

Big Brother is Watching: FBI Surveillance of Antiwar Activities at Mennonite Colleges in the 1960s

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Abstract: During the Vietnam War era, U.S. Mennonites were not of one mind on the best way to witness for peace. Students at Mennonite colleges were often more radical in their approach than many in the church—outspoken enough to attract the attention of the FBI. The Freedom of Information Act makes it possible to obtain files from FBI reports on Mennonite colleges, which show ongoing surveillance at Bethel College of the Peace Club and individuals on campus. Student and faculty protest activities drew criticism from the local non-pacifist population but also from college administrators and the Western District of the General Conference Mennonite Church, who preferred a quieter and more orderly response to the Vietnam War and the draft. In the end, the FBI determined that the actions of the students at Bethel College were in keeping with the Mennonite peace tradition.

During the student “revolutions” of the 1960s, Mennonite colleges had their share of campus unrest. Students spoke up for civil rights, peace, and justice. They protested against the Vietnam War, racism, the evils of the “Establishment,” and restrictive dormitory rules and dress codes. Bethel College, a General Conference Mennonite institution in North Newton, Kansas, was especially in the public eye. In 1967 Calvin Trillin of the *New Yorker* magazine traveled around Kansas to assess the strength of the peace movement in the Midwest. He reported that Bethel College was one of the hot spots of antiwar activity in the state. The twenty to thirty members of the Peace Club, Trillin wrote, are “the kind of young Mennonites who believe that social and peace concerns must be demonstrated.” Without reservation “they believe the war in Vietnam to be particularly immoral.”¹ At the same time, the FBI also had an eye on Bethel—and other Mennonite colleges—as revealed in FBI records gained from the Freedom of Information Act of the United States government.

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1. Calvin Trillin, “The War in Kansas,” *New Yorker*, April 22, 1967, 122-132.

Why was the United States government concerned about students at small Mennonite colleges? This article takes a look at Mennonite student activism of the 1960s as viewed by the FBI, and secondly, as viewed by the wider Mennonite church. Student activists gave a new face to Mennonitism, not one that all Mennonites embraced. The FBI reports of surveillance at Mennonite colleges secured through the Freedom of Information Act help to flesh out in greater detail the tension between student and faculty peace activism during the Vietnam era and the local communities and constituent churches that were not willing to accept radical political protest, particularly from youth who no longer always looked or sounded like respectable Mennonites. Closer to home, suspicions sometimes rose higher. While the FBI, in fact, recognized Mennonite student activism as a form of historic peace theology, albeit cloaked sometimes in the strategies and language of the New Left, much of the church did not.

STUDENT ACTIVISM AT MENNONITE COLLEGES

“Something is ‘blowin in the wind’ across the Mennonite college landscape,” wrote Delton Franz of the Mennonite Peace Committee (MCC) Peace Section Office in Washington, DC, in 1969. “It is evident now that a significant and growing number of Mennonite youth will not be content to go about ‘business as usual’ in the face of the terribly destructive and dehumanizing war.”² In the 1960s American Mennonites, although not a numerous denomination, had eight liberal arts colleges. The Mennonite Church (the “Old Mennonites”) sponsored three—Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana; Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Virginia; and Hesston Junior College at Hesston, Kansas. The General Conference Mennonite Church sponsored three—Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas; Bluffton College in Bluffton, Ohio; and Freeman Junior College in Freeman, South Dakota. The Mennonite Brethren Conference sponsored two—Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas; and Fresno Pacific College in Fresno, California. Total enrollment at the eight colleges in the 1960s was about 4,900.³ In addition, Mennonites supported three theological seminaries: Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana; Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia;

2. Statements by Delton Franz, director of the Washington office of MCC Peace Section, in *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Nov. 6, 1969, 2; Perry Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 242; Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1996), 322.

3. The 1965-1966 enrollment number was 4,912 (of whom 66 percent were Mennonites), based on Silas Hertzler, “Attendance in Mennonite and Affiliated Colleges 1965-66,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 41 (Oct. 1967), 330-333.

and Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California.⁴ Issues related to war and peace were always matters of concern at Mennonite colleges because of the denomination's historic pacifist doctrine. In the 1960s, as in past wars, Mennonite doctrine called for pacifism and taking the conscientious objector stand in regard to military service. In the public arena, however, the American Mennonite voice was traditionally a reserved witness. Mennonites had a reputation of being "the quiet in the land."

The Vietnam War brought Mennonite college students—and some of the faculty members—into a new phase of activism. Most of the colleges had longstanding student peace clubs that protested war through an appeal to the traditional pacifist doctrine; then, in the 1960s the students increasingly began to draw on the newer, secular antiwar ideas. In past times the student clubs promoted peace mostly by holding informational meetings, writing letters to government officials, and attending national intercollegiate peace club meetings. The Bethel College Peace Club (according to its constitution of 1945) had the purpose "to stimulate and promote discussion and action toward the peace effort through Christian methods."⁵ By the 1960s, however, students were marching forth with a more vigorous program, no longer content to be merely pious and quiet.⁶

The task here is not to give a comprehensive account of Mennonite antiwar activity of the 1960s, already available from several authors.⁷ The focus of this essay is on the events that instigated FBI surveillance of Mennonite colleges, particularly at Bethel College. Although much of the early Mennonite antiwar activity was quietistic, composed of silent prayer vigils and letter-writing campaigns, there was an upsurge of antiwar protests in 1966 and then again at the time of the National Vietnam Moratorium of October-November of 1969. Many of the peace actions were orderly on-campus events sponsored by the college peace clubs. Musical get-togethers (called hootenannies) for singing folk and antiwar

4. For an overview of Mennonite colleges, see the article on colleges in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 1:636-639; and John D. Reber, *Teaching That Transforms: Why Anabaptist-Mennonite Education Matters* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing Network, 2011), Appendix. Also, see the recent article on colleges in the online *Mennonitisches Lexikon*.

5. Constitution of the Student Peace Group, May 23, 1945, in Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College [hereafter MLA], Bethel Peace Club, III.1.A.29.e, file no. 30.

6. Reported by Delton Franz, *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Nov. 6, 1969, 2.

7. For an overview of Mennonite antiwar activities during the Vietnam War, see Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970*; and Perry Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*. For the Kansas scene, James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms II: Stories of Kansas Mennonites in Politics* (N. Newton, Kan.: Bethel College, 2016); Robin Deich Ottoson, "The Battle over the Flag: Protest, Community Opposition, and Silence in the Mennonite Colleges in Kansas during the Vietnam War," *Journal of Church and State*, 52 (2010), 686-711. Ottoson is also preparing a dissertation, "The Battle over the Flag: The Political Attitudes of the Mennonite Colleges in Kansas during the Vietnam War, 1961-1975 (Kansas State University).

songs were popular. In October 1969 the inter-Mennonite newspaper *Mennonite Weekly Review* carried campus reports, "Colleges Take Part in Peace Moratorium." An overview of activities included the following: at Goshen College an array of on-campus events took place, concluding with a "silent memorial" on the college plaza for prayer, mediation, and reflection; Eastern Mennonite College had speakers, letter writing to Congress, and a rally with folk singing and readings, all rooted—according to the college administration—in "the biblical basis for pacifism, the ethical mandate for opposition to the Vietnam War, and the students' role in expressing dissatisfaction with the war"; Freeman Junior College tolled the college bell every hour and lowered the flag to half-mast; the Bluffton College Moratorium observance was a "Day of Dialogue," filled with on-campus class discussions, special speakers, interviews with Bluffton citizens, and a letter-writing session. This letter session, however, expanded into an "unplanned" off-campus march and vigil at the Bluffton post office—eventually dispersed by police.⁸

At the Mennonite colleges in Kansas, the usual program consisted of speakers and class discussions, as observed at Tabor and Hesston. Hesston added a symbolic meal of rice and bread in the college cafeteria. The big Kansas action of 1969 took place at Bethel College in North Newton, adjacent to the larger town of Newton, where the students shook the community by ringing the historic college bell steadily for four days to mark every American military death in Vietnam, followed by a march of protesters down to Wichita for a final peace rally.⁹ The Bethel events were highly publicized.

A second Vietnam Moratorium event followed a month later, on November 15, 1969, in Washington, DC. Many Mennonites joined in. The Washington office of MCC Peace Section worked at making arrangements for the 200 or so students coming from Mennonite schools, plus an "undetermined number of adults." Some 500 or more Mennonites participated in the Washington event. Chartered buses and caravans of cars came from Bethel, Bluffton, Eastern Mennonite, Goshen, and the Mennonite Seminary at Elkhart. The Bethel Peace Club took the college

8. *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Oct. 16, 1969, 16; Oct. 23, 1969, 12; Nov. 20, 1969, 12; memo of details of Goshen, "Goshen College War Moratorium," Oct. 15, 1969, MLA, Bethel Peace Club Archive, file no. 2. For the Bluffton post office vigil, see *The Mennonite*, Nov. 4, 1969, 664.

9. Keith Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas 1887-2012* (North Newton: Bethel College, 2012), 157-158; *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Oct. 23, 1969, 2; Ottoson, "Battle over the Flag," 686-711.

bell and assumed a prominent place at the candlelight vigil on the Mall, with the bell “ringing in honor of each soldier killed in Vietnam.”¹⁰

Compared with the more revolutionary activities at Berkeley and Columbia, the Mennonite college antiwar activities of the sixties were mild—“relatively calm,” as historian Perry Bush described the situation at Bluffton College.¹¹ Donald Kraybill also described Eastern Mennonite as quite peaceful—“no violent protests or sit-ins on campus.” Indeed, in 1969 the student newspaper declared EMC safe from revolt: “It can’t happen here. Can it? No, of course not. We are a Christian College. We’re a Mennonite College. We are a conservative college. We don’t have many longhairs here.”¹²

The atmosphere of “relative calm” could describe other Mennonite colleges as well. When there was student agitation, however, it seemed large by Mennonite standards, and it did not stop with protests of national issues. Along with protesting the Vietnam War, some student protesters took aim at campus grievances and lifestyle issues. Students also adopted the long hair and sloppy dress of the counterculture; heckled college officials; and launched protests against required chapel attendance, dormitory regulations, and rules about alcohol, smoking, and dancing. Students were resolute against the doctrine of *in loco parentis*.

As on-campus agitation flared up, Mennonite college professors were somewhat taken aback. As long as protests were directed to other places—for example, military bases and oppressive civil rights situations in the South—they were admirable; but when students began to challenge the curriculum and the authority of the instructor, “the faculty became less enthralled with the student movement.”¹³ In several of the colleges, alienated students produced “underground” newspapers filled with inflammatory rhetoric: *The Fly* at Bethel; *The Menno-Pause* at Goshen; and *Piranha* at Eastern Mennonite.¹⁴ At the colleges, the actively protesting students were always a minority of the student body (only about twelve to fourteen students at Bethel, according to one FBI estimate of 1966, or

10. “Collegians to Join Washington March,” *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Oct. 23, 1969, 2; Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 242; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 322; Bob Mayer email, Sept. 1, 2009.

11. Perry Bush, *Dancing with the Kobzar: Bluffton College and Mennonite Higher Education 1899-1999* (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press U. S., 2000), 182.

12. Donald B. Kraybill, *Eastern Mennonite University: A Century of Countercultural Education* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 211.

13. James C. Juhnke and Keith L. Sprunger, “Teaching at Bethel College in the 1960s,” chap. 4 of *Voices from Newton: Oral Histories from the Story Corps Interviews* (Newton, Kan.: Newton/North Newton Historic Preservation Commission, 2008).

14. Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 161-162; Susan Fisher Miller, *Culture for Service: A History of Goshen College 1894-1994* (Goshen, Ind.: Goshen College, 1994), 241-244; Kraybill, *Eastern Mennonite University*, 183.

twenty to thirty by Calvin Trillin's estimate) but the activists were the ones who gained the most attention.¹⁵ These disruptive and occasionally disrespectful students caused much grief to college presidents who had to endure complaints from college supporters about the Mennonite "hippies." Concerned Bethel supporters asked: "Who runs the college anyway? Radicals and radical professors?"¹⁶ College leaders did their best to give a positive spin to the college activism by posing it as an updated version of traditional Anabaptist values, "Our educational and Christian concern"—as phrased by President Myron S. Augsburg of Eastern Mennonite.¹⁷

Among the antiwar demonstrations, another big issue was looming—draft resistance. In 1969 a student at Eastern Mennonite spoke out: "EMC's observance of the national moratorium is more than just a protest." Students were considering the further step of draft resistance as "an effective way of affirming our desire for peace."¹⁸ During the Vietnam War the question of whether to comply or refuse to cooperate with the Selective Service System was of lively concern to college students, and it drew Mennonite colleges and their constituent Mennonite churches into the dangerous realm of condoning civil disobedience. Young people opposed to military service from the historic peace churches (Quakers, Brethren, and Mennonites) could register with Selective Service as conscientious objectors (COs) and receive alternative non-military assignments in hospitals or other civilian work. However, a handful of young male Mennonites came to the conviction that the very act of registering was unethical because it would mean collaborating with the "immoral" military system. Some who had already registered destroyed their draft cards; others refused to register.¹⁹ The FBI had the task of investigating draft resisters.

15. The estimate of twelve to fourteen Bethel Peace Club students is in FBI document no. 2, dated Nov. 11, 1966 (Bethel Freedom of Information Act archive), apparently based on a statement from Merle Bender, the Bethel director of development, who was seeking to soften the bad publicity coming to the college; reported in the *Newton Kansan*, Nov. 2, 1966. Calvin Trillin in his *New Yorker* article of 1967 estimated twenty to thirty active Peace Club members. These figures were set too low, based on the number who actually took part in the Repentance Walk and Mail of 1966 (about ninety persons). No thorough research has been done about the number of activist students compared with the non-involved students at the Mennonite colleges, but all indications suggest that the activists were a "relatively small" minority. For estimates about the number of "active peacemaker-protesters," at Bethel see Terence R. Goering, "A History of the Bethel College Peace Club" (Bethel College Social Science Seminar paper, 1975), 28 and introduction.

16. Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 163.

17. *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Oct. 16, 1969, 16.

18. Statement by Duane Yoder, president of the EMC Peace Fellowship, *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Oct. 16, 1969, 16.

19. Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 324-329.

The non-registrant students asked the colleges and churches to support them in this civil disobedience against Selective Service. This was a test for the colleges and churches. Perry Bush characterized the dilemma as the “fundamental test of loyalties.” Could Mennonites be “both good citizens and good Christians?”²⁰ In August of 1969 the Mennonite Church (Old Mennonites) meeting at Turner, Oregon, responded to the non-registrants by voting to “recognize the validity of non-cooperation as a legitimate witness.” A few months later, in October of 1969 at a meeting in Wichita, the Western District Conference, a branch of the General Conference Mennonite Church, went a step further and narrowly voted in favor of recognizing “total noncooperation with the Selective Service System as a meaningful witness of one’s beliefs and as a witness as compatible with the historical traditions of the Mennonite church.”²¹ During the 1960s, the inter-Mennonite relief and peace agency, the Mennonite Central Committee, spoke out about “the atrocities of the war” and supported “war tax” and draft resistance. In a recent retrospective article, MCC staffer Titus Peachey recalled that “MCC continued to engage in active resistance to the United States involvement in the Vietnam War.”²²

These bold actions by church conferences and MCC caused alarm among conservative Mennonites, who feared that the church was becoming “political” and was condoning lawlessness and even anarchy. A day after the Western District vote, the *Wichita Eagle* reported that Mennonites supported “total noncooperation,” including declining to register for the draft, refusing induction, and burning draft cards.²³ In passing these resolutions, Mennonite churches assumed that only a few would take this extreme position, which carried the likelihood of arrest and imprisonment. As its main program, the churches continued to favor the established alternative service programs provided by Selective Service. At most, about fifty young Mennonite men took the illegal route of noncooperation with Selective Service during the Vietnam War. The book *The Path of Most Resistance* records the stories of several of these draft resisters.²⁴

20. Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 221. See also Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 332-336.

21. For a summary of these Mennonite actions, see “Draft Resistance Makes the Scene,” *The Mennonite*, Dec. 16, 1969, 758-759; Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, 325-326; Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 248-255.

22. Titus Peachey in a retrospective article, “MCC and the anti-Vietnam War Movement,” in *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* (Spring 2017), 2-4.

23. “Resolutions Stir Mennonite Meet,” *Wichita Eagle*, Oct. 12, 1969, 1.

24. Melissa Miller and Phil M. Shenk, *The Path of Most Resistance: Stories of Mennonite Conscientious Objectors Who Did Not Cooperate with the Vietnam War Draft* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1982).

Some of the Mennonite colleges had the sobering experience of witnessing FBI agents arrive on campus to arrest non-registering students, then seeing the students taken away for booking and fingerprinting. This happened in 1970 to Dennis Koehn at Bethel and Duane Shank at Eastern Mennonite.²⁵ Dennis Koehn has recalled his FBI experience. "I was investigated by the FBI . . . by agent Otto T. Handwerk." Agent Handwerk interrogated Koehn several times, first at the high school, then the next year at college, to the point that they became rather friendly. "This is my friend Otto," Koehn would tell fellow students. In 1970 Handwerk came with bad news: "I have to arrest you."²⁶

Shank's trial ended with a sentence of community service. Koehn's experience was more severe. After his arrest, he went to trial in Wichita before Judge Wesley E. Brown of the U. S. District Court for failing to register with Selective Service. William Keeney, the academic dean at Bethel—also chairman of the MCC Peace Section—and Esko Loewen, pastor at the Bethel College Mennonite Church, testified on his behalf. The judge quizzed the officials about the Mennonite stand on obedience to the law: were Mennonite church and college leaders advising Dennis to disobey the law? With this line of questioning, Mennonites in the courtroom began to sense that the target was widening, "that the Mennonite Church itself might be on trial." Judge Brown found Keeney's and Loewen's responses vague and unsatisfactory.²⁷ They had done a good job of evading the question about obedience to the law in every case, and the judge wanted some direct answers from Koehn.

Judge Brown: "Does your church advocate disregard of the law? . . .

"Are you saying that your church told you to violate the law?"

Koehn: "Absolutely not."

Judge Brown: "Just *some* laws."

Koehn: "That is correct."

Judge Brown (after pausing for a moment): "Well, that can wait for another time."

At the end, the judge found Koehn guilty and sentenced him to prison for an indefinite period, not to exceed six years. In his final words to Koehn, the judge said: "Young man, you are a tragedy of our time, or

25. Miller and Shenk, *The Path of Most Resistance*, 28-29, 71. On Shank, see Kraybill, *Eastern Mennonite University*, 214. In an earlier case, in 1948, the FBI at Bluffton College arrested a non-registering student and Prof. Larry Gara.—Bush, *Dancing with the Kobzar*, 144-145.

26. For events of 1969-1970, Dennis Koehn taped interview by Keith Sprunger, June 12, 1971 (MLA, tape 172.1 B15); Dennis Koehn, "The Cup of Noncooperation," chap. 3, in Miller and Shenk, *The Path of Most Resistance*.

27. Koehn, "The Cup of Noncooperation," and Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms II*, 119-122.

maybe you are a light in the darkness for some." Koehn served eighteen months in the Federal Youth Center in Denver, and then returned to Bethel to complete his college education.²⁸

The widespread revolutionary spirit in higher education took a heavy toll on American college leaders. The norm for presidents of this period, historian John R. Thelin observed, was "early retirement, heart attacks, and disbelief that these contentious groups, numerically so small, had come to exert such a disproportionate influence on the image and reputation of the campus."²⁹ Although this was not exactly the story for Mennonite colleges and their presidents in the 1960s, the Mennonite administrators certainly faced hard times. Several Mennonite presidents left office in those years, some, no doubt, owing to the campus stress.³⁰

THE FBI AND COVERT SURVEILLANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The FBI is the chief federal law enforcement agency whose mission "is to protect and defend the United States against terrorist and foreign intelligence threats, to uphold and enforce the criminal laws of the United States, and to provide leadership and criminal justice service to federal, state, municipal, and international agencies and parties."³¹ These FBI functions are supported by legislation and are well known. But, as Betty Medsger, investigative reporter of the *Washington Post*, put it, there were actually two FBIs—the "public FBI" and a second "secret FBI."³² Under J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI from 1924 to 1972, the agency took on secret extra-legal operations of investigating and spying on individuals and groups perceived to be subversive threats to the American social order. Internally, the FBI called this second program of the 1950s and 1960s COINTELPRO (short for Counter Intelligence Program). Another similar secret FBI program of the time was creating the Security Index (SI), an FBI list of persons deemed dangerous to national security. According to newspaper reports, the purpose of this list, kept from public

28. The account of Koehn's trial is based on the following sources: General Conference News Service news release, "Dennis Koehn Sentencing Reveals Problems for Judge," June 25, 1971, MLA, Peace Club Archive, file no. 18; Koehn's own account in "The Cup of Noncooperation;" and *Bethel College Collegian* (Nov. 5, 1971), 1. Koehn was in prison from May 11, 1972, to Nov. 20, 1973. During this time he took some correspondence courses from Bethel.

29. John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 313-314.

30. These presidential resignations included Orville Voth of Bethel, 1970; Paul E. Miner of Goshen, 1970; and Robert Kreider of Bluffton, 1971.

31. *Today's FBI Facts & Figures 2013-2014* (Washington DC: U. S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013), 7.

32. Betty Medsger, *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 7.

knowledge, was to be “a file which would be the basis for federal arrests in the event of war or an ‘internal security emergency.’” The aim of both covert programs was to target communist and socialist groups, leaders of the civil rights movement, Black Power groups, the Ku Klux Klan, anti-Vietnam War organizers, and radical student groups, such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Weathermen.³³ Higher education was a special target because Hoover and other FBI officials believed that the anti-Vietnam “New Left” students and faculty posed a serious threat to the country. Hoover feared that the radicals had foreign connections “reaching from Hanoi to Harvard, Beijing to Berkeley.”³⁴ In this situation the goal of COINTELPRO was to “expose, disrupt and otherwise neutralize” the campus radicals.³⁵ During the 1960s, FBI agents infiltrated many college and universities, often using secret informants.

In March of 1971 the FBI’s covert programs came to light when activists, calling themselves the Citizens Commission to Investigate the FBI, broke into the bureau’s office in Media, Pennsylvania, and stole documents, many relating to COINTELPRO operations. Among the documents were FBI files about colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area, including reports on “student agitation” and “communist” and “foreign” influence. The Media files revealed that the FBI was devoting great amounts of time and effort to the illegal monitoring of antiwar activists.³⁶ The Media burglars provided documents to newspapers, and the story of the Secret FBI became big news. In April 1971, as the extent of FBI surveillance became known, Hoover ended COINTELPRO. Further information about the FBI’s COINTELPRO activities and other governmental intelligence programs was revealed in 1975-1976 in the findings of the so-called Church Committee (the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, headed by Senator Frank Church). The committee revealed details about many of the FBI’s unlawful covert practices and recommended 180 steps of reform.³⁷ Along with many in higher education, Mennonite administrators suspected FBI spying on their colleges—but where was the evidence?

33. Sanford J. Ungar, *FBI* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1976), 140-144; Medsger, *The Burglary*, chap. 15, 270-284. On the Security Index, Medsger, *The Burglary*, 250.

34. Tim Weiner, *Enemies: A History of the FBI* (New York: Random House, 2012), 2642-2665.

35. Medsger, *The Burglary*, 333.

36. Medsger, *The Burglary*, 232-235, 242; Ungar, *FBI*, 135-138, about surveillance of “student agitation” at different colleges and universities.

37. Medsger, *The Burglary*, 488-490; Weiner, *Enemies*, 298-305; Ungar, *FBI*, 214-216.

THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND MENNONITE COLLEGES

Since the 1960s, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), enacted by Congress, has provided the public with the right to access records from any federal agency. Congress requires the agencies to make the requested records “promptly available,” unless the material is covered by one of nine exemptions, which, according to the Department of Justice website, “protects personal privacy, national security, and law enforcement.” In such exemption cases, the agency is allowed to withhold the material or to provide copies with sensitive names and material edited and removed. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 has further expanded the law, adding to the standard of government “openness” and trimming back a bit on allowable exemptions. The removing or blotting out of sensitive material is called redaction.³⁸ When the FBI provides redacted copies of documents, it also provides a sheet called “Explanation of Exemptions,” which lists the nine exemption areas.

In August 2015, the authors of this article submitted the first in a series of FOIA letters to the FBI about possible secret surveillance at the Mennonite colleges. The first FOIA letter, seeking information about Bethel College, requested “copies of all files, records, reports, or other materials of the FBI on or relating to, by, or about the following topics relating to antiwar activities at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.” The letter also requested “a search of COINTELPRO files.” The letter specified that the FBI and COINTELPRO files may contain topics that include:

- Bethel College and anti-Vietnam war activities in the period 1965-1975
- Bethel College Peace Club
- Bethel College professors James C. Juhnke and Keith L. Sprunger

The letter further stated that the writer was “willing to pay the requisite fees for processing this request and any photocopying charges that may apply.”

In the course of the following year, the authors sent out additional FOIA letters, similar to the Bethel letter, regarding possible FBI surveillance activities at Tabor, Fresno Pacific, Hesston, Goshen, Bluffton, and Eastern Mennonite. When the FOIA reply letters came back, only the Bethel College letter provided any FBI surveillance material (nineteen pages of documents). Requests for the other Mennonite colleges came up

38. On Freedom of Information, see the Department of Justice website on FOIA – Freedom of Information Act. On the 2016 Improvement Act, see *Perspectives on History*, 55 (Feb. 2017), 13.

empty—or nearly so. Three pages of routine material turned up for Bluffton College—namely, a file from 1964 about an enterprising senior student who was writing a research paper on American Fascism and wrote to the FBI for information. “I would like to know if you could supply me with any information concerning this movement.” He received a return letter from J. Edgar Hoover, responding that the FBI had no data available to be released, and also pointing out that “information in our files is confidential and available only for official use.”³⁹ For the other Mennonite colleges the FBI reported: “Based on the information you provided, we conducted a search of the Central Records System. We were unable to identify main file records responsive to the FOIA. If you have additional information pertaining to the subject that you believe was of investigative interest to the Bureau, please provide us the details and we will conduct an additional search.”

Although the search did not turn up FBI records for other Mennonite colleges, it is not certain that the other Mennonite colleges were free of FBI interest or investigation. There may be FOIA material regarding the other colleges that could be retrieved with additional searching by using specific names and files. Because of privacy concerns, files on individuals would not be provided to a general request; however, individuals can make the requests in their own names. In the case of Bethel College, several professors and former students had made earlier personal FOIA requests, some receiving material that they provided to the authors of this article.

The files reveal that FBI activity at Mennonite colleges between 1965 and 1975 period was of two kinds. The first was its law enforcement function according to its stated mission. FBI agents or other government officers appeared regularly and openly at colleges to check into applicants for government positions—the Peace Corps for example—or for “conscientious objector” investigations. Agents would conduct interviews and visit the registrar’s office to review records for draft-age males seeking deferments.⁴⁰ In a few cases the FBI went to colleges to arrest draft resisters who had broken the Selective Service law. These actions, although unsettling to the college communities, were sanctioned by law. Occasionally students or staff members at the Mennonite colleges—

39. Bluffton College FOIA documents (letters dated Feb. 26, 1964, and March 3, 1964), file 94-HQ-59632, received by the authors on Jan. 21, 2017.

40. In the Bethel FOIA papers, document no. 5 (Jan. 10, 1967) refers to a Jan. 6, 1967, FBI “conscientious objector investigation on the Bethel College campus.” The Bethel registrar at the time was Vernelle Waltner, now deceased. A former assistant in the Bethel registrar’s office of the 1960s remembers “vaguely” some FBI visits to the office.—Ina Bartel email to Keith Sprunger, Jan. 7, 2017. During the course of this routine FBI visit, the agent took the occasion to make contact with his “established source” for more information on the Peace Club.

specifically at Eastern Mennonite and Bluffton—complained that college officials were too compliant and “cooperating too much with the FBI.” A secretary in the EMU registrar’s office voiced the concern: “Do you really think we ought to be allowing the FBI such free access to our files?” Was EMU “helping the government to fight the Vietnam War?” The secretary was overruled. At Bluffton a student complained that college officials were “hypocritical” about the peace principle by freely providing student information to the FBI. That said, providing student information was common practice.⁴¹ Collaboration was the general rule. The Media FBI documents revealed that many campus administrators would “readily give FBI agents student information.”⁴²

Bethel student Lauren Friesen (graduate of 1965) recalled an unnerving FBI interview in 1964 regarding a friend and recent graduate who had applied to the Peace Corps. While Friesen was walking across campus, a stranger in suit and tie stopped him, flashed his FBI badge—pulling his lapel aside to expose the badge pinned inside his coat—and ordered him to “come with me.” They climbed to a tiny unused office on the top floor of the Administration Building. Then followed a series of questions about his friend Ken Dunn: “How well do you know him?” “Do you think he will lead a revolution against the United States?” “Is he a radical? Is he a sympathizer of Marx?” Then finally, “Do know any secrets about his life?” Friesen’s response always was “No” or “No, no, I don’t think so.” After a few minutes of interrogation, the agent ordered: “Stay here 5 minutes and I’ll be back.” The agent never returned.⁴³ The fact that the agent knew the college buildings well enough to occupy an office space—or to have a space assigned to him—suggests some collaboration with the college officials. The arrest of Dennis Koehn at Bethel in 1970 was another example of FBI campus activity.

Another publicized FBI college investigation of the 1960s focused on Jerry Penner (Tabor student of 1963-1964), a Mennonite Brethren student from Oklahoma who was refused a conscientious objector classification (I-0) by his draft board. The board said that Penner was not sincere in his religious and pacifist beliefs. In 1967 he refused induction into the army and was arrested; he appealed, with his case eventually reaching the U.S. Supreme Court in 1969, where he prevailed and his conviction was overturned. A large part of the case involved an FBI investigation of his church and college life, amid allegations that he disregarded the beliefs

41. For EMC, see Miller and Shenk, *Path of Most Resistance*, 156, and Kraybill, *EMU*, 214; for Bluffton, Bush, *Dancing with the Kobzar*, 181.

42. Medsker, *The Burglary*, 235-236.

43. Conversations with Lauren Friesen (Bethel graduate, 1965) and email of Mar. 9, 2016; for another account, see Friesen’s book, *Prairie Lands, Private Landscapes: Re-framing a Mennonite Childhood* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Dog Ear Publishing, 2016), 75.

and practices of his Mennonite faith “by smoking, drinking, and carousing with girls while at Tabor College.” FBI evidence of this misbehavior “was taken from college personnel files and unidentified testimony of citizens.”⁴⁴ Many college students from the 1960s could report similar stories of FBI inquiries on campus.

The other kind of FBI activity at the colleges was the extralegal COINTELPRO-type of secret surveillance. The FOIA documents reveal that Bethel College was included in the college surveillance program. In some other cases, getting FOIA documents from the FBI has been very difficult, in fact requiring “a fight” against intransigence and entrenched bureaucracy. In the famous case of Seth Rosenfeld, who was researching FBI activities at the University of California at Berkeley, his FOIA case (eventually involving over 200,000 pages of materials) dragged on for over twenty years. Rosenfeld was forced to submit repeated requests and go to court several times before the requested documents were finally provided.⁴⁵ By contrast, we can report that our excursion into the FOIA process went comparatively smoothly. We did not experience unreasonable delays (responses arrived within six months) and the documents were sent without cost.

FBI SURVEILLANCE AT BETHEL COLLEGE

Bethel College was a center of highly publicized antiwar activism in the 1960s and early 1970s. Two big antiwar demonstrations stand out. The first was the Repentance Walk and Mail of 1966, organized by the Peace Club. Scheduled for Veterans Day, November 11, students, faculty, and other supporters planned to walk as a group into Newton to post antiwar letters to Congress at the post office. When news of the planned event came out, many Newton citizens objected strongly, especially the timing on Veterans Day, which they viewed as a “disrespect of veterans.” It was a “bombshell thrown in our direction,” said the American Legion.⁴⁶ There were some threats of violence against the walkers. Facing this opposition, the Peace Club modified the protest—instead of going into Newton, they walked to the nearby North Newton post office. As a counteraction, veterans organized an afternoon patriotic parade in downtown Newton, and earlier in the day the Kansas Air National Guard flew three B-57

44. On the Jerry Friesen case, see articles in *The Christian Leader*, April 21, 1970, 17, 21; and July 14, 1970, 11); for more information, see Robin Ottoson’s dissertation, “The Battle over the Flag.”

45. Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI’s War on Student Radicals, and Reagan’s Rise to Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), “Appendix: My Fight for the FBI Files,” 505-512.

46. See the Newton American Legion newsletter, *Post 2 Scripts*, Nov. 1966, 1.

bombers over the campus for a thunderous “protest of the Peace Walk.”⁴⁷ Three years later, the Peace Club had another round of events for the National Moratorium Day, October 15, 1969 (and the follow-up National Moratorium at Washington, D. C., on November 15). For the Moratorium, the Peace Club organized a bell-ringing event, and an eighteen-mile march to Wichita, the military center of Kansas, where they hoped “to call into question some of the basis of its economic and financial wealth.”⁴⁸

Robert Mayer, a Bethel freshman, served as the state Moratorium coordinator for Kansas colleges. In November, Bethel students moved their bell to Washington, D. C., to participate in the national event. Both of these events from 1966 and 1969 were highly provocative to the surrounding community’s patriotic sensibilities. Moreover, the college received threats from some of its Mennonite donors about withholding gifts. For these reasons, the campus newspaper, *The Bethel Collegian*, and the inter-denominational *Mennonite Weekly Review* refused to support the 1966 Walk, and President Vernon Neufeld earnestly requested the Peace Club to tone down its activities because the publicity was proving detrimental—indeed, had already caused “great and irreparable harm” to the college.⁴⁹ The academic dean, Orville Voth, participated in the 1966 Walk; but in 1969, after becoming president, Voth was lukewarm in his support of the Peace Club, questioning the motivations of the protesters. At one of the club meetings he reportedly spoke out: “I hope you know you are destroying Bethel College”—and then walked out.⁵⁰

The peace activities associated with Bethel College continued into the early 1970s. In 1970 James C. Juhnke, professor of history, launched a campaign as a Democratic peace candidate for Congress for the Kansas Fourth District. The goal was “to make a prophetic peace witness against the Vietnam War.” He won the Democratic primary race but lost to the incumbent Republican Congressman, Garner Shriver. In spite of losing, the peace forces still claimed a “moral victory.” The Juhnke campaign with its antiwar theme had considerable support from students and faculty, “canvassing, making telephone calls.”⁵¹ In 1971 Bethelites launched The

47. Goering, “History of the Peace Club,” 30, and bulletin board announcement “Sky Watchers Alert,” MLA, Peace Club Archive, file no. 2.

48. On Bethel College actions, see report in *The Mennonite*, “For Us the Bell Tolloed,” Nov. 4, 1969, 662-664; Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 156-159; Terence Goering, “History of the Peace Club,” 41; discussions with Kirsten Zerger and email of Feb. 29, 2012.

49. Pres. Vernon Neufeld, “Memo to the Peace Club,” Nov. 1, 1967, MLA, Peace Club Archive, file no. 1; *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Nov. 10, 1966, and Nov. 24, 1966.

50. Comment by Peace Club member about a club meeting of 1969, in letter to Keith Sprunger, Feb. 17, 2016.

51. *Bethel College Collegian*, Nov. 6, 1970, 1; James Juhnke interview by Terence Goering, April 2, 1975, and his “History of the Peace Club,” 53; Juhnke, “Campaign for Congress, 1970,” in his *A People of Two Kingdoms II*, 127-138; Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 158-159.

Walk to End the Draft, an eight-day trek of 175 miles to Topeka. The goal this time was to gain public support for the anti-draft campaign and to meet with Senator James Pearson and urge him to oppose extension of the Selective Service Act. Eight persons did the entire journey on foot, and others joined for a part of the way.⁵²

These highly publicized events attracted the attention of the FBI. The confidential FBI papers about Bethel College consist of nine documents (nineteen pages) from the FBI office at Kansas City, dated from November 10, 1966, to February 25, 1972. In addition, two individual former Bethel students who earlier filed personal FOIA requests have provided access to another ten pages of FBI documents: Allan Teichroew (class of 1969) with material from 1966 and Robert Mayer (class of 1973) with material from 1971. Most of the documents are reports of FBI agents and the information gathered at Bethel College or reports forwarded on to Washington to "Director, FBI." The documents focused on the 1966 and 1969 demonstrations. They include a memo of Nov. 11, 1966, about subversives at Bethel signed by Director J. Edgar Hoover himself.

FBI Concerns at Bethel College

Looking at the documents as a whole, three main areas of FBI activity stand out. The first goal was to secure a list of members of the Peace Club, the main campus antiwar activists, and their faculty sponsors. The FBI failed to get a complete list of the membership of 1966, although information of this kind should not have been very hard to find, since the college yearbook always carried a photo of the club members. In 1969 the agents succeeded in assembling a list of twenty-nine Peace Club students who traveled to Washington, D.C., for the November 15, 1969, Moratorium event by securing names from the cafeteria of students who canceled meals for the duration of the trip.

A second concern was the possibility of violence and civil disturbance between Bethel students and Newton citizens during the peace demonstrations of 1966 and 1969. Based on the FBI assumption that the peace activists were a small, unpopular minority, the officials also looked for signs of on-campus disturbance between the Peace Club and students who believed they were unpatriotic. The FBI consulted with the Newton police chief and the Harvey County sheriff on ways to prevent violence and then left it up to the local officers to keep the peace. In spite of dire threats against the pacifists, violence was averted.

A third FBI goal was to identify by name any perceived dangerous revolutionaries among faculty and students. The Hoover memo of

52. Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 159.

November 11, 1966, warned of a subversive Bethel person of concern, possibly dangerous to President Lyndon Johnson because of “expressions of strong or violent anti-US sentiment.” The subversive person was not identified by name in this particular memo.⁵³ There is no sign in the documents of any attempts to monitor classroom activity or collect material on any professor’s class lectures or opinions.

By 1969-1970, the search for radicals at Bethel centered on signs of infiltration by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the more revolutionary Weathermen. Over the years J. Edgar Hoover had become increasingly concerned—even obsessed—with campus radicalism. A 1971 statement from Hoover, issued in the form of a memo from the FBI office in Kansas City, read: “ALL INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN NEW LEFT EXTREMIST ACTIVITY SHOULD BE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS BECAUSE OF THEIR KNOWN ADVOCACY AND USE OF EXPLOSIVES, REPORTED ACQUISITION OF FIREARMS AND INCENDIARY DEVICES, AND KNOWN PROPENSITY FOR VIOLENCE.”⁵⁴ In this effort, the FBI looked for Bethel College members of the SDS or Weathermen, and then tried to spy on them. Several Bethel students were attracted to the SDS program, having attended the SDS national convention in the summer of 1969 when the Weatherman faction splintered off and began its campaign of violence.⁵⁵ One Bethel student of 1969-1970 is known to have officially joined the SDS.⁵⁶ At first, the FBI thought that the Peace Club functioned as a front for subversive organizations. In 1971 Agent Otto T. Handwerk wrote a report about the matter: “This investigation was instituted upon information developed that [name redacted] has subscribed to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) official paper, ‘New Left Notes.’” After investigating, however, Agent Handwerk concluded: “The Club is not currently known to be affiliated with the SDA, YSA [Young Socialist Alliance, the youth organization of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party], or any front groups of these organizations.”⁵⁷ Agents also examined an issue of the student newspaper, *The Bethel Collegian*, that “was made available to the FBI,” and found that the “newspaper’s content was not extremist in any regard.”⁵⁸

53. MLA, Bethel FOIA archive, document no. 3.

54. Statement from Hoover in a Bethel FBI document of July 9, 1971, MLA, Robert Mayer student FOIA archive. Hoover’s statement was widely disseminated at Washington, D.C., and elsewhere, see Medsger, *The Burglary*, 312.

55. Letter from former Peace Club member to Keith Sprunger, Mar. 3, 2016.

56. The FBI identified the student as Kelly Schroeder, a senior student.

57. FBI memos, Feb. 20, 1970, and Feb. 25, 1970.—MLA, Bethel FOIA archive, documents no. 8 and no. 9.

58. MLA, Robert Mayer student FOIA archive, July 9, 1971.

Although the Peace Club investigation did not turn up much information of interest, the FBI in 1971 kept an open file on Robert Mayer (graduate of 1973), whom they considered to be a suspicious student. Mayer was from Ohio and had previous connections to the Weathermen, the violent student revolutionary group. The FBI report stated: "He had been identified as a former member of a Weatherman commune in Akron, Ohio, and has made self-admissions of Communist philosophies and acceptance of violent doctrines." Further, he spoke disparagingly about American capitalism, which he called a system where "things are what matter. People don't matter." He had also worked for a time as a field organizer for the American Friends Service Committee in Flint, Michigan, where he helped to found a free medical clinic. While with the Weatherman, according to the FBI document, Mayer associated "with individuals who advocate the violent overthrow of the U. S. Government." While at Bethel, Mayer was, in fact, no longer an active Weatherman and had rejected the violent doctrines of the organization. Alongside the negative information, the FBI had received reports that Mayer had changed and "had become an advocate of non-violence and is working for peace." A Flint newspaper feature on Mayer called him the "Antiwar spokesman in Flint. Mayer's the Name, Peace is His Game."⁵⁹ However, the FBI was not fully convinced of his reversal, and the past Weatherman actions and opinions were sufficient for the FBI office at Kansas City to recommend that he be included on the Security Index (SI) – Priority II (the list of subversives considered for special attention and imprisonment in the event of war or civil disturbance).⁶⁰ Mayer is the only Bethel College student or faculty member known to be included on the list.

After several investigations, the FBI came to the conclusion that the Peace Club was truly a non-subversive organization. By 1972 the Bethel Peace Club and the reputed Weatherman had quieted down considerably, which mirrors the overall national climate as activists ran out of steam when they recognized that revolutionary change would come later rather than sooner.⁶¹ The FBI agent reported that the once-radical Peace Club had now "limited their activities to club meetings on campus discussing the social issues of the day. . . . Not involved in any public display or demonstration."⁶²

59. This information on Mayer is based on FBI reports of April 15, 1971, and Nov. 29, 1971.—MLA, Mayer student FOIA archive; further information from an article "Antiwar Spokesman in Flint" in the *Flint Journal*, July 19, 1970, and conversations with Mayer.

60. FBI report, May 3, 1971.

61. Holly Scott, "Youth Will Make the Revolution: Creating and Contesting the Youth Frame in the New Left," *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*, 7 no. 1 (2014), 43.

62. FBI memo to Hoover, July, 9, 1971.—MLA, Student FOIA documents.

Sources of FBI Information

In the shadowy world of surveillance at Bethel College, the FBI developed several channels of information. Some information was gathered directly by FBI agents moving around Newton. The Freedom of Information documents show frequent contacts with local law enforcement officials—Chief C. E. Patterson of the Newton Police and Harvey County sheriffs Russell Werner and Norman Walker were noted by name. The police and sheriffs “advised they would remain alert for any possible trouble points.” Chief Patterson, a former social science student at Bethel, felt qualified to provide information, since “he formerly attended Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, and is acquainted with many of the activities of that college.” As reported by Patterson, the college, sponsored by the Mennonite Church, “for many, many years had a reputation as a pacifist school.” In addition to Patterson, another police officer [name redacted] worked on identifying members of the Peace Club.⁶³ In 1970 Sheriff Norman Walker had an “established source,” a Bethel student [name redacted] who “has been gathering Intelligence Information regarding Liberal Groups at Bethel College.” According to Walker, the Bethel College staff “has a very liberal outlook on student affairs and allows free student involvement in social issues.”⁶⁴ There were also hints that the FBI gained information from the local post offices, or perhaps from the mail clerk at the college.

The most intriguing documents give information about undercover “established sources,” or informants. In 1966, 1967, 1968, and 1970, the FBI worked with several such sources on the Bethel College campus. The names of these informants have been removed, so in some cases it is not possible to know if they were male or female, student, staff, or faculty member.⁶⁵ In 1970 the source was “a student at Bethel College, [who] is in contact with many of the students each day and does hear what is occurring on campus.” In a further reference, it was reported that the source was in “close contact with students at Bethel College and members of the Peace Club.” As he learns more, “he will immediately contact the FBI.”⁶⁶

Most Bethel students of the 1960s were not aware of FBI surveillance. In fact, when informed of the secret FBI actions, the usual reaction was one of surprise. One alumnus commented in retrospect: “No, I didn't imagine

63. MLA, Bethel FOIA archive, document no. 5, Jan. 10, 1967. The Bethel Alumni Directory listed Charles E. Patterson as a member of the class of 1953.

64. MLA, Bethel FOIA archive, document no. 9, Feb. 25, 1970.

65. *Ibid.*, document no. 4, Nov. 11, 1966; document no. 5, Jan. 10, 1967.

66. *Ibid.*, document no. 8, Feb. 20, 1970; document no. 9, Feb. 25, 1970.

the FBI was interested in Bethel. I guess I thought we were too insignificant.”⁶⁷ A few students had suspicions about the FBI, especially that an FBI informer might be operating within the peace group. Such a person—it was theorized—would have posed as a “radical” and “had the emotional disposition to be an inside informant”; but they did not talk openly about their suspicions at the time.⁶⁸ Today, there are various speculations about the identity of these campus informers.

Redacted Documents

The Bethel-related names in the FOIA documents have all been redacted. The names of most law enforcement officials, however, remain. From the context of the documents, and from other sources, it is possible to fill in some of the redacted names. The two faculty sponsors of the Peace Club who were noted and investigated—with information that both in past years had been arrested for violation of the Selective Service law—were J. Lloyd Spaulding, professor of economics, and Dwight Platt, professor of biology. Spaulding was described as “well known in the area as a pacifist and has been the guiding force of the club.” The FBI may also have studied the college yearbooks, which identified and photographed the two professors as faculty sponsors of the club.⁶⁹

Several other redacted names can also be identified, including a student leader of the Peace Club of 1966 living in Goering Hall,⁷⁰ and also a Peace Club officer and spouse of 1969, namely a married couple, the wife a sophomore and the husband a senior student.⁷¹ In another case, the SDS student of 1969, living in Warkentin Court, can be identified through rather careless redacting, which allowed his home telephone number to remain in the text.⁷² The identity of the suspected Weatherman student of 1971 (Robert Mayer) is also revealed through documents in his personal FOIA files. Here and there a partial name or some tidbit of data remains, no doubt due to hasty redacting. Regarding the secret informers, the documents offer so little information that identification is not possible at this time.

67. Alumnus of 1967, email to Keith Sprunger, June 2, 2016.

68. Peace Club member from the 1960s, letter to Keith Sprunger (2016).

69. MLA, Bethel FOIA archive, document no. 2, Nov. 11, 1966. Spaulding was erroneously identified as a religious minister as well as a professor.

70. *Ibid.*, document no. 2, Nov. 11, 1966, matched up with the personal FOIA document of the student of 1966.

71. *Ibid.*, document no. 9, Feb. 25, 1970.

72. The telephone number belonged to the Schroeder family of Newton, and this led to identifying the student as Kelly Schroeder.—*Ibid.*, document no. 8, Feb. 20, 1970. Schroeder’s membership was also well known on campus at the time.

WHY BETHEL COLLEGE?

There are several possible explanations as to why Bethel College, more than other Mennonite colleges, was targeted for surveillance. First, area FBI offices around the country handled these investigations in different ways. Being in the bailiwick of the Kansas City office, rather than in another area, may have been a factor. Second, Bethel's contentious relationship with Newton and other surrounding communities, especially in times of war because of the Mennonite pacifist stance, no doubt attracted special attention. Finally, the high level of radical opinion emanating from some students of the college was unusual for Mennonite and other Christian colleges, in Kansas and elsewhere.

In the view of Chief of Police Patterson, "the pacifist activities of students at Bethel College had in the past created a feeling of ill will among residents of the community."⁷³ This ill will had been especially strong during the First and Second World Wars, leading to episodes of yellow paint vandalism and grotesque student effigies hanging from the flagpole on campus. In fact, in 1966 it was this concern regarding the possibility of civil disturbance at Newton that first brought the FBI into the Bethel picture. In wartime, the Newton community had little love for antiwar Mennonites. Community residents have called Mennonites "Yellow-bellied COs," "Bastard Communists," and "Egotistical Nuts." Patriots labeled North Newton as "Red City" and "North Viet-Newton."⁷⁴ One influential Newton citizen complained about Bethel students: "Those nuts are out there walking," just "to satisfy their own immature egos."⁷⁵ These harsh opinions continued from decade to decade, generation to generation. In one recent example, a Vietnam veteran in 2017, looking back after nearly fifty years, spoke of his continuing unhappiness with the Bethel actions of the 1960s: "One thing that really ticked me off was Bethel College. They had a protest and I was so mad."⁷⁶

Rather than backing off, when the Peace Club students of the 1960s faced criticism, they marched ahead. "A quiet witness was no witness," they said.⁷⁷ By trial and error, the club became masters of publicity. A club

73. *Ibid.*, document no. 5, Jan. 10, 1967.

74. Some anti-Mennonite epithets from Newton; one campus-town confrontation of 1966 was described in "Mennonite Rumble" by William Juhnke, Jr. (paper written for Chicago Theological Seminary, 1969).—MLA, Peace Club Archive, file 32.

75. Notes on Peace Club conversation with Newton citizen, Sept. 29, 1969.—*Ibid.*, file no. 2.

76. Reported in the *Newton Kansan*, July 8, 2017, "A Soldier's Homecoming," A1, A6. The story was about veterans returning from the "Kansas Honor Flight" that took them to Washington, DC, to visit the war monuments and honor their military service.

77. Comment from a Peace Club presentation at First Mennonite Church of Christian at Moundridge, Kan., Oct. 12, 1969.—MLA, Peace Club Archive, file 2.

leader spoke of their success: “certainly our publicity campaign was unprecedented in its effectiveness.” The Moratorium bell of 1969 was an idea of publicity genius, in the assessment of club members—“the bell heard round the world.”⁷⁸ Such events were “organized, in part, to attract coverage by various news media.”⁷⁹ The students relished the national attention. “This will put Bethel on the map,” they said.⁸⁰ Although the publicity served a greater purpose—that of advancing peace—the attention was also admittedly heady stuff for college students—“an ego thing sort of thing.”⁸¹

Along with much local coverage, Bethel gained news and photo coverage in *Life* magazine, mention on the front page of the *New York Times*, and reports on many national television and radio broadcasts.⁸² The Peace Club was highly motivated to get its message out. The bell-ringing of 1969, a peal for every American soldier lost in Vietnam, was intended to be compelling and incessant, according to club president Kirsten Dick, “ringing for 12 hours a day, for 4 days straight, making its message—the terrible cost of the war—impossible to ignore.”⁸³ The club promised to keep its activities going on well into the future; “not just going to act on one day out of the year . . . but it’s going to be a day-to-day and week-to-week thing.”⁸⁴

The college protest events created publicity for Newton, but not the kind that Newtonians desired. Many Newtonians resented the sensational image of the town and feared that it reflected badly on the patriotic reputation of Kansas. College officials and members of the board of

78. Comment by Peace Club member from the 1960s, letter to Keith Sprunger, Feb. 17, 2016; Stan Senner taped interview, Oct. 1972.—MLA 172.1B, nos. 25-26.

79. Stan Senner, 1972 taped interview, quoted in Thane E. Chastain, “The Media and Vietnam Peace Protests: Actual or Acted?” (Social Science Seminar paper, Bethel College, 1982), 15.

80. Comment (critical opinion) by Milton Goering, Bethel dean of students, tape recorded interview, Milton Goering, Nov. 2, 1972.—MLA 172.1B, no. 32.

81. On the publicity topic of Bethel student protests, see Comments by Milton Goering, Bethel dean of students, and Stan Senner, Peace Club activist, in “Peace Activities of 1969 at Bethel College or A Peace of the ReBELLion” (Bethel student research papers by the Levellers, 1972), chap. 8 by Kurt Goering; Chastain, “The Media and Vietnam Peace Protests,” 15; “The Vietnam War and Its Effect on a Small Town (Newton, Kansas),” Bethel student research project by “The Diggers,” 1980. Tape recorded interviews, Milton Goering, Nov. 2, 1972.—MLA 172.1B, no. 32; Stan Senner. Oct. 1972.—MLA 172.1B, nos. 25-26; Prof. Harold Moyer, Oct. 30, 1972.—MLA 172.1B, no. 30.

82. Years later, in 2017, there was a fleeting image of students and the Bethel bell in the Ken Burns film *The Vietnam War*.

83. Discussions with Kirsten Dick and email, Feb. 29, 2012.

84. Kirsten Dick, Peace Club president in 1969-1970, in comments about the bell ringing and future plans, at a Peace Club meeting, Sept. 11, 1969 (tape recording).—MLA, 172.1B, no. 3a; and more recent comments by email, Feb. 29, 2012. See also Goering, “History of the Peace Club,” 40-41.

directors of the 1960s reported being swamped with hundreds of angry telephone calls.⁸⁵ When “influential citizens” complained about Bethel to city leaders, to the police, and in letters to the newspaper, this surely helped to trigger FBI attention.

The student demonstrations attracted not only harsh words, but also threats of worse things to come—of community patriots awaiting the students with baseball bats, rubber hoses, rotten tomatoes, and yellow paint. At the time of the 1966 protest, a Newton citizen came to the campus with a warning that if the peace walk went on as planned there would be “violence—and blood will flow.”⁸⁶ In the tense situation, as a precaution, the Mennonite manager of a local lumber yard instructed his sales staff “not to sell any yellow paint or axe handles” unless they could determine that they would be used for nonviolent purposes.⁸⁷ The college town of North Newton had only a small police force of its own, just a part-time officer on occasional duty. The FBI took steps as the day approached: “Military agencies advised. Local authorities advised.” The Newton police chief responded that the situation was well in hand. His confidence was confirmed as the student march event took place on March 11, 1966, “without incident.”⁸⁸ Even though violence never erupted, town-gown tensions during the Vietnam War era appear to have been more acute in Newton than in other Mennonite college towns.⁸⁹

The FBI also focused on Bethel because of a large concern about radical New Leftish ideas flourishing on the campus. There was sufficient suspicion of extremism to place a Bethelite on the national Security Index of dangerous persons.⁹⁰ Although actual membership in the Students for a Democratic Society and the Weathermen was very small, there was plenty of talk about the evils of capitalism and the wisdom of Karl Marx, more than the usual at Mennonite and other Christian colleges. One club member recalled: “there were no ideas on the left to which we were not exposed, including all the sectarian divisions.”⁹¹

85. “Peace Walk Baffles Peace Church,” *The Mennonite*, Dec. 13, 1966, 760.

86. Threats made at the time of the 1966 and 1969 peace marches can be found in MLA, Peace Club Archives, “Chronology of Events Pertaining to Peace Club Rally, Nov. 11, 1966,” file no. 15; Research Note about 1966 Peace Walk and Mail by James Juhnke, dated May 19, 1969, file no. 1; notes in file 28, “1969 Clippings.”

87. Interview with Prof. Emerson Wiens, quoted by Chastain, “The Media and Vietnam Peace Protests,” 26-27.

88. MLA, Peace Club Archives, document no. 1 (Nov. 10, 1966) and document no. 2 (Nov. 11, 1966).

89. This conclusion is based on reading the recent published histories of Bluffton University, Goshen College, Tabor College, Hesston College, and Eastern Mennonite University.

90. MLA, Student FOIA file, FBI report, May 3, 1971.

91. Ed Dick email, July 27, 2010.

Some of the harshest criticism of the Bethel College peace activists came from a local pastor, Vern Bender of the People's Baptist Church. He labeled antiwar students at Bethel and Hesston as unpatriotic and likely Communist-inspired. Bender warned of a "Kremlin plot" on the Kansas prairies.⁹² As rumors of Communism at Bethel circulated, David C. Wedel, from the college development office, hurried to issue a statement in the local newspaper: "I want to assure my fellow citizens of Newton that they have nothing to fear. There are no communists at Bethel College."⁹³

Other Mennonite colleges also had their radicals. Susan Fisher Miller in her history of Goshen College wrote that Goshen had some SDS sympathizers, pulled in by the idealism of the SDS manifesto for reforming America, particularly the *Port Huron Statement*.⁹⁴ Overall, however, the FBI chose to give less attention to the other Mennonite colleges and instead especially focused on Bethel's radical activity.

IN RETROSPECT:

PERSPECTIVES ON MENNONITE STUDENT PROTESTS OF THE 1960S BY THE FBI AND BY KANSAS MENNONITES

The FBI, as noted above, initially viewed the Mennonite protests as part of a larger movement of student revolution, unsettling to the social order. The students pushed for a more activist Mennonite church, "not to be the quiet in the land," as one student stated.⁹⁵ Were the Mennonite churches, the constituency supporting the colleges, ready to follow the students into this more radical Christianity? In 1969-1970, in most cases, the answer was No.

If Bethel's relationship with the surrounding communities was strained, the same could be said for relations with the college's supporting Kansas Mennonite churches. Although Mennonites embraced their identity as a historic peace church, many did not support strident antiwar activities. By traditional church standards, ringing bells and contentious street demonstrations were incompatible with a quiet witness. While the editor of the denominational periodical, *The Mennonite*, personally applauded the student activists, the official story was, according to his

92. *Newton Kansan*, Feb. 20, 1970; Juhnke, *People of Two Kingdoms II*, 113-115.

93. David C. Wedel to the *Newton Kansan*, Feb. 23, 1970, 4.

94. Susan Miller, *Culture for Service*, 239; Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties*, 243. Sam Steiner, Goshen student in the 1960s, recalls that there were two or three individual SDS members at Goshen in the 1960s, including him, but "there was never an active chapter at Goshen" (email, Jan. 18, 2017).

95. Stated by Dan Lehman, EMU student, in Miller and Shenk, *The Path of Most Resistance*, chap. 7, "To Not Be the Quiet in the Land," 149.

own headline, "Peace Walk Baffles Peace Church."⁹⁶ Historically, American Mennonites preferred witnessing against war by signing petitions and writing letters to Congress; the men, when drafted, served faithfully as conscientious objectors in officially sanctioned voluntary service programs like PAX or I-W.⁹⁷ In 1969, many American Mennonites had not yet made the turn from nonresistant quietism to advocacy, identified by sociologists Leo Driedger and Donald Kraybill as well under way by the early 1980s.⁹⁸ The student protestors of the 1960s troubled the traditional Mennonite constituency by basing much of their peace activism on humanitarian and political principles, not directly on the teachings of Jesus. Although the religious basis of pacifism had a presence, the student protesters spoke much about "appealing to human decency and common sense."⁹⁹ Another club activist declared: "The Peace Club's basic ideology was Give Peace a Chance."¹⁰⁰

The Bethel students did not get the strong church support they hoped for. In 1969 when the Peace Club asked delegates of the Western District Mennonite Conference meeting at Wichita for an endorsement of its Moratorium protest activities, the delegates turned them down by a vote of 213 to 191.¹⁰¹ Some delegates admitted that they were turned off by the ragged dress and unkempt appearance of the students, more than by their actual protest plans. The Peace Club archive contains some letters of support but also negative letters complaining that the students' appearance offended standards of respectability. One Mennonite wrote that the vote for the Peace Club at the Mennonite conference would have carried by a large majority, except for the appearance of the student delegation: "They were dressed like tramps. Shabby clothes, long hair, and misshaven faces. Why couldn't your representatives dress like ordinary people." Another wrote: "Some of your personal appearance is so very repulsive that it defeats your cause." For a fellow to appear before a group looking dirty, "the natural conclusion that people reach is that his inner life must be even dirtier. Think about this."¹⁰² Criticism went beyond

96. Headline used by editor Maynard Shelly in *The Mennonite*, Dec. 13, 1966, 757.

97. Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2012), 185.

98. Loewen and Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace*, 188; Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2004), 151-152.

99. Comment about 1966 protest, letter of William E. Juhnke Jr., Peace Club officer, to Marie Schrag, Dec. 9, 1966.—MLA, Peace Club Archive, file no. 32.

100. Comment in retrospect about 1969, letter from Phil Unruh to Thane Chastain, 1982, quoted in Chastain, "The Media and Vietnam Peace Protests," 13.

101. *Western District Minutes and Reports* (Oct. 10-12, 1969), 16.

102. Letters by P. S. Goering, Nov. 17, 1969, and Anna E. Siemens, Nov. 10, 1969.—MLA, Peace Club Archives, file no. 2.

a mere generation gap, as other Mennonites objected to an over-emphasis on the Social Gospel at Bethel and not enough on Bible study and evangelism.¹⁰³

Some Mennonites, of course, especially those of progressive views, supported the student actions. In a private letter, Maynard Shelly, editor of *The Mennonite*, warmly endorsed the student marches. If the students made just one antiwar march into Newton, he suggested, that action “would have done as much good as evangelistic meetings have done there in the last 10 years.”¹⁰⁴ Overall, however, college officials at Bethel and other Mennonite colleges saw the activism and hippie lifestyle as a threat to institutional stability. At Bethel, in the late 1960s, donations, enrollment, and constituency support dropped drastically. David C. Wedel of the college development office, and former president of the college, warned the faculty that Mennonite church support was dangerously low. Wedel said, “Bethel College lost about one-half of the Mennonite Western District because of the peace witness of the Bethel Peace Club.”¹⁰⁵ During the contentious 1960s, Wedel and Orville Voth, who was then president—along with many Kansas Mennonites—urgently desired that the student “peace witness” would be more directly based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and his message of love. And many desired that the student protesters would get haircuts and wear respectable clothes.¹⁰⁶

In the quieter times of the 1970s and 1980s, President Harold J. Schultz (1971-1991) rebuilt Bethel’s relations with church and community to a considerable extent. After 1970 the high energy of the Bethel Peace Club waned. Membership shrank and there were signs of exhaustion. By the fall of 1973, the club was completely inactive, with no attempts that year made to reorganize the group. There would be a Peace Club renaissance in later years, but at that moment it was the end of an era.¹⁰⁷

The Freedom of Information documents show that the FBI and local law enforcement officers were more generous and forgiving in their evaluation of the Bethel student protesters than the Newton community and many traditional Mennonites. In spite of much suspicion about

103. For an in-depth examination of youth politics in the New Left, see Holly Scott, *Younger Than That Now: The Politics of Age in the 1960s* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016).

104. Reported by Marie Schrag to William Juhnke Jr., letter of Jan. 4, 1967.—MLA, Peace Club Archive, file no. 32.

105. David C. Wedel, memo, May 4, 1971; Steven G. Schmidt, memo, reporting on a conversation with Wedel, May 6, 1971. See also Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 163.

106. Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 163; Orville Voth, “What Motivates Peace Mission?” *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Oct. 30, 1969, 4.

107. Goering, “History of the Peace Club,” 55-58, 71-73. On the Harold J. Schultz era, see Sprunger, *Bethel College of Kansas*, 165-194.

radicalism at Bethel, after numerous investigations, the FBI called off active surveillance work because nothing dangerous could be found. While numerous Mennonites disapproved of the student actions, the FBI concluded that the Bethel Peace Club operations were indeed in line with the college's tradition of Christian pacifism. As one FBI report put it, "the pacifist attitude of the members of this club are in keeping with the teachings of the Mennonite church which sponsors Bethel College."¹⁰⁸ Though many in the church begged to differ, the antiwar students, according to the FBI documents, were just being good Mennonites. While Neo-Anabaptism—a new mid-twentieth-century appreciation for the radical discipleship of the Anabaptist forebears—was energizing some North American Mennonite agencies and intellectuals with a theological basis for peace and justice activism, it was only in the early 1980s that a more political and aggressive approach found wider acceptance in General Conference and (Old) Mennonite churches.¹⁰⁹ Radical students at Mennonite colleges in the Vietnam era, acquitted by the FBI if not their own denomination, took historic peace church theology into the public square, not as dangerous subversives but as engaged citizens and church members.

108. Report of Chief of Police C. E. Patterson to the Kansas City office, Jan. 10, 1967.—MLA, Peace Club Archive, document no. 5.

109. Loewen and Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace*, 154-157, 185, 188.

