

INTERVIEW WITH
Rev. Ray I. Witter

on
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by
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This is an oral interview on August 28, 1964, with Rev. Ray I. Witter.

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 to these

- Page Two -

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 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 lived along the river and as the Church grew,

- Page Three -

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 nick name, only.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, some authors in their study of the Brethren in Christ Church and in their writings, particularly, Gladys Dodd, in her book, "The Religious Background of the Eisenhower Family" feels that the religious revivals, which swept the early colonies in the late 18th century, had a great influence on the founding of the Brethren in Christ Church because these revivals turned the Pennsylvania German settlers to Christ and in turn they went ahead and found their own Church--based on your knowledge of the history of the Brethren in Christ Church and your experience within it, what influence do you think the revival movements in the late 18th century had on the founding of the Brethren in Christ Church?

REV. WITTER: Well, I would answer that question largely by growth and influence. Every revival has a surge of inspiration and zeal and progress, reaching out, and the tide runs high and people--there's a lot of conversions, a lot of in-gatherings and this has been true in the

- Page Four -

Church down through the years when, according to history, there were times of revival and there were times when--I--it seems as though the revival spirit was not generally recognized so much and it was during the times of these revivals when I could point out different areas in which the Church entered new fields, missionaries started out and pushed out in frontier work like, for instance the work in Kentucky today, and other fields, States, I could mention have been the result of pushing out, extending the work into new fields and establishing new Churches.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, do you feel that the revival movement in the late 18th century may have had some influence on the founding of the Brethren in Christ Church, or was the founding of the Church more of a split from groups which were more like the Mennonites in religious practice and belief?

REV. WITTER: I, really, think it was more the influence of the revival because at that time the revival had spread and there were benefits noticed all over the country more or less. I don't think it was much of a result of the split of some of those bodies back there.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, what were the beliefs of the early Brethren in Christ Church regarding doctrine and daily life?

REV. WITTER: Well, the doctrine of the early Church--they always stood for regeneration, that is, a new born experience--crises to be met in the life where-in they felt a change in their life and conscious that a new life had begun and they always were very careful of keeping a clear record, in other words to not have anything against them or any sin charged against them, to keep their records clear. The doctrines, of course, bore on this to a great extent in reminding, for instance, the communion service always was a reminder of whether the life was as it should be, because in Corinthians it says "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat" and so this was a vital touch between the members as well. So their doctrines were founded simply on the Word of God--doctrine of baptism, communion service, divine healing, anointing for the sick and the various ordinances--these were all drawn from the scripture--practiced continually.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, where did the Church draw its doctrine for its unique daily life, that is, for the unique daily life for the members of the Church?

REV. WITTER: Well, there may have been some bearing here of some of other bodies like the Menonites or possibly the Church of the Brethren may have had some influence. I think the founders of the Church had convictions along this line which they had received by contacting somewhat these other bodies, but I think we can say that part of this was perhaps influence from associations with other bodies.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, regarding the daily life of the members of the Brethren in Christ Church, in the early years of the Church, was there a general withdrawal from daily life, that is a living apart from the world?

REV. WITTER: Yes, there was in various ways. For instance, they had a warmth and fellowship between them that I think would be good to have some of it today. The spirit of helping one another and if anybody got in need they were right there to help him. I think there is a great loss of that today among Christian people and so they believed in practicing it day by day and brotherly love, by Godly example and practice, which they carried on. Then, as to the withdrawal, there were many things which they didn't partake of being nonresistant.

From the start of the Church--war was one of the things that has always been taught against and also in many forms of entertainment--- such as dancing and shows, wrong kind of shows, and exciting places. They lived rather reserved separate life from all these things. They strongly emphasized to abstain from all the appearance of evil and that light and darkness can not mix and the Christian life is a separate life, a clean life, and there is many things that don't go along with real Christian living according to Bible teaching. So, they taught separation from many things which are going on around about, tobacco and liquor were out, drinking, and gambling and all those things, worldly gatherings and customs were out. They believed in more of a simple life, dedicated life and they found their entertainment, enjoyment, largely, in the Church alone--was very pronounced in the early Church.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, getting into some of the basic doctrines of the Church, I'm going to ask you several questions about various early practices and we'll see what--try to see later on if any of these have changed or have been or are no longer practiced by the Church, the first question is: What is the form of baptism that is practiced by

the Brethren in Christ Church and has it changed in any degree since it was originally established?

REV. WITTER: The mode of baptism has not changed. We still use the trine immersion. However, the Church has come to this point that if someone comes from another Church and is satisfied with their baptism, in a recent year now, they will be accepted where it used to be they had to be re-baptized according to our method but that has changed on that point, otherwise the same mode is used as before, when converts are received.

MR. BARBASH: Does the Church practice child baptism?

REV. WITTER: No, it never has--we believe in genuine conversion and a child is not old enough to know this yet. However, we do have a service of dedication if parents want it, whereby the child is dedicated to the Lord with vows and prayers are made for the future guidance of that child and planning controlled by the Lord--infant baptism has never been accepted.

MR. BARBASH: In the ordinance of feet washing where it's practiced in the Brethren in Christ Church today who's feet were washed?

REV. WITTER: It's confined to the believer--and brethren usually withdraw to one part or room and the ladies to another and they wash one

another's feet. In the early days one would pick up a tub and wash perhaps a number but that has been changed so that one just washes another by their side and it keeps passing on till it goes clear around-- is the custom at the present time.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, would you explain the ordinance of the love feast?

REV. WITTER: The love feast was a great annual occasion. We used to get some of the biggest crowds right here in the county. As a boy, I well remember when we'd have such overflow crowds that we had extra preaching outside in the yards, they couldn't get in the Church--usually came together on Saturday morning--preparation was made and meals were served, a simple meal in the church in the basement, and daytime was a time of examination, the morning was an inspirational service, in the afternoon there were two scriptures used--the Fourth of Ephesians and 1st Corinthians the 11th Chapter in reference to the prayer veiling for the sisters and these messages were along the line of clean living and proper relationship between the members, no unforgiveness, and there was frequently quite a time if anyone carried unforgiveness before they came to the Communion table in the evening that was cleared up, straightened up, teaching was that it should be, before the Communion service

and was often carried out. So there was, also, a time of testimony which often times was quite an inspirational part of the service where different ones testified to their real experiences and blessing which they had attained and were enjoying.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, could you, now, tell us a little bit about the veiling of the sisters, what is the belief based on and what form of veiling do the sisters wear?

REV. WITTER: This is centered upon Corinthians, which has already been cited, and we notice in the scripture there Jesus or where the apostle, Paul, rather makes clear that man's head should be uncovered, inasmuch as he is the Glory of God, and woman, being created for the man-- man is her head and we look upon it like this--Christ is our Head and then man and then woman and this sign of authority by the prayer veiling gives her the right to pray or prophecy in service, public assemblies, the same as anyone else. We call it a prayer veiling but the same word says that a woman's head should be covered, or a revised version veiled in her approach in recognition of her head and as her being in subordination. The prayer veilings were usually of a white material and made conveniently to be worn on the head in public

worship and there are those that felt to wear it more to the extent that whenever they prayed they felt that they should have their head veiled.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, could you describe the two different types of covering that the women wear?

REV. WITTER: Yes, there is the prayer veiling--this prayer veiling required something different to fit and be practical so women wore a bonnet which was placed over the prayer veiling as a matter of convenience and as a matter of their own making and the two go together really from a practical standpoint.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, would you, please, explain the ordinance of anointing with oil a person who is sick and is this ordinance still a part of your Church's doctrine?

REV. WITTER: Yes, distinctly so. The anointing with oil, as James speaks of in the 5th Chapter there "if there is any sick among you let them call for the elders" and it goes on to tell us to anoint with oil in the name of the Lord and prayer of faith would save the sick. We still practice that the oil as it is found a number of places in the Old Testament as well as the New is the type of the Holy Spirit and

this oil is a little token there, a symbol of the spirit, and it's used in anointing--the same thing, of course, they anointed prophets and kings, priests--they anointed people in the past for specific lines of service but here oil is used as a symbol for type of the spirit for healing, and, I think, we can say that it does help the faith of the one in question. Furthermore we still practice this, like you will find according to Paul's practice that in the case where the sick are not present-- handkerchief's are anointed and sent to the afflicted ones and there has been some good results through this little token of simply anointing a handkerchief and sent to the sick person and as they receive it, why, they know that the prayers have accompanied this token.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, does the Church still practice the words of the 18th Chapter of Matthew regarding the problem of differences arising between members?

REV. WITTER: Yes, this doctrine is still advocated, preached. If there is any difficulty--getting together, talking it over, give forgiveness one of another. This is still in practice, still among our doctrines and like any Church doctrines--some observe it and some do not, but it's still in practice.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I wonder if you would explain the concept of the new birth and tell us whether or not it is still a part of your Church doctrine.

REV. WITTER: Yes, definitely so. It is still one of the cardinal doctrines. The Church has never taken in members unless they have experienced a change of heart. You read in Corinthians "if any man be in Christ, He's a new creature, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new" to give a more specific explanation-- a sinner is dead and trespasses in sin--he has no spiritual life whatsoever and in this experience when a sinner has repented and come and surrendered to the Lord and by faith accept Jesus Christ, there is the experience of Christ's pardoning grace and, also, the new life begins-- he's born of the spirit, he receives of the spirit and that new life has begun and you notice he says in Corinthians "old things have passed away, behold all things have become new" and again in the 3rd Chapter of John, Christ speaking to Nicodemus--he said "Ye must be born again" told him that if he wasn't born from above he couldn't see the Kingdom of Heaven and therein is where we advocate that the new life begins the spiritual life is again brought into the soul that was lost in the fall of Adam.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, how did the Church gain new members in its early years, in my reading and in finding out about the early Church the feeling seemed to be that there was no overt seeking of new people on the part of the early Church--how did the early Church, then, gain new members?

REV. WITTER: Without a doubt, there was a greater general recognition of revivals in the earlier day. I, well, remember as a boy some of the older ones stating how they started. It seemed as though conviction just simply got hold of them and even in a prayer meeting which has always been held--usually midweek--prayer meeting night there were those that would stand up and say "I want to be a Christian" and break down in tears and if they had anything to straighten up, any sins to confess or to anybody there or anywhere else and they made their starts by taking a definite stand and then telling their experience, how the Lord met them. In later years, we pressed the issue more and try to get people to yield and the Church has taken more of the initiative-- it seems necessary these days because it seems as though we are living in different days than what we used to be.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, once again coming back to the founding of the Church, also, in the research, we have found that some scholars feel that Jacob Engle founded the River Brethren Church because of what the Bible says about baptism, do you have anything to say about that?

REV. WITTER: Well, mine has been handed down but as far back as I could go with listening to the older brethren and information handed down, the major point in doctrine was the new birth. To really become converted and experience the new life baptism was secondary because we were taught it was not for sinners, it's always been taught that it was for believers so I think we would have to be fair and emphasize the "new born again" experience in the Lord and the other being secondary. This particular mode was, of course, accepted, practiced and is still practiced.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, in 1843, the first problem of discord split the Brethren in Christ Church, this was between the Yorkers and the River Brethren, what was the reason for this split and what became of the Yorkers?

REV. WITTER: This was quite a matter of Churches--building churches--the Brethren in Christ part of the division--they began building churches and reaching out. Later years they came to Sunday School and Bible Schools and went out in mission fields and they branched out, but the Yorkers have maintained those doctrines that were held back there in those early days and still do yet today. I'm still aware of

some congregations which are in the "horse and buggy days" and also have the meeting yet in the Churches--they don't have Sunday School, they think that's worldly and they still maintain the same doctrines which were maintained back there in those early days. That seemed to be the greatest division--was the Church problem and then from there on, naturally, the Brethren in Christ developed into quite a general out-reach. The Yorkers still go by the name of Yorkers.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, in 1855, there was another split in the Church or another problem which may have helped to split the Church and this was between the regular River Brethren or Brethren in Christ and the Brenzerites, can you discuss that problem for us?

REV. WITTER: Yes, that's where the issue came. They--Brenzer, a man by the name of Brenzer built the first church and the Brethren in Christ were not ready yet to go along with it and that was the major point in the division there--where the Churches came to a climax and they began building Churches. Later Church buildings were accepted by Brethren in Christ, also, they worshipped in their homes before this.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, just before we move out of the early Church

into the modern years, so to speak, could you give us a brief description of what the Church service was like in the early Church?

REV. WITTER: Yes, I think the Yorkers branch of it still maintains what the early Church did. They didn't have the notes in their song books in those days--the old hymnals, which were sung by the long and short meter, and it was not an unfrequent but which a line was read by the leader a line or two then it was sung and then another lining out and it was sung. It was largely consisted of singing and testimony then usual for confessions to come if somebody felt they had not been living up to their privilege they should and, then, a message--some preaching--might have been several sermonettes because in those days they were conscientious about outlining a sermon or having notes, it was rather more of the exorting type and no instruments but that was just about the general run of the services.

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 grandfather or the president's father, David's father, 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.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, now we would like to go into your connection with the Church in this area and particularly, of course, with Dwight Eisenhower, could you tell us when you first became acquainted with Dwight Eisenhower and how?

REV. WITTER: Well, I could tell--I can't tell the year, but it's just like cousins get acquainted nowadays. Our folks contacting one another, he lived here in Abilene and I lived on the farm southeast 10 miles, and when my folks came to town, I'd meet the boys and play with them,

then, they came out to the farm every chance they got. It was one of the highpoints of their joy in boyhood days to come out to the farm and enjoy farm life so this runs back as far as I can remember when we were just young boys.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, when you came to town to visit with the Eisenhower's, did you spend any time at the home and what sort of things as young boys did you do?

REV. WITTER: Well, I, occasionally, spent a weekend there, a few days at the longest, and times were not dull, we were boys--we had live times. We played everything from baseball, hide and go seek, and dare base and all those games of the past and I remember one time when we--when the older boys made some candy, we got sick over it. I roused the parents up during the night because I got sick of the candy and all those common games--common to boys and girls were--done everything from pouring water to snowballing if it was that season of the year and anything in general that was common to youth--we engaged in it.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, you say you remember playing ball with Dwight Eisenhower--was this in the younger years or was this when you were in high school and if it was high school, can you remember what

kind of ball player he was?

REV. WITTER: No, this was our boyhood years, we used to play down there on the Lincoln School ground and I wasn't in high school up here but he was a common ball player like the rest of us.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I wonder if you could remember enough to describe an average weekend that you spent at the Eisenhower home.

REV. WITTER: Yes, along with our playing, there was strict discipline in the home, but not unreasonable and Aunt Ida was a great cook, knew how to prepare a great table, and discipline was such that when "yes" was said it was obeyed and when "no" was said it was obeyed and the word was law, respected, highly respected. I remember the first thing in the morning when breakfast was ready, was the family worship, Uncle Dave, the father, always read the Bible and we all bowed together around this circle in prayer. That was in the beginning of the day, prayer was often given at every meal three times a day and that was expected. I remember on Sunday they had Bible study in the home and the adults they gathered together--the children were not included in that but the boys were sent to the Brethren in Christ Sunday School here on 7th and Buckeye and there is where they attended Sunday School.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I believe you attended Sunday School with Dwight Eisenhower, what kind of a Sunday School student was he?

REV. WITTER: Well, I think Dwight, it could be said was about as common as any that particular age when the teacher wonders, sometimes, whether they are getting anything across because the boy's interests oftentimes are varied--many times, quite far away. But I can't remember Dwight as being a great debator or strong inquirer, he wasn't outspoken, but polite, as all of the boys were raised to be but that is as far as I remember of their conduct. They knew what it was to behave in Church--they had that orders and they were, also, reverent in Church when they went to services.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, did the Eisenhower boys and, particularly Dwight, attend the Brethren in Christ Church regularly or did they attend other Churches in town and did Dwight ever become a member of the Brethren in Christ Church?

REV. WITTER: No, Dwight never became a member and they never attended other Churches of any degree, otherwise, to my knowledge.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, was Mrs. Eisenhower a member of the Brethren in Christ Church?

REV. WITTER: I had this question on my mind and more recent year when Aunt Amanda Musser was still living and her mind was clear, because of different views being taken around by different ones and I asked her "Did Aunt Ida ever belong to the Church?" and Aunt Amanda said, "No, she did not", but she worked along, helped along, and came along for a number of years and cooperated.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, was David Eisenhower, Dwight's father, a member of the Brethren in Christ Church?

REV. WITTER: No, I understand he, neither, belonged to the Church as much as he had, for a while there, supported it and went right along, but I couldn't find out, even Aunt Amanda that I'd asked, she didn't have knowledge of his ever being a member.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, based on your weekend visits and the amount of time that you spent at the Eisenhower home, do you think you could give us a rough idea of what Ida Eisenhower was like, what sort of a woman she was?

REV. WITTER: Well, she was a woman to know her, you can see why the boys respect her as they do today. She had a talent of management in the home, the boys had their work assigned, while there were no

sisters or daughters in the home, those boys had their share of the work, no matter what it was, whether it was baking or washing dishes or cleaning up floors. They had their work assigned to them, cleaning up and everything and they could do it. I remember one time the boys stated how they put the dishes away--one would stand at the dishpan, the other at the drying pan, another at the cupboard and they would toss the dishes over like a ball, one to another, and they made fun out of play but Aunt Ida was a great cook and she was very able to manage the household and command respect from her boys, from her family, and there was cooperation in the home between the husband and the wife. I'd never known them to disagree, at least, among others when I was there, but she kept her house in good order and she controlled the boys as I would say in short.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, in line of Ida Eisenhower's beliefs, even though she was not a formal member of the Brethren in Christ Church, several authors have stated that Ida was a pacifist and as a result of this she did not let the boys play war games, do you remember this to be true?

REV. WITTER: No, because I played war with the boys. In around the time of the Spanish American War, I remember when us boys built our forts, we had imaginary battles against the Spaniards and we played some war games the same as you find boys doing yet today, at least, when we was out to the farm and I don't doubt, but, what she, of course, kept it down to more of a minimum than some places but we played along that line, I well remember.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, what was a visit like that Dwight and his family made down to your folks' farm, what were some of the things that were done and some of the incidents that took place?

REV. WITTER: Well, I don't remember the whole family ever being there, for several reasons, they just had a road wagon and old bay horse called "Dick" so usually, it was the boys would come or a parent occasionally but usually the boys would come. There wasn't a getting together by families, I think, due to the conveyance possible, largely, and those were always great days when we got together on the farm or I could get up here to Abilene seems as though those boys delighted in getting on the farm, enjoying nature, enjoying the livestock and the methods of farming and all those environments, hunting--they loved to hunt, so these were some of their common interests.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, do you remember any amusing or interesting incidents that took place when the Eisenhower boys visited you at the farm?

REV. WITTER: Yes, these will always be remembered with me, I, well, remember one time when the corn was being laid by the last cultivation when it was up there--tall, and Dwight and I were to watch the horses while my father went in to get a drink, we were close to the house, it was threatening showers and clap of thunder came--father always had spirited horses, so this team started off down the row and I had the lines and Dwight had the shovels, it was a walking cultivator, he had the shovel handles, but he couldn't keep the plow out of the corn, we hoed off the corn for a few rods until we got the team stopped--just hoed it off straight and clean. Then again I well remember, when they were out there and our other cousin, Beulah Musser, was there and we got into a water fight, there was so many on each side, we'd grab buckets of water and douse each other--one side had the water tank and didn't need to pump their water but the other side only had the well on their side and they had to pump that water but it was cold and when you'd catch one out to a side why you'd run up and give them a bucket of water right, in the face or all over them, we were wet and the ground

was wet, we had quite a great time that day. I remember Beulah Musser one of the opposing group---met her coming around the corner of the building there with a whole bucket full of cold water and they let it go right in her face--she had to gasp for breath for a little--but those were high times. One of the high points of interest was we used to have a pond and we boys would play in the water there--we had no bathing suits, just nature's clothes, and one day it was hot and we were in and out and in and out and we sunburned ourselves we blistered our backs so bad that the skin peeled off and that next day we were laying in on the dining room on the floor moaning, and groaning and rolling in our misery. I remember the time I visited Dwight at the White House, I asked him whether he remembered that time---he said "I'll never forget that". He hadn't forgotten that blistered back and I never have either.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, as Dwight Eisenhower and the rest of the Eisenhower boys grew older and went on to high school, did you attend high school here in Abilene with them?

REV. WITTER: No., I didn't attend. They wanted me to come so I could be on the ball team but father needed me on the farm so I couldn't come in and join them here in high school.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I'd like to get into a little bit of the family history now, there has been quite a bit of writing and talking about Ida Eisenhower's connection with the Jehovah's Witnesses Church, I wonder if you could give us any background or if you can tell us anything that you remember from family talk about this.

REV. WITTER: I remember this, I didn't know what it was in the early years--they generally referred to that Sunday afternoon meeting as a Bible Class but as that continued on and on, why, I discovered it was Jehovah's Witness meeting which they, the parents, attended. It was held at their home occasionally, later on it was held at other places and while they didn't have ordained ministers--they had their form of doctrine and interpretation of the Bible that they followed.

MR. BARBASH: Do you know how Ida Eisenhower became interested in the Church and how she was brought into the Church?

REV. WITTER: I'm not able to say who interested her but there was a time and period of her life, this was what my aunt told me, when she was seeking satisfaction of her own experience, she run across this doctrine and got started reading and finally absorbed it and took up with it. But father, in the later years, of course, gave it up--he

couldn't go on through with it. I visited him before he died and had the satisfaction that he dropped out from that belief--from that doctrine.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, moving on to another aspect of the family, it, also, has been stated that it was Chris Musser who provided the funds to bring David Eisenhower and Ida up from Texas after he had gone down there following the failure of his general store in Hope, and that David went to work at the creamery at the request of Chris Musser and the rest of the River Brethren and that he by working at the creamery paid off this loan, so to speak, do you know anything about this or have you heard anything about it in the family history?

REV. WITTER: No, I haven't heard much about this--about all I know of, they failed down there, things were not as bright as they expected and got in bad circumstances and I can easily see why Chris Musser helped him because Chris was a man there in the creamery for many, many years and actually I can see where his influence brought David into the creamery as a source of livelihood.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, another aspect of David's connection with the creamery that has been brought out, is that when David left the

creamery, after working there for many years, he left with some bad feelings, do you know anything at all about this, do you know why David left the creamery?

REV. WITTER: That I cannot answer, I heard a little rumors back but not enough to commit myself as to what the difficulty or disagreement was that arose. I remember the time when he dropped out and that was as far as I can say.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, getting back to Dwight, after Dwight finished high school, he was preparing to go to West Point and he worked for a year before he went, he worked at the creamery for a year before he went to West Point, did you have much contact with him at this time at all?

REV. WITTER: Well, only occasional visit it seemed as we got up there in the years of work we didn't get together quite as much as regular any more but I remember when he worked in the creamery and prior to his going to West Point, that's about all I can remember at the present time.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, what did you---what steps did you take regarding your livelihood following your high school education and following the time when Dwight went to West Point?

REV. WITTER: I continued on the farm there, due to the fact that I was the only boy and those days, education was not emphasized as it is today. I continued on the farm, began my ministry while on the farm, for some years but I become too deeply involved in the ministry and, a little better than some 40 years ago I quit the farm and gave my time to the ministry--put the emphasis there.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, when Dwight had chosen or had selected to go to West Point, do you remember if there was any reaction on the part of his mother to this selection of livelihood?

REV. WITTER: No, I was not present any time or neither can I remember anything relative to his going to West Point. However, her being a pacifist, I am quite certain that she was not too elated over it but there is nothing in my mind that occurred that gives me anything that I can commit myself to on this particular point.

MR. BARBASH: Did Ida Eisenhower ever make any comment to you about Dwight's selection of military career?

REV. WITTER: Yes, she committed herself even to the pointed question 'why he ever took up such a vocation' and her belief it was not of God and that it was Satan, she was much opposed to military and wasn't too happy, naturally.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, following Dwight's departure for West Point and his beginning his military career, when was the next time you saw him?

REV. WITTER: Well, his being home on furlough, I remember contacting him a time or two, he was pretty well occupied and didn't get home any more very often. His visits at home were far between, as I remember, so, we had very little contact then only just rare occasionally, after he went to West Point.

MR. BARBASH: Do you remember anything of significance that he said to you or that you can remember that is worth mentioning here?

REV. WITTER: No, I don't. I remember the time--I remember his breaking

his leg playing football and he visited one time later when he was down in the Panama as an officer, but nothing spectacular, particular, that I recall.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, did you see him at his homecoming here in 1945 following the end of the war in Europe?

REV. WITTER: Oh, yes, I saw him back in those days, just brief visits, but I was in contact with him, also, saw at the time of his mother's funeral and talked with him--had a chance to talk more with him there. He was unable to attend his father's funeral because he was at the strategic part of the Army at Washington and they couldn't relieve him, let him off, because he knew Corregidor, worked with Mac Arthur, and it was important for him to stay there, so he didn't get out to his father's funeral.

MR. BARBASH: Regarding his mother's funeral, Rev. Witter, do you know anything about the circumstances surrounding the selection of the minister who presided at the funeral service?

REV. WITTER: Well, it was the Jehovah Witness ministry service. The sermon, so called, was read out of their writings and it was planned

by their group. I well remember the service, it was quite different though when the father was buried than when the mother, the boys had arranged the mother's funeral and Chaplain from Ft. Riley ministered-- done a nice job.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, did you get to talk to Dwight Eisenhower when he came home here in 1952 to start his campaign for the Presidency?

REV. WITTER: No, I didn't contact him at that time I contacted his brother, Milton, about that time and I put this question to Milton-- when they were talking just before, prior, I asked Milton, "Will Dwight accept if he is nominated"? I remember Milton, emphatically, said "No, he doesn't want it. I don't think he'll accept it".

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, after Dwight was nominated and elected, did you ever have a chance to visit him in Washington?

REV. WITTER: Yes, we visited him in Washington, we raised a family reunion. I had my three children and their companions with us and we had a nice contact there in his private office there at the White House.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, have you had any chance to talk to President Eisenhower or see him since he left the presidency?

REV. WITTER: Yes, in the recent trip that he was here, I got within a few feet when they were ushering him off in a car, recognized each other, but I wasn't afforded the privilege to have a conversation with him--they kept him so busy.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, to get back to the Brethren in Christ Church, now that we seem to have covered your connection with Dwight Eisenhower and what you can remember of those years, when you became a minister in the Brethren in Christ Church, where did your work take you?

REV. WITTER: Well, for some few years, I ministered there, locally, usually had several preachers at each congregation and the pastoral system was inaugurated at a later year, but there wasn't too many years when I began receiving calls to other States to hold revival meetings--- a series of meetings during the winter season and sometimes in the summer I was called away from home and this became quite an active part of my ministry.

MR. BARBASH: Did you minister most of your life in this area?

REV. WITTER: Yes, I started preaching when I was 24 years of age and then at 40 I was ordained as one of the Bishops and that was for 26 years, that I served and till I reached the age of retirement. My work

still continues, pinch hitting when somebody needs help or still engaging in evangelistic work in different states and also Canada.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I believe this problem in the Church took place when you were a young boy or probably in your early years in the ministry of the Church, but the River Brethren or the Brethren in Christ Church after they had moved to Kansas faced a problem of the doctrine of sanctification, could you, please, explain this term and tell just what happened to it in regards to the Church?

REV. WITTER: Yes, I was old enough to remember when this doctrine started in the Church, while the early Church, prior to this, always held up a high standard of regeneration, Christian living, but never treats the sanctified life, fullness of the spirit for believers, you remember Peter said, "have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed" but the spirit in empowerment, this came in through preaching in the area, some evangelists started and some people sought the Lord, prayed through, and got the experience, a victorious testimony and increased joy and happiness made others hungry and they, likewise, sought the Lord--that was the start but it grew rapidly through the Church.

It was a message to believers to dedicate their lives wholly to the Lord and ask for a cleansing of the heart, of any imbred or sinful tendencies, like hatred or envy or jealousy or covetousness or unforgiveness and this is what caused folks to seek heart cleansing--to get the heart clean and filled with the Holy Spirit. Naturally, when it came in, some thought it was false doctrine and it caused some dissension but as time went on it spread and the Church accepted it so wholeheartedly that it became one of the major doctrines and emphasis as we continue to preach it yet today.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, does this indicate, then, that it's possible for a member of the Brethren in Christ Church to be reborn twice in his Christian experience?

REV. WITTER: Well, only from this standpoint, there is a possibility of having the experience of drifting away in other words, we call backsliding and they become indifferent and perhaps give up and even go out into sin, but when they come back to the Lord again and renew their covenant, there is an experience awaiting them again that they can be restored back in grace and enjoy what they had enjoyed before.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, could you tell us, now, what a service is like in the River Brethren Church or the Brethren in Christ Church as it is, as it exists today, just to give us an idea of the difference between the early Church and the present Church?

REV. WITTER: Yes, there is quite a difference today, in this age in which we live. Our services today we have music in the Church, nearly every Church has an organ and, occasionally other instruments are used. There is special singing--solos, duets, and quartets, choruses and choirs and the Sunday Schools are well organized and the services are, usually, given out by bulletins, you know ahead when you come to Church Sunday morning what's expected, and the ministers now are supported pastorates and only one man at a place, he may have a lay minister or call on somebody else in case of emergency but, the services copy quite closely along with other Churches today on various lines.

MR. BARBASH: Is the Church still pacifist in its belief toward war?

REV. WITTER: Yes, we still maintain a pacifist view and our young men are taking, 1W service, alternate service, in various institutions which are recommended by the government and are serving other places-- some of the men have for a number of years served those two or three years without any compensation even from the government--done some-

thing that was helpful, something that was a ministry to suffering humanity. As many of our boys feel that the soldier boys make a sacrifice, they, too, ought to be willing to make a sacrifice--some have even given themselves as guinea pigs to experiment on the different vaccines, medicines, and they have gone into all kinds of labor in mental hospitals and other hospitals and what have you, so many things that way, the government has recommended for the boys to engage in to spend their several years of time and receive an honorable discharge.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I noticed that you are wearing clerical dress, could you, please, tell us how long this has been part of the tradition of the Brethren in Christ Church?

REV. WITTER: As far back as I remember, our ministry has always maintained a clerical garb. It's being lost sight of today this is quite general, in years gone by because I remember Methodists, Baptists, and various churches wore the Prince Albert coat or military collar or had a clerical vest and we believe the ministry should be identified, let you know who he is when you meet him and quite a lot of our men yet today wear the clergy and some are leaving it off perhaps it may be lost sight of in the course of years.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, do the male members of your Church still wear beards and cut their hair in a special way and wear very plain clothes?

REV. WITTER: No, very little, some of the older ones do but beards had been discarded. It's very rare thing to find anyone any more, naturally, in the years gone by that didn't even mean as much. If you follow up the army records, you will find that it was a case of "have to" back in the Civil War back in through there, it was considered as a case of dignitary and it didn't mean as much back in those years but it's rapidly being lost sight of, you may go quite a while now until you find one that does any more and the Church is changing on this line.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I think that concludes our interview and unless you have anything to add, anything that you have thought of, since the interview began that you think would be worth leaving to the historians who will use this interview, I would like to end this interview and express to you the most heartfelt thanks of the staff of the Eisenhower Library for giving them the opportunity to interview

you and giving us the opportunity, let us say, of interviewing you and giving the historians a little piece of something to work with.

REV. WITTER: I think I could say this with all due respect to any other groups--that the group that came out here from Pennsylvania and the elderly people will substantiate my statement, were very progressive people and they were industrious and were great farmers and they made contributions to the county that are, I think I can say, are enjoying the impact of it yet today. We have had a very good heritage from those that come out from the East and settled up this country and I think some of the cooperation and some of the commonness that gave service to all men under, some times, sacrifice could be renewed but I appreciate my heritage and I'm glad for my background.

MR. BARBASH: Rev. Witter, I'd like to thank you very, very much.

