

Programmatic Site Concept for

CROSSROADS: JOURNEYS OF FAITH AND CONSCIENCE VALLEY BRETHREN-MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTER

This is a reproduction of three key sections from a longer document summarizing nearly four years of work by the Program Committee of the Valley Brethren Mennonite Heritage Center. The Board of Directors has adopted the following as giving direction for further development of the campus.

PROGRAMMATIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

1. Mission and Vision: Our purpose is to interpret the heritage of the Brethren and Mennonites in a manner consistent with the Mission and Vision approved by the VBMHC Board of Directors in July 2000:

Mission: The Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center exists to share and celebrate the story of Jesus Christ as it has been reflected in the lives of the Mennonites and Brethren in the Shenandoah Valley.

Vision: The Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ, interpreting the Brethren and Mennonite story, providing background on their denominational histories, and illustrating core faith values that guide their responses to cultural and historical events.

2. Audience: Our intended audience is
 - Brethren and Mennonites from the Shenandoah Valley,
 - our neighbors here in the Valley,
 - Brethren and Mennonites from outside the Valley, and
 - other visitors to the Valley.
3. Engagement: We intend to develop an interpretive program that engages both “tourists” and “pilgrims.”
 - Tourists engage the interpretive experience at an informational level.
 - Pilgrims move beyond the data to consider faith implications at a more formative and reflective level.

It is our intent to provide tourists an informative and enjoyable experience which invites them, possibly even on a later visit, to become pilgrims.
4. Invitation: We intend to develop an interpretive experience that is authentically invitational and interactive, taking care to avoid the traps of either watering down conviction or seeming coercive or offensive. Among our strategies for meeting this goal will be
 - welcoming guests through face-to-face contacts,
 - relying upon the power of story,
 - acknowledging honestly the faults we know, and
 - providing honest answers to questions our guests ask.
5. Design and pace of tour: We intend that there will be a logical order—defined by chronology and likely also by topic—in which guests will move about the CrossRoads campus. This order will likely include an orientation within a group and accompanied by a guide. At the same time, we mean to allow our guests considerable freedom in how they engage much of the campus, both in terms of the pace and order at which they choose to move.

6. An interpretive center: We intend for CrossRoads to be an interpretive center rather than a museum. A key application of this concept is the understanding that we will be guided by our mission in our procuring, accepting, and displaying artifacts. As a matter of principle, we will rely on our interpretive themes to direct whether and how artifacts are used as opposed to designing our programming or space to incorporate particular artifacts.
7. Living history: Much of our programming will be meant to recreate historical environments in ways which elicit themes from those time periods which are relevant to our mission and vision. We expect many of our volunteers will adopt identities from the time period of the environment in which they are working. It has also been suggested that we may want to generate historical identities which our guests may adopt during their visit.
8. Artifacts: We intend to make extensive use of artifacts as part of our interpretive scheme. We will need to balance a preference to allow our guests to touch and handle artifacts with the need to provide for their care and security.
9. Technology: We plan to use contemporary technology to enhance the interpretive experience in ways which are appropriate to our mission and consistent with our heritage.
10. The Civil War “hook”: We intend to use the experience of the Civil War as a programming and marketing “hook” to engage the interest of tourists to CrossRoads.
11. Age appropriate programming: We are committed to planning an interpretive program and campus which will engage visitors from children through senior citizens. Discussions to date have frequently noted the importance of careful planning for how our programming engages children.
12. Dynamic interpretation: Our goal is that the center’s program be dynamic with features which regularly draw visitors back onto the campus. We visualize three large categories in terms of attractions to the campus:
 - permanent exhibits and regular programming.
 - rotating exhibits and special events organized by VBMHC.
 - events for which CrossRoads facilities are made available to other parties.
13. Historical reference: We have heard the question as to whether references to specific centuries as a way to make given time periods is the most authentic way to mark eras in the Mennonite and Brethren heritage. Not having arrived at an alternative, even in this document, we note the matter here for further attention.

PROGRAMMATIC PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGN OF THE CAMPUS

1. CrossRoads motif: We plan to give attention to ways in which our name can be represented and integrated visually and symbolically into the design of the CrossRoads campus. Our interest in the CrossRoads design, however, does not include the following:
 - construction of the campus in the formalism of a cloistered design following Jeffersonian classicism.
 - representation which invokes the Confederate battle standard.
2. CrossRoads logo: We will use the CrossRoads logo as developed by marketing and approved by the Board in signage on the campus.

3. Aesthetics: The campus will be designed to maximize the beauty of its environs. We articulate three applications of this principle:
- that the campus present an attractive façade when viewing the campus from offsite.
 - that the campus provide vistas from various points on the campus highlighting the beauty of the Valley.
 - that the design of the campus respect the topography of the site in the arrangement of buildings and landscaping.

We note the importance of obtaining counsel from competent sources in making decisions about landscaping.

4. Campus integrity: The campus will be designed to enhance the integrity of the campus experience by screening out neighboring distractions. Such screening can include the position of the buildings framing the campus and various types of landscaping. Among the distractions to be minimized are the high school athletic fields and the retail complex at Garbers Crossing.

5. Access and flow: In the planning of the campus, we will give attention to the order in which guests are to obtain access to various buildings and events. For example, all guests will likely be directed through the Welcome Center to begin their tour of the campus and at the end of their tour again be directed back through the Welcome Center with its gift shop. We will use “friendly landscaping” on and about the campus to control access and direct flow.

(On this point, see also Section I.A.5.)

6. Authenticity: There is agreement that authenticity is very important to our Committee. We have developed definitions to highlight particular priorities which need to be considered in discerning how to be authentic.

- *Chronological authenticity* highlights historical exactness which could be illustrated by arranging buildings in strict chronological sequence (the 1829 Log House, followed by the 1840s wash house, followed by the 1850s Burkholder-Myers House).
- *Functional authenticity* attends both to the ironies of historical development and use and to the function we intend for particular buildings or artifacts (the 1829 Log House representing the eighteenth century and the 1850s Burkholder House anchoring a nineteenth-century farmstead with the spring house as a structure adjacent to the farm house).
- *Interpretive authenticity* emphasizes our intent that twenty-first century visitors experience the heritage portrayed by CrossRoads as having relevance today.

We are committed both to each of these aspects of authenticity and discerning how to balance them in our program and design on the campus.

7. Hospitality: We consider those who visit the center to be our guests and want to plan the campus for their pleasure and convenience. Expressions of such hospitality will include

- face to face conversation with hosts and hostesses.
- provision of adequate restrooms.
- accommodation of senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

OVERVIEW OF THE INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCE

We envision an eventual interpretive experience that for most visitors to the center will take about one hour and consist of the following—partially staff-guided and partially self-guided:

1. Receiving an orientation to the Brethren and the Mennonites at the Welcome Center. The fourteen-minute video completed in the spring 2004 will play a key role in this orientation. From this beginning of the interpretive experience, a key emphasis will be that of showing how Christian faith was intertwined in the lives of the people who lived through the various centuries. During any time that guests need to wait to begin their actual tour, they will have the option of visiting both permanent and rotating exhibits and perusing additional literature about the Mennonites and the Brethren, all housed in the Welcome Center.

Structure:

- The ranch brick house on the northeast corner of the campus is being remodeled as the Welcome Center.
- A new Welcome Center toward the top of the hill on the north side of the campus is included in the long range plans.

2. Revisiting the eighteenth-century experience of early Mennonite and Brethren settlers in the Valley. The interpretation in this area will highlight the land of the Shenandoah Valley and its occupants before European settlement. Programming will also focus on patterns of migration, the vulnerability of early European settlement, and the development of communities and institutions. The settings for many of the events in this time period were the Massanutten settlement of Mennonites in Page County and the Flat Rock settlement of Brethren in Shenandoah County. Interpretation in this area will also include artifacts, many of which can be handled, displaying technology of the period.

Structures:

- The Weaver Log House (1829) is currently dismantled and awaiting reassembly on the campus.
- There have been conversations with two local farmers about relocating a free standing stone ground or root cellar from one of these farms to the campus.

3. Encountering a mid-nineteenth-century multi-generational family living on a Valley Brethren or Mennonite farmstead. Either through living historical actors or sound recordings, visitors hear the voices of family members inhabiting this homestead as they discuss events about them and the rising tensions and militancy as war appears imminent. These mounting tensions culminate in the experience of “the Burning” in the fall 1864, which is depicted in the lower level of the barn. Interpretation in this area will also include artifacts and technology of the period.

Structures:

- The Burkholder-Myers House (1854) is the brick house, set upon its new foundation on the campus.
- The Wash House (1840s) is sitting by the Burkholder-Myers House, waiting to be set upon a new foundation.
- A bank barn is anticipated as a part of this homestead, including a stable area on the lower level constructed with charred timbers from a barn which was lit but survived the Burning.

4. Visiting an extended series of interactive exhibits which highlight traditional and contemporary values of the Mennonites and Brethren. Planning for this interpretive experience has identified three key themes:

- Stewards of the Land,

- Members of Christ's Body, and
- Partners in Christ's Service.

We note that the emphasis upon the family and varying perspectives on education have been important parts of our heritage and commit ourselves to consider how these themes can be dealt with under the above themes or addressed on their own. This aspect of the programming is currently the most wide open in terms of planning and possibilities.

Structure:

- In planning underway before CrossRoads was located on its current site, the leading idea for the location for these exhibits was a large barn, possibly constructed internally to reflect the motif of a mill as a gathering place for the community with internal passageways into the various theme areas.
More recent deliberations have raised concerns about building such a large barn that may appear out of proportion to its surroundings.
Similarly, whether the concept of a mill continues to serve our purposes needs further consideration.
- Interpretive programming bringing the themes listed above into the twenty-first century could occur in a barn, a new Welcome Center, or additional structures yet to be planned.

5. Visiting additional features of the campus, possibly for further reflection. These options will include

Structures:

- The School House is an existing structure waiting to be located on the campus.
- The Meetinghouse is an anticipated structure, either through relocation of an existing building or new construction.
- The Amphitheater is projected for one of the sinkholes in the wooded area of the campus.
- The picnic area, possibly including an orchard, is one which has been projected.

6. Returning to the Welcome Center.

Upon their return to the Welcome Center, guests will have the option of visiting both permanent and rotating exhibits and of perusing and purchasing additional literature about the Mennonites and the Brethren.

Structure:

This is the same Welcome Center where the tour begins, described above.