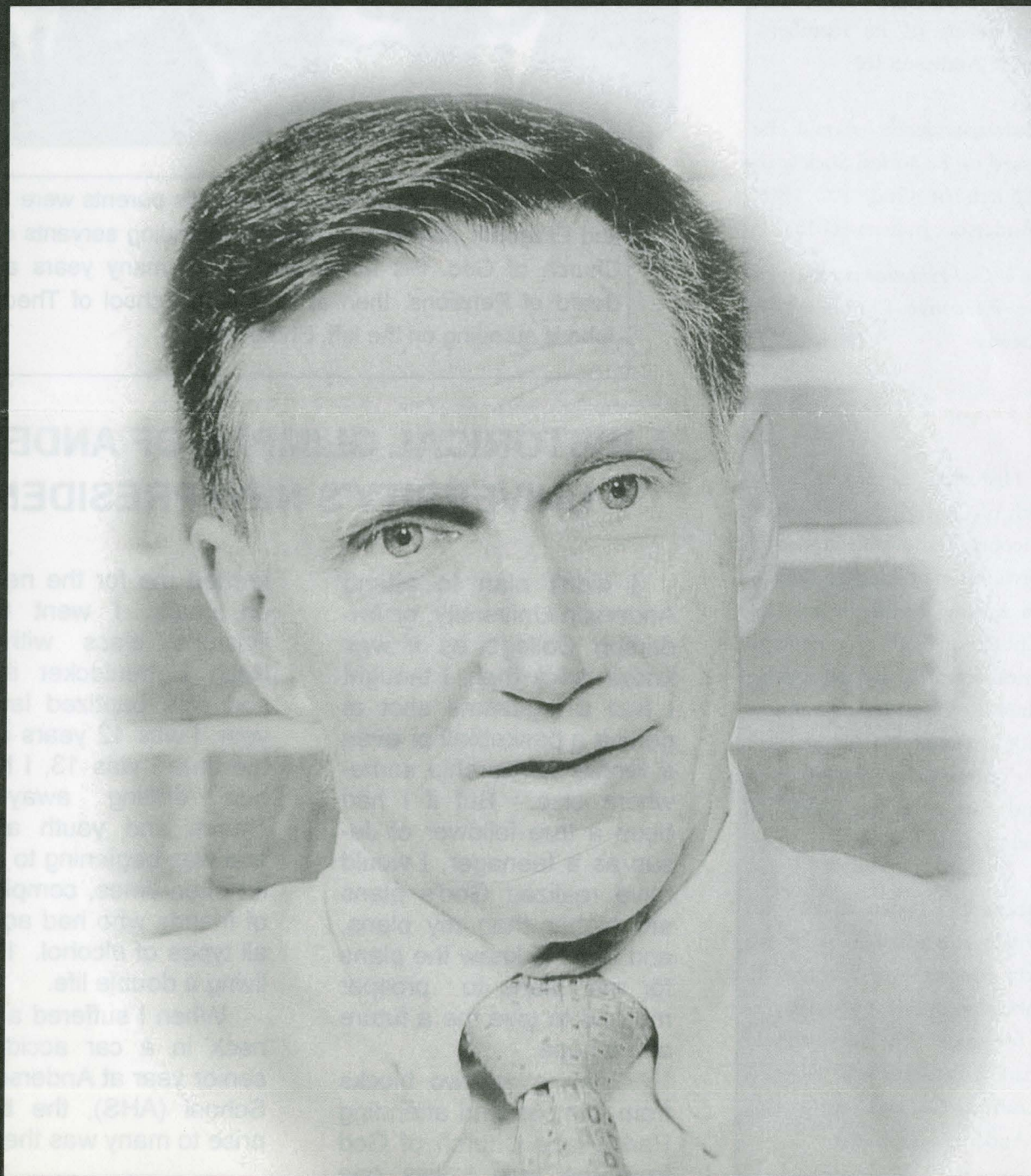




Church of God Historian

Historical Society of the Church of God

Volume 16 Number 2 Winter 2016



Church of God Historian

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

Vol 16 No 2 Winter 2016

This newsletter is published three times a year: Fall; Winter; and Spring. It is published by the Society on behalf of its members. Printed in Anderson IN

All correspondence should be addressed to: Historical Society of the Church of God, P.O. Box 702, Anderson, Indiana 46015.

Church of God Historian is managed by the Executive Committee of the Society.

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 \$20 per year (\$12 for students.) Checks should be made out to *Historical Society of the Church of God* and sent to Box 702, Anderson IN 46015.



John grew up in Anderson, Indiana. His parents were Hollis and Elizabeth Pistole, who were outstanding servants of the Church of God. His father worked for many years at the Board of Pensions, then at Anderson School of Theology. John is standing on the left. Photo 1966.

A HISTORICAL GLIMPSE OF ANDERSON UNIVERSITY'S NEW PRESIDENT

I didn't plan to attend Anderson University, or Anderson College as it was known back then. I thought I had a legitimate shot at getting a basketball or even a tennis scholarship somewhere else. But if I had been a true follower of Jesus as a teenager, I would have realized God's plans are higher than my plans, and that He knew the plans for me, plans to prosper me and to give me a future and a hope.

Growing up two blocks from campus and attending Park Place Church of God from the time I was one year old shaped and

formed me for the next dozen years. I went through Pastor's class with Rev. Keith Huttenlocker in 1968 and was baptized later that year. I was 12 years old. By the time I was 13, I had begun drifting away from church and youth activities and was beginning to drink, a lot often times, complements of friends who had access to all types of alcohol. I started living a double life.

When I suffered a broken neck in a car accident my senior year at Anderson High School (AHS), the big surprise to many was there was

- Cont'd on Page 7

PRESIDENT'S PEN

With each passing year we lose many women and men who have faithfully served Christ among us. William C. Neece is one who deserves mention. After his service in World War II, he attended Anderson College, and led a number of congregations across the U.S. He is perhaps best known for his pivotal role in the establishment of Pastor's Fellowship, an organization which promotes the proclamation of the historic message of the Church of God. Though he was not able to attend this year's gathering held annually in Winchester, Kentucky, he was missed.

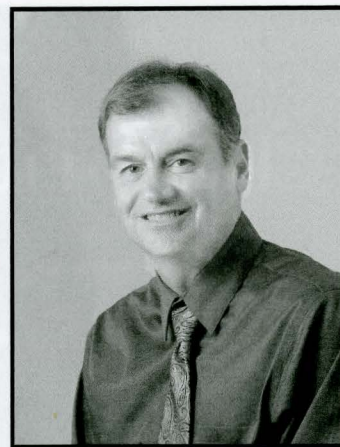
Over the past couple of months, I have enjoyed the rich phone conversations with Neece. After hearing of his passing, I looked back into my journal and found that I had recorded a phone conversation we shared on October 8 of this past year. In it he spoke of his failing health. He told me that he had not entered the pulpit for about a year. I asked him a number of questions about his ministry. He generously shared his recollections. For example, he recalled how that during the Battle of the Bulge his unit was slated to be sent in to

help stem the tide of the German counter offensive. Amazingly, and without his knowledge, one of his superiors intervened on his behalf and this because he knew that Neece wanted to become a minister when he returned back home. In the end, he was not assigned to accompany the rest of the unit. In hindsight, Neece suggested that this same intervention may have saved his life and ministry. Indeed, he will be missed.

I might also mention the passing of Billy T. Ball, long-time pastor of the Grand Avenue/Towne Boulevard Church of God located in Middletown, Ohio. This same congregation was among the largest in the movement in the early 1980s.

Meeting with the General Director of Church of God Ministries

I recently had the opportunity to meet with the General Director of Church of God Ministries, Jim Lyon, on behalf of the Historical Society. It was a most helpful conversation. As we spoke about his travels around the world, I was renewed in my commitment to try to expand the scope and perspective of the Historical Society. We have so many stories to col-



Gary Agee

lect from our brothers and sisters around this globe. Further, we discussed the future direction of the Society. The General Director offered his help in any way he might be of service. I felt good about this meeting.

A Global Reformation

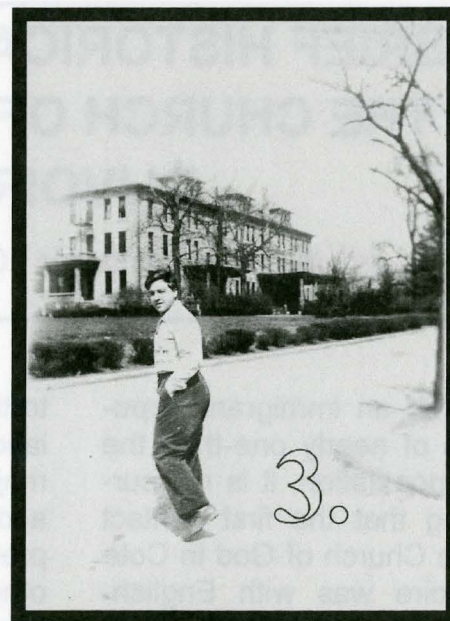
One of the goals I hope to help the Historical Society achieve is broadening our focus a bit to include stories of the Movement's growth and development around the world. To this end, in this issue of the *Historian* we have included a sketch of the history of the Church of God in the West African country of *Cote d' Ivoire*, a nation of over twenty million people. Their common language is French. This sketch was written by Larry Sellars. He and his wife, LeAnn, were sent by the Missionary Board of the Church of God to that country in 1996 and have served there faithfully since that time.





By facing in the direction in which the arrows point, you can see where the photographer was standing when the photo was taken. The numbers on the smaller photos correspond with the numbers on the large photo. This will give you some idea of the campus area of Anderson University then and now.

— Photos by Dale E. Stultz



A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CHURCH OF GOD IN COTE D' IVOIRE

By Larry M. Sellers (written in 2013, updated in 2015)

With an immigrant population of nearly one-third the total population, it is not surprising that the first contact of the Church of God in Cote d' Ivoire was with English-speaking immigrants from other West African countries, such as Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana. Persons from these countries had benefitted from Cote d' Ivoire's open door policy regarding immigration to seek jobs and better lives for themselves. Many of them being Christians, they sought relationships with other Christian groups to fellowship with and work with in reaching out to local persons from Cote d' Ivoire and other French-speaking countries of West Africa present in the country. This is how the Church of God first entered Cote d' Ivoire, first through contact with English-speaking believers living in the country beginning in 1992.

An official relationship was established by the Missionary Board and the Church of God in neighboring Ghana by 1994. It was agreed that it would be important to send missionaries to work with this diverse group of believers in developing this new relationship and in beginning to reach out

to the French-speaking population who represented the majority. So in 1996, Larry and LeAnn Sellers, who had previously served in three other French-speaking countries, were sent to Abidjan, Cote d' Ivoire to settle and begin working with this group to establish the first French-speaking work of the Church of God in West Africa.

Within the first two years, churches were established among Africans of several nationalities and ethnic groups in the cities of Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Korhogo and Sinfra. By the year 2000, land was purchased in the new capital city of Yamoussoukro to serve as the central national ministry center for the rapidly-expanding church.

Over the next several years and with the help of several work teams from the USA, a large multipurpose two-story building was built on this property to house the main church, national offices, a future training institute and other national and local ministries. Since then, this building has housed a French radio ministry and recording studio, a ministry to help youth understand how to avoid AIDS by living a holy life of abstinence and faithfulness, a literacy program and

the West Africa Bible Institute, known as IBAO.

IBAO is the pastoral training arm of the Church of God in Cote d' Ivoire and is the only French-speaking Bible school of the Church of God anywhere in the world. Since its inception in 2007, it has trained two dozen leaders from three different countries to serve the church in French-speaking areas. Students from IBAO were instrumental in establishing the first African missionary-led outreach to the neighboring country of Burkina Faso, where a new Church of God plant is growing in the second city of Bobo Dioulasso.

In addition to the Sellers family, the church and IBAO have been served by Sherman and Kay Critser, long-term missionaries to Africa. This couple finished their missionary career with 12 years of service to Cote d' Ivoire, especially as teachers at IBAO. Short-term worker, Jennifer Sigl, also served two terms in Cote d' Ivoire. With the departure of the Critsers, the church eagerly awaited the January 2015 arrival of Bob and Jenny Mihsill. They were slated to coordinate the startup of the Children of Promise program, to help needy children, to teach at IBAO and help coordinate work teams, even as they gave attention to helping the church become more mature and self-sustaining in the future.

- *Cont'd on Page 8*

Cont'd from Page 2

no alcohol involved. The driver with whom I was riding in his '68 VW Bug simply ran a stop sign and we got broadsided by friends who were also returning from lunch. Friends and family from Park Place and other churches, along with my father's colleagues from AU and mom's friends from Anderson High School, surrounded and bathed me in prayers of healing.

I thought I was beyond redemption, but I underestimated God's forgiveness. Looking back, I believe God gave me a second chance in life physically and spiritually. I didn't have an immediate 'road to Damascus' experience, but over time I came to know and experience true healing as only God could lavish upon us.

Coming to AU as its fifth president has been a continuation of that journey. I firmly believe that God can and does use ordinary people in extraordinary ways as we prayerfully and obediently follow Proverbs 16:3. "Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established."

When I was an AU student (because no scholarships materialized elsewhere), I wanted to be a lawyer. After three years of law school and a year practicing in a 'Church of God/AU law firm' in Anderson, I realized I didn't want to do that the rest of my life and that just possibly God was calling me to something else. The question was what. After a great deal of

soul-searching and time in prayer, I decided to apply to be an FBI Agent. I felt like a failure, but again, God had a plan that my puny faith was struggling to see.

Twice over the next year the FBI told me they couldn't hire me, once because of my broken neck and another time because my mother in law, Clella Harp, had been born in Egypt. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength..." became a verse with real meaning and application to me during this time of discernment.

Eventually the FBI hired me and I moved away from Anderson. Later, I could look back and laugh at that process. But it also gave me a sensitivity to others who may be going through similar circumstances.

After 26 years of service at the FBI, including over five as the Deputy Director, I sensed God may be calling me to other service when I was asked to serve as the head of the TSA. I said yes to the process and 90 days later the U.S. Senate confirmed me as the fifth Administrator in TSA's short history. I had no insight that five years later I'd be selected by the AU Board of Trustees as the fifth president in AU's nearly 100 year history.

Each step in this journey has been shaped and influenced by the Holy Spirit. My wife, Kathy Harp, has been my constant companion "through it all." Together we have prayed for 'DEWS' (Discernment, En-

couragement, Wisdom and Strength) as we engage the campus community and the city. It is an amazing blessing to be back on campus, and I am humbled to follow in the footsteps of President Edwards, Nicholson, Rear-don and Morrison.

Kathy and I solicit your support for our great school and DEWS prayers not only for us, but for our 31 Trustees, our outstanding faculty and staff, and for our students, past, present and future. As we prepare to celebrate our 100th anniversary in 2017, I also solicit your financial support as we seek to build a firm foundation to take us into our second century of educating students for a life of service in the church and society. Blessings!

— John Pistole

HEADS UP!

Historical Society members and potential members are invited to the annual retreat/meeting of the Society to be held at Timberick Woods Retreat Center in Anderson IN on Monday, June 20, 2016. The Retreat will begin with the evening meal on Sunday, June 19 and end Monday evening, but campers are welcome to stay at Timberick even throughout the North American regional convention of the Church of God, to be held at Madison Park Church of God June 21-23 2016.

Cont'd from Page 6

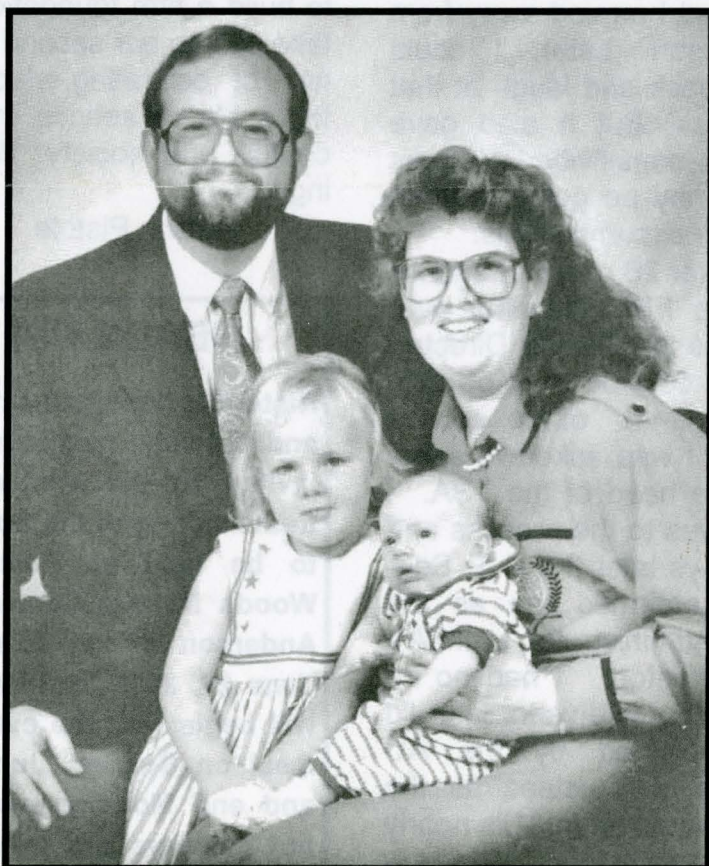
Today there are eighteen recognized congregations of the Church of God across Cote d' Ivoire and another twenty-five or more new church plants being nurtured by the established churches. The number of believers who

are a part of the churches number close to 1,800, many of whom are new believers coming from non-Christian or even Muslim backgrounds. After being missionary-led for seventeen years, in 2013 the first Ivorian Superintendent, the Reverend Emmanuel Nanhoua Yeo, was elected

by the General Assembly to lead the Church into the future. The Church of God in Cote d' Ivoire stands poised to be a strategic center for reaching out to the other twenty-one French-speaking countries of Africa.

– Larry M. Sellers

MEET YOUR MISSIONARIES



THE SELLERS

Kountze, Texas, was Larry's birthplace, but his childhood years were spent in France and Algeria, and he went to high school in Alaska. His father is a retired petroleum engineer, whose work took him and the family to various parts of three continents.

Larry earned a Bachelor of Arts in Missions from Gulf-Coast Bible College. His call and commitment to world missions led him to graduate studies in the Anderson School of Theology.

In 1985, Larry was commissioned by the Missionary Board to serve in Haiti in the areas of leadership development and teaching English.

LeAnn was born into a Church of God home in Florida. She graduated from high school in Sarasota. She went to Gulf-Coast Bible College, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education.