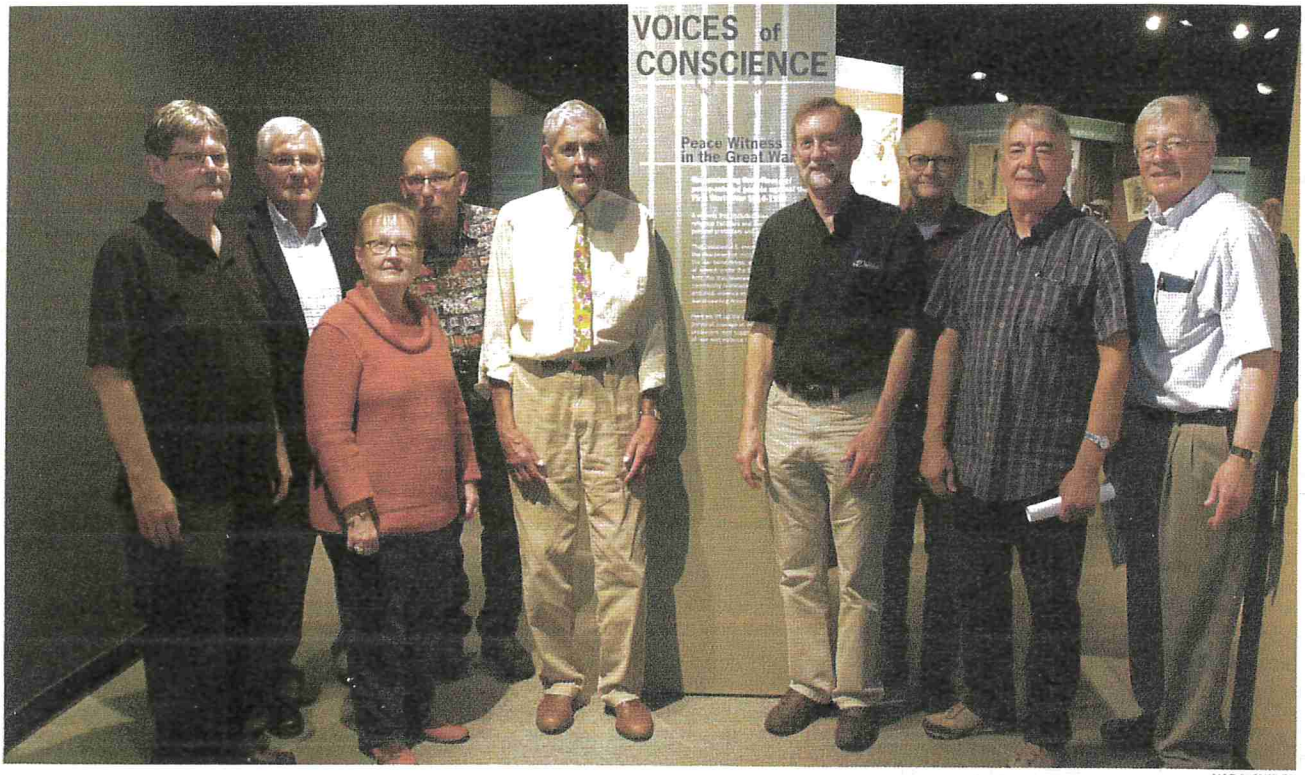

VADA SNIDER

Some of the 11 students who worked on the history department's first major oral history project gathered for a photo outside the Kauffman Museum exhibit "Voices of Conscience," from left, Allan Teichroew '69, Dale Schrag '69, Sondra Bandy Koontz '70, Federico (Fred) Zerger '71, Keith Sprunger, professor emeritus of history, Don Holsinger '70, Greg Stucky '71, John Waltner '68 and Jim Juhnke '62, professor emeritus of history.

EXHIBIT SHEDS LIGHT ON HIDDEN STORIES OF WORLD WAR I

Four years ago, a group of Mennonite historians were discussing the upcoming centennial of the U.S. entry into World War I in 2017, and realized there was at least one important piece missing from planned events marking the anniversary – the story of the conscientious objectors.

That was the beginning of the Kauffman Museum special traveling exhibit "Voices of Conscience: Peace Witness in the Great War." The bulk of the visioning, collecting, writing and fabricating of the exhibit came from Jim Juhnke '62, professor emeritus of history, Rachel Pannabecker '80, retired director of Kauffman Museum, Chuck Regier '77, Kauffman Museum curator of exhibits, and Dave Kreider '82, exhibit technician.

The exhibit opened at the museum this fall. Right after Fall Festival, it traveled to the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri, for a major conference, "Remembering Muted Voices: Conscience, Dissent, Resistance and Civil Liberties in World War I Through Today," Oct. 18-21, and then was on display for a week at Rainbow Mennonite Church, Kansas City, Kansas, before returning to the museum through Jan. 21, 2018.

The special programs associated with the exhibit throughout the fall at the museum have included a number of Bethel alumni, beginning with Rachel Waltner Goossen '82, history faculty member at Washburn University, Topeka, who spoke Sept. 10 on "Legacies of Peace Witness" at the exhibit opening.

An informal reunion on Fall Festival Saturday morning, Oct. 14, and a program at the museum later in the day, brought together a group of graduates (only two of the 11 were unable to attend) who, along with their professors Juhnke and Keith Sprunger, carried out the history department's first major oral history project from 1968-72 – collecting the stories of mostly Mennonites, and some others, who chose an alternate route to military service during World War I.

The Schowalter Oral History Project (named for the major funder, the Schowalter Foundation) comprises around 300 interviews or attempted interviews, collected in the Mennonite Library and Archives. Some are available online at mla.bethelks.edu/audio/ohww1/

"I discovered a history of World War I I didn't know and hadn't been taught," said Federico (Fred) Zerger '71, Albuquerque. "This was a subject that needed more light, and I was part of an effort to do that.

"I thought these men were heroes," he added, "although they didn't see themselves that way."

"I was struck by how these men were able to remember 'who they were,'" said Allan Teichroew '69, Silver Spring, Maryland. "They couldn't give a lot of citations in their defense, but they had a sense of being part of a nonresistant community."

Don Holsinger '70, Edmonds, Washington, recalled interviewing Orie Conrad – a memory helped by the fact that Conrad's is one of those online.

"His daughter [had told me] he was traumatized and might not talk, but he was open to the interview and he did talk," Holsinger said. "I was so impressed by the bravery and resolve of these men, especially when they suffered physical abuse, as Orie Conrad did."

And this story continues to the present day. "Amy Epp, one of the pastors of my church, Seattle Mennonite, named her son Orie after his great-great-grandfather."

Epp and her husband were deeply moved after accessing the online interview, Holsinger said. "They never imagined being able to listen to [Orie's] voice, or that their little boy might someday hear the person for whom he was named [tell his story]."

MELANIE ZUERCHER