

Oral History Interview  
Rev. Ray I. Witter  
August 28, 1964

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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 State?

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 to 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 first and so we never learned 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 baptism 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 I that it was because they lived along the river and as the Church grew, some of those brethren at a distance, it was not uncommon for them 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 nickname only.