

Church of God Historian

Historical Society of the Church of God

Volume 21 Number 1 Fall 2019

2019 Annual Meeting News and Announcements

The 2019 annual meeting took place this summer. Dale Stultz introduced keynote speaker, AU President John Pistole, by situating and contextualizing the home Pistole grew up in and its connection to Church of God heritage. President Pistole addressed the group, discussing growing up in Anderson, moving to Washington, D.C., and how he was later approached and persuaded to return to Anderson as Anderson University's fifth president.

In addition to the keynote, four major items were announced at the business meeting. First, last year's budget was read and approved, and will be included as an addendum to this newsletter. Secondly, Nic Don Stanton-Roark was approved by consent as editor, following a year as interim. Third, Nathan Willowby was introduced to the Historical Society as the new official historian of the Church of God, a position occupied previously by Merle Strege and Society President Gary Agee. It



must be emphasized that there is no necessary relationship between the position of Church of God historian, a position appointed by the General Assembly, and the President of the Historical Society, a position elected by the Society itself. Still, Willowby looks forward to working with the Society in his coming term, and has offered a piece to this newsletter introducing himself, his background, and his mindset as Church of God historian (see page 5).

Finally, and most significantly, Dale Stultz announced his inten-

tion to begin the process of stepping down as Society Vice-President. This doesn't reflect any official change as yet, but Dale encouraged us to consider the process and the search for a successor as having begun. Dale has been instrumental in the ongoing efforts of the Historical Society since shortly after its inception. He emphasizes that he intends to continue his personal dedication to historical and documentary work regardless of title or position.

Unity

By Nic Don Stanton-Roark

Gary Agee, Society President, currently on sabbatical is working on a manuscript for a monograph-length work about church unity. So while there will be no President's Pen section this issue, I wanted to reflect a bit on the central yet contested role that "unity" has had in the movement's history.

Agee has said that "the idea for writing this book crystalized over the past two summers as I conducted workshops on the history of the Church of God movement." We're all familiar with the central thrust that "unity" as a concept has had for the movement, as well as the major shift that occurred from the incipient call to unity through socially "coming out" from the "Babylon" of denominationalism to the more ecumenical vision of unity through the recognition of common participation in the true church that can be expressed in the context of any given denomination.

Russell Byrum's contested position on Christian unity offers a clear and interesting transitional point in this history. In April 1929 movement conservatives, led by R. L. Berry and Birdie Smith, expressed concern that Byrum's teaching at Anderson Bible School and Seminary was "contrary to the generally accepted teaching of the reformation movement," listing five areas of concern of which unity is the first. At John Morrison's direction, Byrum produced a summary document entitled "Christian Unity" that was distributed by mail in advance of the annual camp meeting.

In the leading section, titled "Christian Unity Will Be Realized," Byrum observes that unity is an increasing concern among Christians in all bodies, and "is not the idea of one or of a

few men, nor is it by the influence of a particular body of Christians." Christian unity, for Byrum, does not consist of uniformity in practices or methods, but rather of "loving fellowship." For this reason, Byrum concludes, it is not necessary that all Christians come to join our agencies, but rather that "all true Christians will come to our position to the extent that we are on the true ground for unity, and hold the attitude of loving fellowship."

Toward this end, Byrum urged Church of God believers to continue to hold up the ideal of unity, to oppose creedal tests (including unwritten creeds) and sectarianism, and to refute error without antagonism or narrowness.

Gary Agee, preparing for his project, writes that church unity should be "built on trust and mutual respect and love," and that it doesn't "just happen." It is "inspired by God and carried forward by those who choose to walk in the light."

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Please send your family stories and photos to the same address. We would love to print them in future issues.

Follow the Church of God Historical Society online through Facebook and Instagram for regular content.

President: Gary Agee

Vice President: Dale Stultz

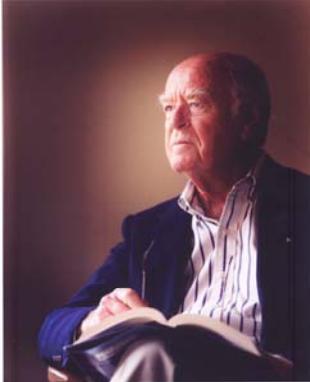
Secretary Treasurer: Sadie Evans

Editor: Nic Don Stanton-Roark

Movers and Shapers in the Church of God: Enoch Byrum

By Robert Reardon

This on-going serial captures firsthand recollections from Robert Reardon regarding luminaries in the Movement. See the Winter 2019 issue for details.



I. K. Dawson came along in the church at a time when exceptional growth had multiplied the number of congregations across the land, when the centralization of authority in Anderson had reached its zenith and the various states were struggling to find ways of working to solve local problems. No one ever had a better eye for organization and it was not long before he convinced his brethren in Illinois to make him State Evangelist, with the responsibility to organize and carry forward a program to help establish new congregations, deal with problems, carry on training programs for personal evangelism, and coordinate the various missions going on in the state. In this responsibility, he managed to work carefully in the sensitive area of pastoral placement, which endeared him to some and angered others. But it was an idea whose time had come, and Elver Adcock at the Board of Church Extension brought him in to the Board to encourage other states to follow suit.

Unfortunately, at this time the movement was embroiled in what was then known as the Slacum Agitation, a reactionary development aimed at the Gospel Trumpet Company for using the Lord's presses for printing the house organ for General Motors, at Anderson College for alleged doctrinal apostasy among the faculty, and at the Board of Church Extension for misleading the church by promoting the Dawson Plan of State Evangelists—a “sinister octopus,” he claimed, which would make every pastor a virtual slave to the whims of a state dictator. [The plan consisted of eight appointed positions, such as chairman, vice-secretary, etc., which Slacum likened to eight “arms.” The eighth position was the one Dawson himself would hold, “State Evange-

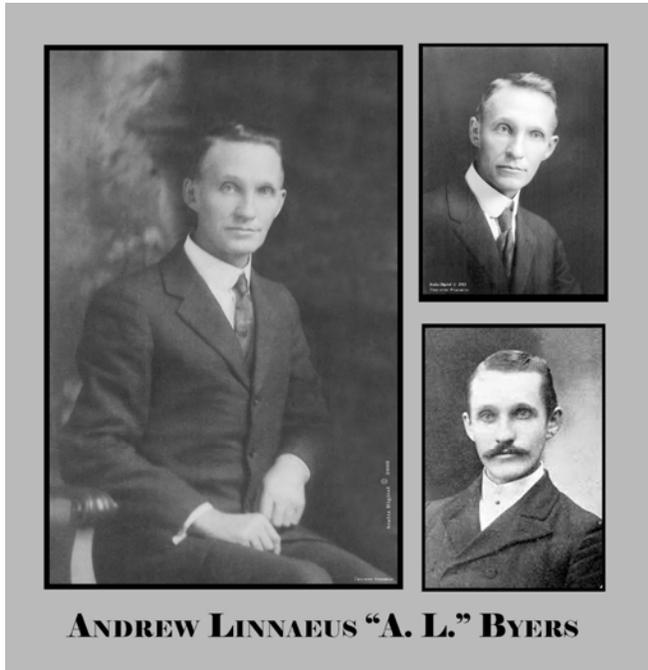
list.” - ed.]

The Slacum agitation, no doubt, had some slight credibility, but those of us who were in the ministry at the time will remember its ugly, negative, malignant spirit, its narrowness, and call to return to sectarian isolation. Fortunately, Dawson's idea was a good one that eventually caught on, even among our most conservative states, and he must be credited as its author and champion. Most of our states are now organized basically on The Dawson Plan. The Plan made a major change in the church—decentralizing authority.



Ivan K. Dawson, ca. 1941. Photo courtesy
AU&CHOG Archives

A. L. Byers Memorial Grave Marker: An Appeal



The following is an informative appeal for donations by Dale Rude. The Historical Society is happy to support this effort by broadcasting the appeal. As of press, the GoFundMe is listed at \$745 raised of an \$1,100 goal. –Ed.

A. L. Byers was born on August 26, 1869 in Albany, Illinois. His father was an evangelist with the Church of God and his mother a song writer. A. L. Byers was saved in 1888 and dedicated his life to the work of God in 1890 when he became involved with D. S. Warner & B. E. Warren in evangelistic work as a member of the flying ministry. Over the course of his life, he worked as a historian, authoring D. S. Warner's biography titled, *The Birth of a Reformation: Life and Labors of D.S. Warner*. Byers worked at the Gospel Trumpet for 35 years, and served the church as a hymn writer, music editor, and most notably, a hymn composer. Byers was involved in the song selection and publication of nearly every songbook of the Church of God from 1897 to 1936. He wrote the music for many of our favorite songs, including *The Church's Jubilee*, *Reformation Glory*, *O Church of God, He Is Just the Same Today*, *I'm on the Winning Side*, *Spirit Holy*, *The River of Pleasure*, *Tell What He's Done for You*, *I've Enlisted in the Service*, *I'm Glad I Counted the Cost*, *I Know, I Cannot Be Idle*, *Church's One Foundation*, *Consecration*, *Be an Overcomer*, and *Are You Adorning the Doctrine*. These songs are yet being sung today, one hundred

years on. Byers also authored books such as *200 Genuine Instances of Divine Healing*, *Treasures of Poetry*, *The Gospel Trumpet Publishing Work Illustrated*, and several children's books, including *Things that Happened*, *Ideals and Moral Lessons*, *Bible Stories and Studies*, *Things in Nature*, *Birds and Animals*, and *Countries and Customs*.

A. L. Byers left the Gospel Trumpet work because of health problems and worked as an evangelist and pastor in Idaho and Oregon before taking a pastorate in Sacramento, California, in 1934. He died on November 9, 1952 (aged 83) in Sacramento, California. He is buried in Sacramento Memorial Lawn Cemetery next to his wife, Della Florence (Wickersham) Byers, who died on July 16, 1968.

Sadly, for reasons unknown, A. L. Byers was not given a proper burial and was laid to rest in an unmarked grave. [Byers family lore suggests that some statements about the treatment of footwashing were to account for this. -Ed.] For almost 67 years, this outstanding and dedicated pioneer of the Church of God has not had a grave maker and very few people even know where his body was buried.

It's time to change that!

We are collecting donations to purchase a simple flat grave marker and have it installed on his gravesite. The price of the grave marker is estimated to be around \$1,100 and all proceeds will go towards the cost and installation of the maker. We have a Pastor in the Sacramento, California area who is willing to do all of the groundwork to make this happen. A lot of people in the Historical Society have a deeply held appreciation for the heritage hymns. If anyone would like to contribute towards this compassionate project, they may do so by contributing to a dedicated GoFundMe site [<https://tinyurl.com/albyersfund>]. Checks can be made out to New Covenant Church of God and mailed to 2300 Ridge Road, Springfield, Ohio 45502.

For questions, contact Dale Rude at HDaleRude@gmail.com or by phone at (937) 605-8735.

Introducing...



By Nathan Willowby

Sunday School Smith and the Beecher Grove revival. The Elk City train station and traveling Board of Christian Education volunteer work. These are the stories of which I am a part, and that in many ways have served as the foundation for my interest in the Church of God and its history. My name is Nathan Willowby. I serve as Assistant Professor of Theology and Ethics at Anderson University. Prior to serving the Church of God in this capacity, I was the pastor of Crossroads Church of God in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where I also had the opportunity to be involved in many aspects of the Wisconsin Assembly work. I'm writing this piece for the newsletter because I've been ratified by the General Assembly as the Church of God Historian for the next five-year term. I'm humbled by the nomination and look forward to the ways that I may have an increased role in collaborating with the Church of God Historical Society, its President Dr. Gary Agee and other leadership—especially Dale Stultz, Sadie Evans, and Nic Don Stanton-Roark.

When I was introduced this summer at the annual gathering, I was immediately asked about my family tree—so I'll share some of that here, since we Church of God folk seem drawn to these narratives. My mother is Cheryl

Helvering Willowby. She gifted me with genes, stories, and experiences that put me in touch with the Church of God in Louisiana, Arkansas, Japan, Warner Press, South Meridian Church of God, Gulf Coast Bible College, and Warner Southern College. I have fond memories of childhood trips to Bastrop, Louisiana, for family reunions in years when Nathan (after whom I was named) and Ann Smith were on furlough. My father is Rich Willowby. He gave me a bald head, but also stories and experiences with the Church of God and its history related to Warner Press, Colorado, Kansas, Oregon, Oklahoma, Hill City Campmeeting, and West Middlesex. I grew up in Park Place Church of God and attended Anderson University for college and the first year of my MDiv. I then married Jill, moved to Durham, NC, and Duke Divinity School to finish up the MDiv before pursuing a PhD at Marquette University in Milwaukee. Jill and I have two children (2 and 5) and attend Church at the Crossing in Indianapolis.

I have been interested in Church of God theology and history since I was a fairly young man. I recall holding ropes during high school at Anderson Campmeeting (to keep some of you readers from driving the wrong way into the campground) and reading John W. V. Smith's little book that I'd bought in the tent—*I Will Build My Church*. That book, along with my education at Anderson University, the stories told around family tables and living rooms, and my curiosity, led me to see the radical message of holiness as a complicated but crucial aspect of those positions of which I was proudest about the Church of God. I saw the commitment to Spirit empowerment and pursuit of holiness as central to our egalitarian practice in the earliest decades with respect to women in ministry and racial prejudice.

[Continued on p. 6]

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I saw the commitment to holiness as enabling good examples of international mission work in an era marked by colonialist approaches.

Of course my curiosity led me to read enough and hear enough stories to learn that we didn't always do things so well—that our understanding of holiness didn't always lead to egalitarian actions and helping people to flourish. But that seed of holiness has always captivated me. In my dissertation, I offered a glimpse into the Church of God and the broader American Holiness Movement in general with respect to the ways that holiness might better be understood as politically significant instead of as a private theological concept. I dug into the ways that theology of sin often leads us to narrow the scope of our expectations of holiness.

I hope this brief introduction helps you to understand a little about me. But it also probably raises for many of you an awareness of my many gaps or holes in Church of God history. I perhaps know more about the origins of the Church of God in Northwest Kansas than many of you—or the influence of a Louisiana farmer who initiated a family tree that played some part in numerous ordained Church of God ministers, missionaries, Church agency workers, etc. But you know more about so many things. I'll confess—I don't have nearly as comprehensive understanding of the Church of God history as the last five people who've been in the position I'm in today—and that awareness informs the primary goal that I have for my work in this role.

My hope and energies will be directed towards broadening the scope of the history that we as a historical society help to gather and disseminate. I hope that you'll think of holes in our

historical memory and people with whom we can connect to try and begin the work of filling them. Just last week, I was able to talk with Malcolm Hughes about his work on the history of the Church of God in Australia. Prior to that meeting, I wasn't aware of his project, but now I eagerly await its completion and dissemination. I know there are numerous other people out there with curiosity and connections, and hopefully our group can help to expand the reach and access to their work. I'm still working out what sorts of ideas and actions we might take to accomplish this aim, so if you have ideas—feel free to email me (njwillowby@anderson.edu) or drop by my office if you're in Anderson.

Peace,

Nathan Willowby



Tenting and Parking at Campmeetings Past



INTO THE ARCHIVES

We commonly hear the expression “from the archives” when historical documents, photographs, and recordings are on display, but archival retrieval is multi-prepositional: materials move *into* the archives, preservation is performed *within* the archives, researchers work *with* the archives, and knowledge is broadcast *from* the archives. In this regular feature, we will keep readers informed about the work of the Anderson University & Church of God Archives.

Digital Archives Update: Access historical *Andersonian* issues online

The Anderson University student paper began publication in 1947 following an unsanctioned student paper called “The Orange and Black,” which, according to first *Andersonian* editor Kenneth Hall, had “apparently caused the administration some problems.” The first issues were written on four or five war-surplus typewriters and set and printed on Gospel Trumpet Company presses across the street for campus distribution. (Check out the interview with Kenneth Hall on this at <https://andersonian.com/a-chat-with-the-founding-editor/>.)

Over the years, the *Andersonian* has undergone changes in format, in focus, and in frequency of publication—sometimes weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly—but with only one exception, when critical equipment was damaged in 1956, has been a mainstay of Anderson University life. The Archives has long maintained print copies of issues, and has now uploaded digital editions of extant issues from 1947-2013 for digital access.



While these historic issues can be useful as a local news source for campus events (tracking faculty appointments, chapel speakers, campus events, etc.), they are perhaps most interesting as a primary source artifact, a glimpse into the culture and minds of the students who produced them. Most importantly, in addition to browsing, the entire collection can be searched for names and keywords as well. Users can access the digital archives from the university library website (library.anderson.edu) under the Archives heading, or use this direct link: <https://tinyurl.com/andersonian>.

Along with *The Andersonian*, the digital archives includes Gospel Trumpet editions 1880-1922, Church of God Yearbooks, and Gospel Trumpet Company Records prior to 1923. The Anderson University Publications collection will soon expand to include “Echoes” yearbooks and older student publications such as *Anderson College News* and *The Broadcaster*.



Above: Gary Agee conducts the business meeting at the 2019 annual conference

Below: Catered dinner for those who risked staying to brave the oncoming storm



In this issue: Reardon recounts the contribution of I. K. Dawson and the Slacum Controversy, a look at an upcoming book project from Society President Gary Agee, introducing the new Church of God Historian Nathan Willowby, and more.