brothers, Ira and Abe, were ministers. Ida had memorized countless Bible verses as a girl and used them to reinforce her lessons to her sons. Each meal began with a Bible lesson. In the evening after supper, the family gathered in the parlor for Bible reading. The boys took turns reading, reluctantly handing the Bible over to the next brother whenever a mistake was made. The River Brethren were stricter in the actual practice of their religious beliefs than some of the church-going citizens of Abilene; however, their beliefs were not inconsistent with those of the larger community at that time.

Although Dwight D. Eisenhower never joined the church of his youth, its influence was evident in his behavior and beliefs throughout his life.

Suggested Readings from *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends*: 51-53, 60-63, 79, 86-88.





1906

Souvenir Report
Brethren
Sunday School,
Abilene, Kansas.

Officers.

Sunday School Board:

G. A. Kauffman, J. H. Engle, C. O. Nusser.

G. Allen Kauffman, Superintendent.
John Kauffman, Assistant Superintendent.
Mrs. Amanda Nusser, Primary Superintendent.
Mrs. Sarah C. Engle, Home Department Superintendent.
Miss Anna M. Engle, Secretary.
A. S. Pyke, Treasurer.

Showing Forth His Praise. *Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Eph. 5:19.*

Our faces ought to reflect back the sunshine of heaven, and the joyful tones of our voices to seem the echoes of its hallelujahs.—F. P. Cobbe.

INTERMEDIATE DEPARTMENT.

Class Number 5.

*Mrs. M. L. Hoffman, Teacher,	Carrie Leady,	
Florence Amess,	Anna Lenhart,	
*Florence Engle,	Jessie Williams,	
Rhoda Hoffman,	Winnie Williams, 12
*Hedwig Schmutz,	Dwight Eisenhower,	
Anna Engle,	Lillie Ross,	
Cora Engle,	John Dayhoff,	
*Katie Gish,	Mary Dayhoff,	
	Irvin Metz, 17

**Members International Bible Reading Association.*

To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable; wealthy, not rich; to study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly; to listen to stars and birds, to babes and sages, with open heart; to bear all cheerfully, bear all bravely; await occasions, hurry never. In a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common. This is to be my symphony.—Channing.

LETTER FROM JOHN LONG
Childhood Friend

Rt 2 Box 440

Q

Hood River Ore

97031

March 6 1970

Dear Mr Endacott

I hear from Dr Ed Long that you would like to have more information about my life with General Eisenhower when I was going to school in the 5-6-7 and 8th grades at Abilene Kansas.

My mother and Dwigths mother were very close friends as the grandfather of Dwigths came from the same valley in Pennsylvania that my grandfather lived.

My grandfather home was only about 6 or 7 miles from Elizabethville where the Eisenhower family came from. And as a boy my grandparents took me up to Elizabethville many times to the camp meetings held there by the United Brethern Church. My mother was the first

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woman of the River Brethern Church that took off the little white cap claiming that the church put too much faith in it instead of Christ. Mrs Eisenhower was the second woman that took off the little white cap.

Dwight's grandfather was more liberal in his faith and beliefs and the main church was

A lot of the prayer meetings were held at the Grandfather Eisenhowers home and I used to go with my mother to these prayer meetings and then I would go to Dwight's home until my mother was ready to go home!

We often planned & talked about going to Annapolis to get an education as we thought that was the only way to a college education as we both was to poor to get a college education

REVEREND RAY I. WITTER ORAL HISTORY

Pages 1-3:

MR.BARBASH: Rev. Witter, will you, please, identify yourself and tell us in what manner you are related to General Eisenhower?

REV. WITTER: My mother and his father were brother and sister.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, can you, please, tell us what were Wadesian and Piestic movements in Europe and what influence they had on the founding of the Brethren in Christ Church?

REV.WITTER: I would say that the influence being handed down was the greater influence from what I have been informed. Some of their methods and ways of worship and doctrine of beliefs and so on had its bearing and influence upon some of the early men that established or were instrumental in starting the Church.

MR.BARBASH: Rev. Witter, would you, please, tell us how the Brethren in Christ Church was founded in the United States?

REV.WITTER: Yes, it was founded along the Susquehanna River there in Pennsylvania and started with two brothers. They were the first ones that, just about the same time that the United Brethren started, so as time went on in some of their beliefs which were separate than any that they could feel at home in any other churches. Speaking of these United Brethren who started theirs said “why don’t you do like we did” and so they agreed they would, so these brothers baptized each other and never would tell which was the first member of the Church. But from, then on, as they continued in their services the additions were added to the Church and it grew.

MR.BARBASH: Rev. Witter, what were the names of the brothers and what was the basic belief regarding baptism of the Church at this time?

REV.WITTER: Well, these two Engle brothers were the first—the instigators of the Church and the records state this very clearly, but they held their first meetings in the houses and, then, the matter of baptism, they baptized by immersion—trine immersion, which means three times forward in the name of the Trinity. While we don’t teach that baptism washes away sins or has any conversion to it, but we believe it is for believers and for those who have received Christ. Their having baptized in the river is where the nickname came—they were called River Brethren at first because of two things—some traditions say it was because they baptized in the river that was a convenient place, where the Church started is right along the river and other traditions is that it was because they loved along the river and as the Church grew, some of those brethren at a distance, it was not common for then to say “let’s go down by the river and see how our brethren are getting along”, hence, the name River Brethren got started as a nick name, only.

THE GOSPEL WAGON, 1911
Photograph # 64-182



Reverend Abraham Lincoln and Anna Eisenhower