

Church of God Historian

Historical Society of the Church of God Vol 7 No 3 Spring 2007

BESSIE HITTLE BYRUM

Personal Diaries Made Available to Historical Society

A few months ago some personal diaries of Bessie Hittle Byrum were loaned to us by her daughter, Joyce Byrum Featherstone of Burlingame, California. These consist of periodic writings from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s. It has been a delight for us to read them.

Most of the entries are of a personal nature relating to her family and their life in Anderson. But much of it concerns her work in Christian Education, writing, and, preeminently, her teaching ministry at Park Place Church. It is an excellent source of history of that church and its various ministries.

A key figure in the diaries is her husband, Russell R. Byrum, who she describes as “a prince of a man.” She expresses keen regret at the shortsightedness of the Church of God in allowing such a gifted and committed scholar and teacher to be lost to the movement.

It is clear from the diaries that here is a very bright, gifted, and energetic Christian woman. Even as early as the 1930s she was involved in interdenominational activities—and that in an age when the Church of God was still very uneasy indeed about ecumenism.

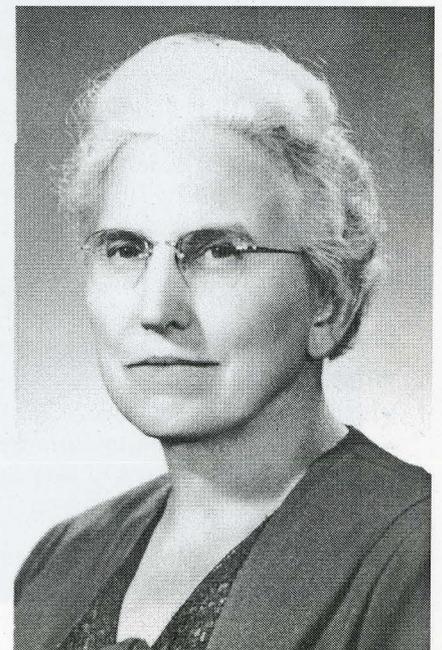
Bessie Hittle Byrum was born in Ohio in 1889 to a Pennsylvania Deutsch family, who were members of the Christian Church. Her father, interestingly, was Superintendent of the

Sunday School. Bessie was a teenager when Barney Warren came to Greenville to hold evangelistic meetings. It was at this point she “gave her heart to the Lord.”

After completing high school (an honors graduate) she obtained a public school teacher’s license and taught school for a year. At this point her family moved to Anderson, where she became a proofreader for the Gospel Trumpet Company.

Gertrude Little, in writing about Bessie, says: “At the age of nineteen Dr. Byrum was made editor of the Trumpet’s two children’s story papers, *The Shining Light* and *Our Little Folks*. She gained much journalistic experience for later writing of uniform quarterlies by composing most of the material for these papers (*Christian Leadership*, January, 1980).

Meanwhile, in Lebanon in the early 1900s, two Lebanese sisters, Asma and Amelia Trad, who were affiliated with the British and Foreign Bible Society, began a public school in a small village just north of Beirut (then in Syria). They came



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Church of God Historian is managed by the Executive Committee of the Society. Merle D. Strege, President, Dale E. Stultz, Vice-President, and Sadie B. Evans, Secretary-Treasurer. Others serve on the Committee as requested by the President.

The Historical Society

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 \$15 per year (\$10 for students.) Checks should be made out to *Historical Society of the Church of God* and sent to Box 702, Anderson IN 46015.



Bessie and Russell Byrum

in contact with the Church of God and appealed to the Missionary Board for teachers. In January 1912, the Board responded by sending Bessie Hittle and Minnie Tasker, who was on her way to India to join her husband, George P. Tasker.

Bessie worked on in Schweifat with Nellie Laughlin. In addition to her many teaching duties, she learned enough Arabic to evangelize and help begin a small congregation of the Church of God. But by 1915 World War I had begun and the Board recalled Bessie.

Back in the U.S., she visited local churches telling of her work and promoting the cause of missions. She also edited the Missions Page of the *Gospel Trumpet*.

In 1916, Bessie married R.R. Byrum, then a pastor in West Virginia. They attempted to return to the work in Syria, but the Board considered it unsafe, so recalled them from New York. In 1917 they returned to Anderson.

Shortly thereafter, Russell became managing editor of the *Gospel Trumpet*. And Bessie became a teacher in Anderson Bible Training School, where she would serve for the next fourteen years, teaching such subjects as missions, world religions, church history, and Christian education.

She was a tireless teacher, writer, and editor (editing the first children's Sunday School quarterly). At Park Place Church she initiated the first graded Sunday School classes, organized the first Vacation Bible School, served as head of the Youth Department, and was, for many years, Sunday School superintendent. She was also a key figure in the development of the national Board of Christian Education.

What a remarkable woman—a woman far ahead of her times! Her vision and commitment inspire us yet today.

— D.E. Welch and D.E. Stultz

EARLY TRUMPET SOUNDS AND EARLY CHURCH OF GOD WORKS IN EASTERN EUROPE

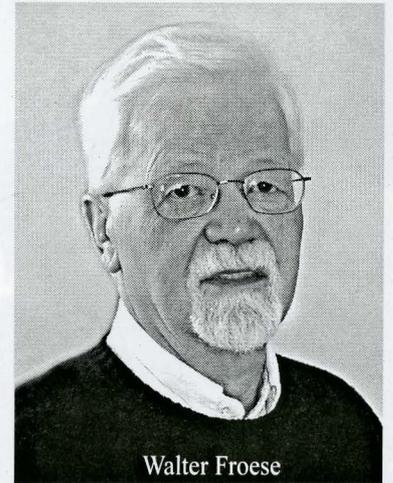
— *Walter Froese*, Professor of Church History
Anderson University School of Theology

The enthusiasm and dedication of early Church of God saints helped spread the message of the *Gospel Trumpet* to Europe, including the German colonists of eastern Germany and western Russia. A German language version of the *Gospel Trumpet*, the *Evangelium Posaune*, which began in 1895 in Grand Junction, Michigan, and is still published today in York, Nebraska, brought the message of redemption, holiness, and unity to German readers living in remote places of the world.

As early as 1896 a letter to *Posaune* readers from Riga requested information and advice about the Church of God. In 1901 Georg Vielguth, a recent immigrant from Germany to the United States and a new convert, made a trip to Europe and helped organize a Church of God congregation in Riga.

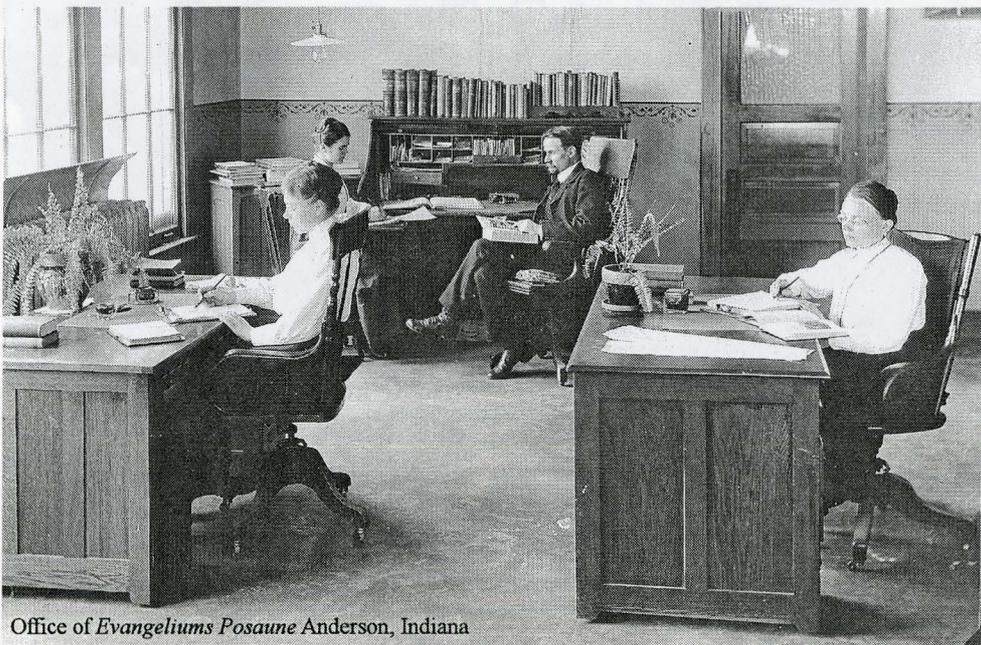
In 1903 Karl and Augusta Arbeiter and in 1907 Otto and Gertrude Doebert went to Europe as long-term missionary-evangelists. In 1909 William Ebel, long-time editor of the *Evangeliums Posaune*, and his wife Anna followed and settled in Riga to pastor and help publish a Latvian and Russian "Gospel Trumpet."

Those years were the times of the Church of God Missionary Homes. In 1907 Vielguth established such a home in a rented mansion in Essen, western Germany. This missionary home became the center where conferences of leaders and helpers were held, annual 'camp meetings' were conducted, gifted young people were trained, and from where much literature was shipped to eastern Europe. Soon small congregations became established in various places.



Rudolf Malzon, born in Russia, spent some time in the missionary home in Essen and then labored as a literature distributor and missionary-evangelist in Volhynia, western Russia. Salomon Weissburger, who was born in southern Germany, also spent a few years in the missionary home and then became a pastor of various Church of God congregations in eastern Germany and western Russia. Several other gifted local leaders were ordained and were deeply involved in the work. However, the constant and influential vehicle for spreading the message of the Church of God in eastern Europe during those early years was the *Evangelium Posaune*.

And then World War I disrupted the work terribly. Several ministers were drafted into the German army. Weissburger was imprisoned in Russia and was separated from his wife and children until the end of the war. Malzon and his family were banished to Siberia. Since the Arbeiters and the Doeberts were all American citizens, they were advised to return home, but they (continued, page 4)



Office of *Evangeliums Posaune* Anderson, Indiana



This photo, first published in the *Missionary Herald* in 1911, was taken in Essen, Germany in 1910. This is a gathering of missionaries, evangelists, and helpers. Middle row, third from left is Otto Doebert and in front of him his wife Gertrude; behind and to his left is Rudolf Malzon. Middle row, fourth from left is William Ebel and in front of him is his wife Anna. Middle row fifth from the left is Karl Arbeiter and in front of him is his wife Augusta. Standing behind Arbeiter is Salomon Weissburger. Others in the photo are not named.

moved to Switzerland. During the war years the Church of God work in Switzerland grew substantially in Basel, Winterthur, and Zurich.

The Ebels were detained in Russia and Romania and when they were able to go to Switzerland after the war ended, the years of hardship had taken such a toll on them that William Ebel died in Basel in 1919.

The decades following World War I brought completely new conditions for the Church of God in all of Europe. Much of the eastern territory of Germany and much of the western part of

Russia became the independent country of Poland. Riga became the capital of a free Latvia. In Russia the communists began their harsh and repressive rule. The German colonists in eastern Europe had to deal with changing realities and adjust to new conditions.

When Rudolf Malzon returned from Siberia to eastern Volhynia, which continued to be a part of Russia, he found only a few Church of God families in the old places and so he set out visiting new German colonies and helped start Church of God congregations there. In the Cau-

casus region of southern Russia a religious awakening happened in which local Church of God believers, who had met the Ebels in Romania, played a leading role.

In western Volhynia, now a part of Poland, visits of Gottlieb Zuber, a young pastor-evangelist for Zurich, Switzerland, helped bring about a profound revival. About forty Church of God congregations were established in Polish Volhynia. August Krebs, Gustav Sonneberg, Daniel Mantei, Daniel Riske, and many other German-speaking native eastern Europeans ac-

cepted leadership roles there.

As the Church of God came to vigorous life again in eastern Europe during the decades of the 1920s and '30s, the earlier influence from the United States faded more and more into the background. The American missionaries returned home. However, fraternal relationships and American financial support remained strong.

In 1921 D.B. Meyer, the editor of of the American *Evangelium Posaune* visited Germany and helped launch a European *Evangelium Posaune*, which began appearing in 1922. Many saints in eastern Europe now received two *Posaunen* which complemented each other with different articles, testimonies, and reports. Also in 1922, with support from the United States, a uniquely European Missions Society was organized.

A foreshadowing of future hardships became clear to many Church of God leaders when R. Malzon traveled from Russia

to Germany in 1928 and informed the brethren about the beginning of terrible persecutions of Christians under the Communists. What was initially planned by Malzon as an informational visit and a plea for help turned into permanent residence in Germany. His family was able to join him only years later.

And then World War II occurred, destroying most of the flourishing Church of God work in eastern Europe. Much of the territory where Church of God believers resided was devastated by military action.

In Russia many Christians were drafted into the "Workers Army" and sent far into eastern territories. The German colonists in Polish Volhynia were resettled to northwestern Poland in 1940 and then fled westward into Germany as the Russian army conquered the region in 1945. The vibrant Church of God work in Latvia also ended when the pastors and numerous others became refugees in 1945.



D.B. Meyer

The terrible events of World War II and its results forced many believers to reflect deeply about their past life and about their future. The years after the war were years of severe privation and acute problems. As more and more of the many Church of God refugees from eastern Europe found each other they started to celebrate 'camp meetings' again, and various revivals, accompanied by large baptismal services, occurred in the late 1940s in West Germany.

Living and working conditions remained extremely difficult however. And so, quite naturally, when the possibility for emigration to North America became possible, many eastern European Church of God families went to Canada and the United States. Gustav Sonnerberg and his family arrived in Canada in 1949 and, as more immigrants came, the existing German Church of God in Canada and the United States experienced welcome and vibrant growth.

When many of the Church of God believers from eastern Europe found a new home in



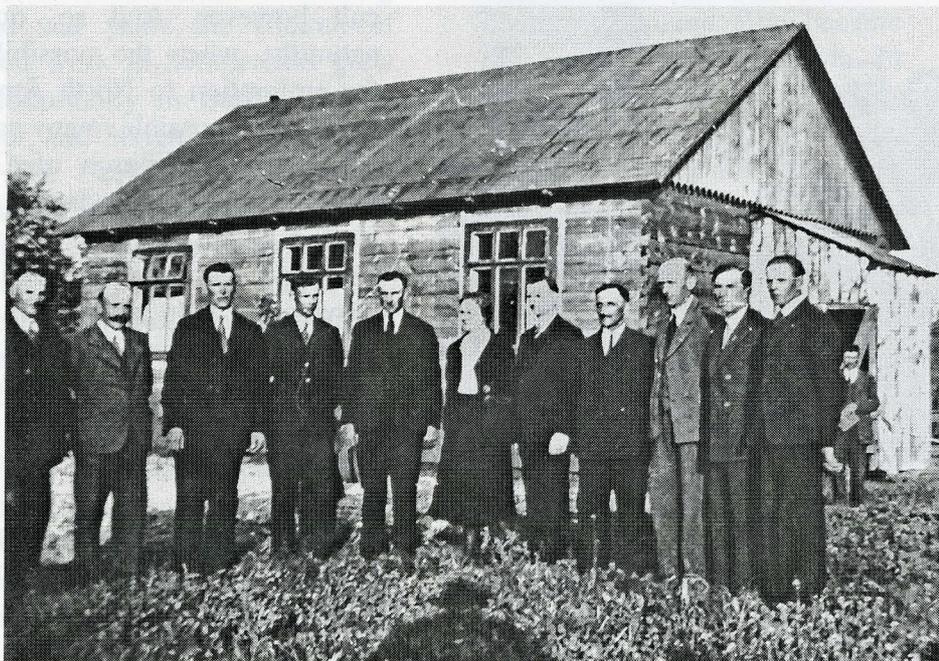
Taken in Amelin, Poland in 1939, this photo is of a gathering of leaders and local congregational elders. Noted leaders are: front row left, Daniel Riske, August Krebs, Daniel Mantei. Behind and to D. Riske's right is Adolf Lutzer. Standing two persons behind Daniel Mantei is Gottlieb Zuber. At the top right is Edmund Krebs, son of August Krebs. Edmund Krebs lives in Toronto.

the United States around 1950, about one half century had elapsed since the earliest *Evan-gelium Posaune* had brought the message of salvation, holiness, and Christian unity to them and to their parents. Dedicated mis-sionaries, fervent evangelists,

committed pastors, and many faithful believers had helped in spreading the Church of God message.

Through times of two devas-tating world wars and many years of terrible hardships peo-ple had devoted their lives to

God's service. We who live now, hopefully, will not only be enriched by learning about their experiences and struggles and commitments, but also be en-couraged to do what has been entrusted to us to do in our time and place. §

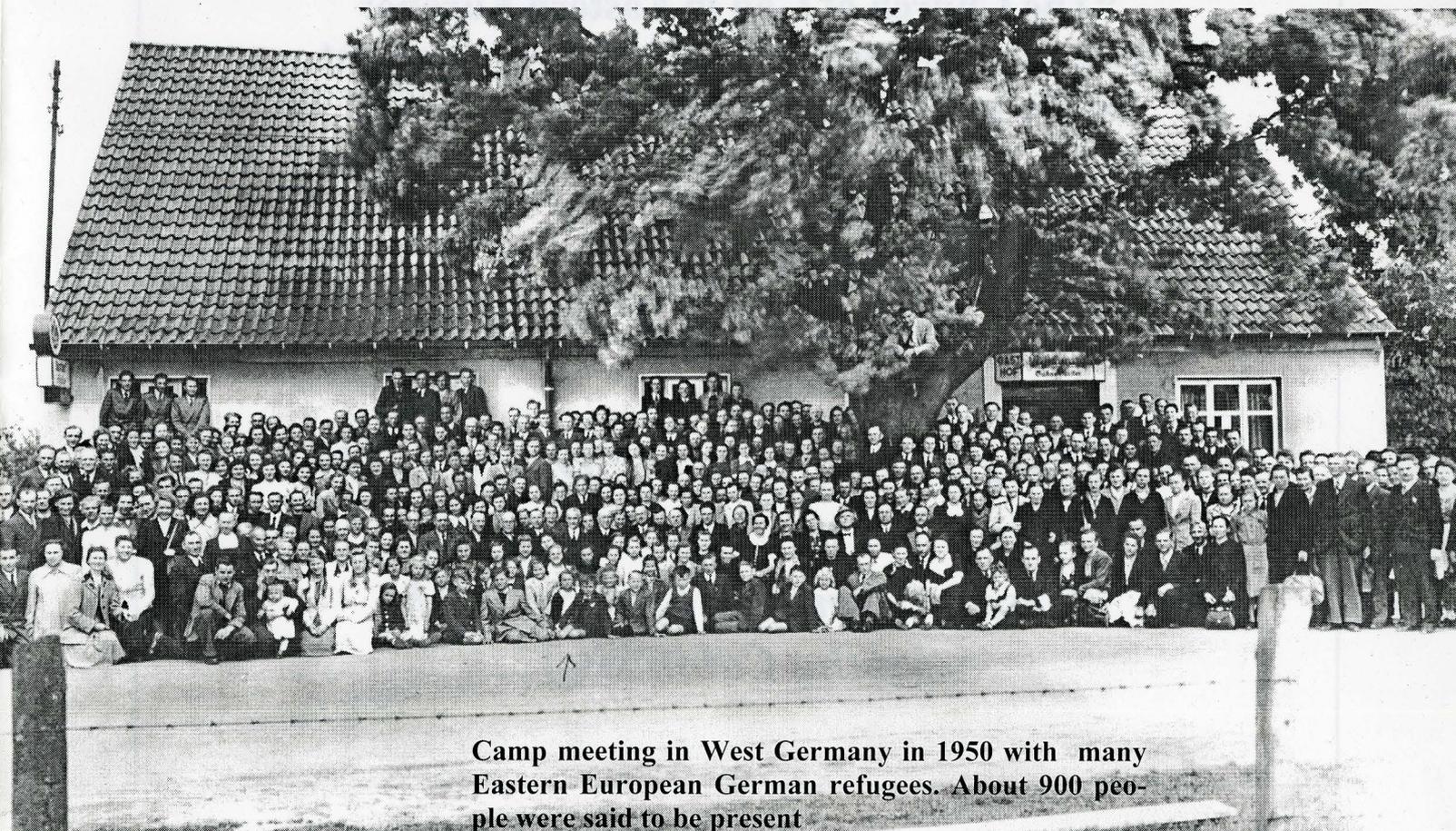


The photo above was taken in Amelin, Volhynia in 1937. It is a gathering of Church of God adherents and leaders. Sitting front center are Daniel Mantei (holding hat) and August Krebs, flanked by their wives.

The photo opposite was taken in Rokin, Volhynia in 1932. Three of those present later emigrated to Western Canada, serving German congregations there. Standing in the center are Gustav and Wanda Sonnenberg and to his left, Daniel Riske. On the left edge of the photo is Br. Weiss, who served for many years in Manola/Cherhill, Alberta. Others in the photo are church elders..



Baptismal service in western Russia
Photo donated by Agnes Neuhaus-Malzon
Daughter of Rudolf Malzon



Camp meeting in West Germany in 1950 with many Eastern European German refugees. About 900 people were said to be present

Historical Society of the Church of God

SEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, June 23, 2007

4:00-6:00 P.M. *

Decker 133*

(* Please note change of time and place)

**Dr. Walter Froese, Professor of Church History
will present a paper entitled:**

**“The Church of God in Eastern Europe:
American Missionaries and the Development
Of the Indigenous Church Up Until 1950.”**

And Also Please Remember

WARREN CABIN DEDICATION

Tuesday, June 26, 4:15-5:00 P.M.

(at the Cabin site)