



Church of God Historian

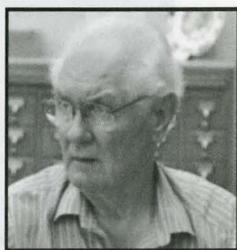
Historical Society of the Church of God

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A Lost Manuscript and a New Story

By Douglas E. Welch

When I began researching the story of my parental family, there were few available documents,



but numerous family stories. My father often attributed our paternal ancestry to three brothers who came from Wales to the U.S. in the mid-19th century. One of those brothers was his grandfather. And those are our paternal origins in North America.

As good as the story was - simple, direct, unambiguous - the problem was, none of it was true. Rigorous documentary research led to a very different story - a complicated one. And the story was told (even in writing) that my mother's people had existed for centuries in the Highlands of Scotland.

That, I soon discovered, wasn't true either. All the birth, baptism, marriage, and death records available in the Scottish National Archives in Edinburgh showed quite clearly none of my mother's known ancestors was a Scottish Highlander - all were Lowlanders, most of whom had, for generations, been crofters (tenant farmers, not wearers of kilts and players of bagpipes).

The Highlanders story is more exciting, of course, but it happens to be wrong.

Even more disappointing to me was that my maternal grandmother had not been born in the lighthouse of St. Mary's as the family lore (again in writing) reported. Some fact checking research indicated there had been no such residential lighthouse at Port St. Mary's when she was born (and not earlier or later either).

However, she was born at Port St. Mary's on the Isle of Man and had spent some of her girlhood there. Somehow, an ordinary lighthouse, or beacon, had been transmuted into a residence where children were born and lived. It's not true, but it is one of those "warm, fuzzy" stories worth repeating. (It was beginning to look more and more like Robert Reardon was right when he said "History ruins a lots of good stories" - if we understand history to be what most likely happened.)

And so forward from family histories to Church histories. One rather routine day when I was working in Church of God Archives, the telephone rang. It was Kathleen Beuhler, who worked at Warner Press, reporting they had discovered two old manuscripts on the top shelf of a closet they were cleaning out in what had been the old Gospel Trumpet building.

At my request, the manuscripts were brought to the Archives.

They were wrapped neatly in brown store paper and securely tied with white store string (you know, the old-fashioned kind). The first contained all the documents relating to the trial of R.R. Byrum in the mid-1920s, including letters, notes, exhibits, and minutes.

The second package contained the complete manuscript of a book written by Allie Fisher and, apparently, submitted to the Gospel Trumpet Company. Rather than being published, it had been sequestered (for how long we've no idea) and eventually ended up on the top shelf of a remote closet in the Gospel Trumpet building (rather yellowed and mildewed, but quite intact).

I remember sitting there, both excited and dismayed. Why had this book not been published? What did it contain which assured it would end up on a closet shelf somewhere out of sight and out of circulation?

Again, some fact checking. A.L. Byers' book, *Birth of a Reformation*, had been published in 1921. Byers' book (noted for its Confirmation Bias and outright hagiography even to Allie) assigned to D.S. Warner a role in the "final reformation" which she thought was over-generalized and over-stated and needing her viewpoint.

Her book (which I think was an attempt to correct Byers) was not well-organized or well written, but it was a needed corrective to a story which was somewhat more fanciful than

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Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Church of God (Anderson)

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The Historical Society of the Church of God (Anderson) exists to encourage the collection and preservation of artifacts and documents relating to the history of the Church of God; to encourage historical research and the writing of Church of God history; and to provide a forum for like-minded people interested in participating in and furthering the study of Church of God history. Membership is open to all who are vitally interested in what the Society desires to accomplish. Membership dues are \$20 per year (\$15 for students.) Checks should be made out to *Historical Society of the Church of God* and sent to Box 702, Anderson IN 46015.

President Gary Agee; Vice President Dale Stultz; Secretary Treasurer Sadie Evans; Editor John Aukerman.

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factual - to be sure, not downright wrong as my family stories were.

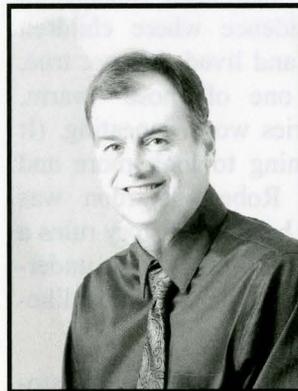
However, it galvanized Dale Stultz and me into new efforts in our research for *The Gospel Trumpet Years*, inspiring us to dig and travel as we had not done, leading to facts which had never before been published. Allie, it proved, was often right, although dates, sequences, and places were occasionally wrong (something that happens to the elderly in particular - fact-checking is now more important than ever at my age).

What we published in 2011 was the result of all of that digging. Allie's story was ignored and stored (hidden?) away; ours had a much kinder fate. We'd grown up in the meantime.

Allie Fisher in her earlier and later years



Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, in Church of God Tradition



Dr. Gary Agee, President

On October 31 of this past year, Christians from around the world commemorated the five hundredth year anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of the Ninety five Theses. Recalling this event offers an opportunity to revisit how our Church of God forebearers viewed this revolutionary period in Christian history.

Early literature published by the Gospel Trumpet Company leaves little doubt that the faithful viewed the Protestant Reformation with some ambivalence. This is not to say that our forebearers were free from the anti-Catholic animus so prevalent in this country among evangelical Christians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, those who gathered to hear the "flying messengers" believed the papacy to be the fount of corruption in the church, defiling her with human contrived practices and rituals repugnant to God. But they were also of the conviction that the Protestant movement had failed to restore the church to its former unity and holiness--a glory the early church had radiated during the Apostolic period.

It is true that early Church of God pioneers lauded the noble spirit of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli, as well as other principled reformers. The embrace of these courageous preachers of the Protestant Reformation is not surprising given the fact that the "Evening Light Saints" be-

lied themselves to be doing similar work in their own age. More specifically, early Church of God pioneers believed that the sixteenth century reformers were correct in their aim to restore the Word and Spirit to their rightful place in the church. Similarly, Church of God saints were of the conviction that they were carrying out a parallel mission as they travelled the country condemning human creeds and calling the faithful out of "Babel."

In the mind of Daniel S. Warner and his early followers, the formation of the Confession of Augsburg and its articulation of the key doctrines of the Protestant faith marked a watershed moment in the life of the church. For though this year marked the end of the papacy's "dark night," it also signaled the beginning of her descent into sectism and division. As history would later show, such a path led not only to schism, but also to full scale war among those who claimed Jesus Christ as Lord.

Early Church of God saints were "People of the Book." An interpretive framework adopted by Warner and other pioneers illumined for them the history of the church as set forth in the pages of Scripture. Armed with this conviction, charts and diagrams depicting their beliefs about the history of church were published. The first church age, the age of "Morning Light," was also termed the "Apostolic Period." This initial era began with the establishment of the church and continued through the year 270. After the emergence of the papacy, however, the church descended into what was termed the "Papal Age," a period of "Dark Night" which lasted 1,260 years. It was believed that some light returned to the church during the "Protestant Era"-- the period of "Cloudy Day"--

which lasted from 1530 to 1880. This era was eclipsed beginning in 1880, however, by the period of the "Evening Light" and the arrival of what was believed to be the "Last Reformation." This last reformation, led by the saints of the Church of God, would restore the Church to unity before the Lord's return.

I once heard Dr. Merle Strege, former president of this Society, share a story about his short-lived enlistment into the military. When asked to declare his Christian affiliation he refused to select either of the two alternatives presented him: Catholic or Protestant. In his mind he was neither. Instead, he insisted that his dog tags be engraved "Church of God." Understanding the early beliefs of the saints of the Church of God as they relate to Luther and the Reformation show why Dr. Strege held such a conviction.

Annual Meeting

The Fourth Annual Retreat of the Historical Society of the Church of God will be June 23-24, 2018 at Timber Rick Woods in Anderson.

Our Vice President, Dale Stultz, owns Timber Rick and is pleased to offer the facility for our use free of charge.

If you want to camp, please call Dale ahead of time at 765-621-3161 and let him know. You may arrive any time on Friday (June 22) or Saturday (June 23).

Further details will be announced in the Spring issue of the *Historian*.

A.U. Centennial Homecoming

On October 16, 2017, Historical Society Vice President Dale Stultz, Secretary Sadie Evans, and Editor John Aukerman handed out some of our surplus books in the big tent at Homecoming.





D. S. Warner's home, which fell into disrepair and has been demolished.

Something Old, Something New

Pictured here are two structures at Warner Memorial Camp, Grand Junction, Michigan.



The newly built climbing wall, which will serve the physical and relational needs of young people for years to come.