

# Church of God Historian

Historical Society of the Church of God Vol 10 No 1 Fall 2009

## BORN IN A BARN?

Perhaps not. But 'the church of God reformation movement' as it was then called may have been 'reborn' in a barn. In this case it was a new barn just built by Jesse Wickersham, an uncle of the Byrum brothers, Enoch and Noah, who were to take over the struggling Gospel Trumpet publishing company in Grand Junction, Michigan,

and make it work. The Church of God in Randolph Co., IN was born in this barn as the result of an evangelistic meeting held here by D.S. Warner and his evangelistic team. The converts (many of whom had already left the United Brethren Church earlier) then constructed Praise Chapel, which is still in use today.

Warner and company returned the next Summer to hold meetings in Praise Chapel itself. Apparently, E.E. Byrum accompanied them from Grand Junction. It was during this meeting that Noah Byrum converted and returned to Grand Junction with his older brother to take up the work of the publishing company.

The company had virtually died in Ohio, was resuscitated by the Fishers and their converts, and moved to Michigan. It nearly foundered again, but with the promise of support and undergirding from J.C. Fisher and his community—particularly Sebastian Michels, the company moved to Grand Junction, where it was restored to viable and sustained life.

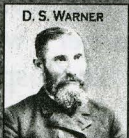
For additional photos, see back page of this newsletter.

## JESSE WICKERSHAM FARM (2009)

JESSE FINISHED HIS NEW BARN MAY 1886  
HE OFFERED IT FOR SERVICES LED BY  
D.S. WARNER AND COMPANY, WITH BARNEY  
WARREN, J.C. FISHER AND WIFE, ALSO S.L. SPECK

UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH  
CALLED, PROSPECT CHAPEL  
WAS LOCATED HERE

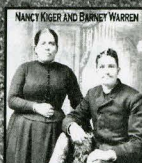
Here are a few of the people who gathered here 123 yrs ago.



D. S. WARNER



FRANKIE MILLER  
LATER MARRIED WARNER



NANCY KIGER AND BARNEY WARREN



J.C. AND ALLIE FISHER



S. L. SPECK



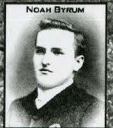
H. C. WICKS  
SON OF JESSE WICKERSHAM



ENOCH BYRUM  
MOTHER OF BYRUM BOYS



E. E. BYRUM



NOAH BYRUM



## Church of God Historian

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

Vol 10 No 1 Fall 2009

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

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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. D.E. Welch, Managing Editor and Publisher.

## 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.



## RIISING FROM THE ASHES IN WILLIAMSTON

We are not yet certain that the building we have located in the small town of Williamston, Michigan is the actual building in which the *Gospel Trumpet* was resuscitated after virtual extinction in Bucyrus, Ohio. At the moment, we are *somewhat* confident it is. If our search for final proof is successful, we will have photos and news in the next issue of the *Historian*.

A long-time lawyer and history 'buff' in Williamston is cautiously optimistic that this is the building we are seeking. And an elderly resident of the area (also an amateur historical sleuth) is confident this building has been there as it stands for at least eighty years. Most unfortunately, the Williamston newspaper files after 1883 have been lost or destroyed. (This society, it seems, is not very good at preserving its history—a fact which constantly plagues our research.)

So, a drive to Williamston may be in our future if our 'long distance' inquiries can assure us the building in the

old postcard reproduced above is the building we seek.

What we are quite certain about, however, is that the future of the *Gospel Trumpet* was in grave doubt (pun intended) in Bucyrus. Penniless, in debt, and beleaguered by those he had thought would underwrite his publication work, D.S. Warner was at a dead end. The timely arrival on the scene of the J.C. Fisher 'movement' of Michigan in the person of Thomas Horton, who paid the mortgage, settled other debts, and loaded the would-have-been confiscated printing equipment on a railway car bound for Williamston, saved the day for the *Trumpet*.

The publishing work, now under the management of Fisher and Horton, was reestablished in Williamston in a commodious two-story building apparently owned by Horton. Here, the moribund *Trumpet* was given new life, here the Gospel Trumpet Family was born, and here the failure in Ohio was quickly forgotten.

— Stultz & Welch



## THOMAS HORTON

In our search to find out the 'fate' of Thomas Horton, Warner's 'rescuer,' we came across the information we sought in an article, "With One Shoulder" written by "Daniel" in the *Gospel Trumpet*, Oct 15, 1884. Part of it is reproduced below.

We have stood by our calling through "floods of ungodly men," and storms of trials. The Almighty God has now raised up the help we need, our dear brother Fisher. God has blessed him with a business and financial gift that we have lacked. O how we have prayed the Lord to raise us such a coworker, and for four years God has called him to the work, and now at last, thank God, he has fully apprehended his calling, and assumed the responsibility of the same.

Since the assembly meeting Bro. F. has the interest in the office, held by Thomas Horton. This is to the glory of God. Though Bro. H. has rendered a very timely, and important service by his means, for which we shall ever remember him with much gratitude, and pray God's blessings upon his soul, for various reasons it was needful that he be released from further participation in this work as he also desired to be. And now we feel assured that God will move the saints with one shoulder, to help Bro. Fisher through. He desires to sell his horse and buggy to apply on the debt. Will not some one of the saints assist him by purchasing the same. There will be about four hundred dollars to raise, should he sell his horse and buggy. Now brethren, let not your hands be slack. Many should give \$10. to \$25. There are many tracts and books to be published, the time is short. Quickly invest your means in the bank of heaven where it will never burn up. Bro. Horton has kindly given us the use of the office room, and dwelling apartments, free of rent, the large lot, and the entire lower story of this large building, so long as the Church continue to pay him the very reasonable rent for the hall above, which is contracted for a year.

The dear brethren work for their board. The saints in the country are very kind to bring in supplies. So that the expenses are very low, and every thing is encouraging. Only now let all do their duty, and the work will go right on, for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. Send

*Note: The reference in the excerpt to "move the saints with one shoulder" is ambiguous without a fuller context. This comes from an interesting bit of eisegesis at the beginning of the article relating to Zephaniah 3:9, which Warner says comes from "a glorious chapter of present truth." The text actually reads, "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (KJV. The NRSV says "with one accord"). Warner bases his article on an 'inspired' marginal reading in his version of the Bible which says, "or with one shoulder," a reading that seems to have no known linguistic validity at all. (A later correction, GT Nov 1, 1884, notes that "Bro. F. has the interest in the office held by Thomas Horton" should read, "has bought the interest.")*

This article is the last we hear of Thomas Horton. He was, apparently, a convert and follower of J.C. Fisher, and seemed to have sufficient cash to 'bail out' the dying Gospel Trumpet publishing company.

Our research shows him to have been a long-time resident of Williamston, a prosperous farmer and community leader. In 1859, he was elected Justice of the Peace and again in 1863. In 1872, he is listed as Treasurer of the town and in 1874 and 1877 he is President of the 'town council.' He seems to have been a man of property and owned the building into which Warner and the Gospel Trumpet publishing work was moved at the beginning of April, 1884 when publishing activity in Bucyrus had ceased.

In the Fall of 1884, Joseph Fisher 'purchased' Horton's interest in the work, becoming sole publisher and business manager. At this point, Horton seems to exit 'stage left.' He simply drops from the record.



Joseph C. and Allie R. Fisher

## THE FISHER MOVEMENT

Reconstruction of the timeline of our earliest history is proving much more difficult than we presupposed. Much more 'digging' remains to be done. A problem we often run into is that of contradictions in the record itself. But later writing from 'memory' often leads to such problems and the contradictions cannot always be satisfactorily resolved.

Our best information now indicates that Joseph and Allie Fisher 'came out' of the Michigan Eldership of the Churches of God sometime in 1880, at least a year before Warner withdrew from the Northern Indiana Eldership over the questions of sectism and church organization—also great concerns of D.S. Warner. Between 15 and 20 people walked out of the Michigan Eldership meeting (accounts vary).

Fisher later accepted holiness teaching in an evangelistic meeting held by Warner in northern Indiana. He became 'Corresponding Editor' of the *Trumpet* in January, 1882.

The 'church of God movement' did not originate in Michigan as a result of Warner's work, but was the outcome of the Fishers' efforts. It was this movement that saved the day for us.



## EARLY CHURCH OF GOD LEADER HONORED



**Editor's Note:** The photo and news article which follows were submitted to us from Bakyrmen Nongpluh (who attended the ceremony in Shillong) by courtesy of David Neidert of Anderson School of Theology. We are grateful.

"Yesterday (Sept 12, 2009) the Government of Meghalaya through the District Council, unveiled the statue of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy. Many outstanding politicians delivered speeches expressing their awe and admiration for his contribution to our people and the nation. The following is reported today in the well-read newspaper, *The Shillong Times*.

"Rev. Nichols-Roy was a true nationalist, a compassionate leader and missionary. With his vision, the Sixth Schedule was framed to safeguard and give special status

to indigenous tribes of the North-East through autonomous district councils." Mr. Kyndiah, former Union Tribal Affairs Minister and a close associate of Rev. Nichols-Roy said while addressing the function.

Mr. Kyndiah recalled the contribution of Rev. Nichols-Roy toward the hill state movement and his opposition to the British Government's move to make Shillong the capital of East Pakistan during the partition of India.

"Rev. Nichols-Roy was a visionary, he thought ahead of his time and shaped the destiny of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills autonomous district councils," Mr. Kyndiah said.



Photo courtesy of Church of God Archives

## J.J.M. NICHOLS-ROY

Joy Mohan Roy, for so he was first called, was born in a Christian home near the Bangladesh border in June, 1884. He converted to the Christian faith in Shillong during his final high school years. In 1904, while a student at Calcutta University, he met John A.D. Khan, R.N. Mundul, and Mosir Moses and discovered they believed as he did. His mentor was Wooley Mohan Roy (who had learned the holiness doctrine from the Salvation Army) who gave him copies of a Methodist paper and the *Gospel Trumpet*.

He left Calcutta before finishing his Masters degree to become a Church of God evangelist. In 1906, he married American missionary Evelyn Nichols. Together, they raised up congregations all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya.

In 1921, Nichol-Roy entered the arena of State politics. He had a special interest in religious minorities and soon made his mark as an upright, compassionate man of God, as well as a wise and effective politician. In 1926, he became a Minister of the State Government, a position he held for many years. His continual pleading for minority rights and religious freedom ultimately helped enshrine them in the Constitution of India.

But he also left a great spiritual legacy as well. The Church of God in Meghalaya today consists of nearly 800 congregations and 100,000 adherents. When he died in November, 1959, he was mourned in both church and state as a man for all seasons. He had stood loyally with the Church of God for more than fifty years.



## GREAT LEADER OR CONFUSED HERETIC?

Well, as with a great many other things, it all depends who you ask. If you were to ask Borman Roy Sohkhia, a long-time pastor-evangelist in the Church of God in Meghalaya, India, the answer would be quite simply: "J.J.M. Nichols-Roy was the great leader in the Church of God Movement in India" (Masters Degree Thesis, Anderson School of Theology, 1979).

If you were to ask Charles E. Brown, long-time Editor-in-Chief of the Gospel Trumpet Company, Nichols-Roy had not only 'backslidden' from his high calling to the ministry of the Church of God in India, but had either embraced (or at least refused to condemn in clear, bold reformation language) doctrines which Brown considered contrary to 'orthodox' Church of God doctrine as he understood it. In fact, disfellowshipping Nichols-Roy was the only proper Christian response.

J.M. Roy (James J.M. Nichols-Roy after his marriage to Evelyn Nichols) had, from the very beginning of the work in India, very strongly opposed the introduction of a foreign

mission system' particularly in South India (but doubtless sided with Khan, Tasker, and Moses in opposing it anywhere in India). This would not have endeared him to Brown in the long run, since Brown seems to have believed in 'spiritual democracy' only in the United States and not in the 'mission fields.' Brown was a strong opponent of G.P. Tasker, a Church of God missionary who vigorously advocated 'spiritual democracy' in India as well.

Nichols-Roy was the husband of an American missionary who was given to "fanciful prophetic speculations" and—very much worse in Brown's view—the 'tongues experience' (Borman Roy Sohkhia insists, "Tongues was never accepted as the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence," 1979:5.) Through her husband's influence, however, she did change her mind in later years on some issues). But the very idea that it had any biblical validity of any kind irked Brown.

Nichols-Roy himself believed (as a number of leading early Church of God leaders did, including F.G. Smith) that the 'tongues' of Acts 2 referred to historical languages and the reference in I Corinthians 14 was to a prayer language. Many of the leading Anderson 'brethren'—and Brown in particular—were very opposed to such a notion.

But there was even more. In 1921, Nichols-Roy was elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly representing Shillong.



J.J.M. & Evelyn Nichols-Roy and First Child c.1908

In 1927, the Governor of the State of Assam appointed him as a Minister of the Government—with the clear and agreed understanding that he could continue to preach the Gospel. The Missionary Board promptly withdrew its financial support of the work in Meghalaya. C.E. Brown considered politics "a dirty business" and considered Nichols-Roy to have disqualified himself from full fellowship.

Even Brown admitted that Nichols-Roy was a very scholarly man (and was extensively published by the *Gospel Trumpet*), but when Nichols-Roy began to waffle on the question of pre-millennialism, refusing to be dogmatic one way or the other, Brown had heard enough and 'disfellowshipped' him. Nichols-Roy not only questioned Missionary Board policy (as his close friend and colleague, George P. Tasker, had done and whom he and his wife vigorously defended before the Board) but he dared to disagree theologically with the leading brethren in the U.S.A.

Thus, in an unprecedented and unofficial action, Brown went to Shillong, Meghalaya in 1952 and 'ordained' the leader of a small dissident Church of God group there as the 'true'

— Cont'd page 7



J.J.M. Nichols-Roy









The family were presented with copies of the *Church of God Historian* for 2007 featuring the dedication of the Cabin, as well as copies of *The Book of Noah*, which describes more of Brother Warren's work during the beginning of the Church of God. In addition, they were given a copy of *The Evening Light and Salvation Echoes* (1897) featuring a great many of Barney Warren's hymns.

Coming from Church of Christ and Nazarene backgrounds, the Harrisons and Crawfords shared that their line of the Warren family was also musically inclined.

As our time together drew to a close, Doug Welch said, "If Barney could have been here today, he probably would have written a song about you." Sadie replied, "He already did—" A CHILD OF GOD!" Dale then led us in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Cont'd from page 5

leader of the 'true' Church of God in Meghalaya—an action which, according to Sohkhia and other missionary leaders in the U.S. created no end of needless division there.

It was not long, however, before both India missionaries and mission executives began to realize this treatment of Nichols-Roy was not only unwarranted, but wrong. They saw him as "a strong man of God," "a scholarly man," "a great theologian." Missionary Gordon Schieck wrote of him, "Brother Nichols-Roy has a prophetic way about him, and when he prays for people, there is a consciousness of God's presence" (letter to Missionary Board, February 1959).

Borman Roy Sohkhia concluded: "As a matter of fact all the leaders of the church and all the members of the Missionary Board except C.E. Brown held Nichols-Roy as a leader and great pioneer of the Movement in India" (1979:98). In spite of it all, Nichols-Roy stood fast, refusing to let bitterness or resentment rule him. To the end of his life in 1959, he continued to be reelected and reappointed as a Minister of the Government and to serve the Church of God in Meghalaya—and indeed in all of India.

Under the circumstances, we can only wonder what power game lay behind this wrangling over doctrinal issues of little or no consequence. Matters of doctrinal taste (call them 'convictions' if you will) must never outweigh the duty of love to all who are in Christ.

— D.E. Welch

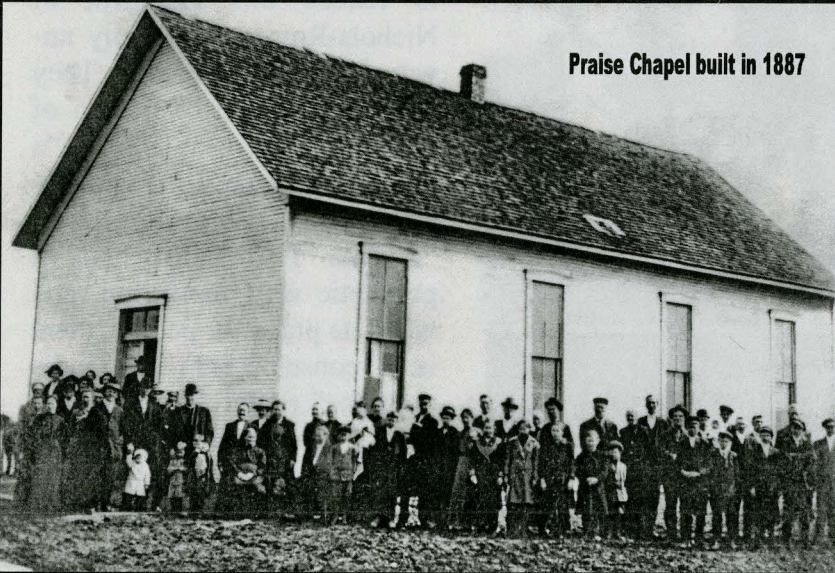


Byrum Farm Randolph Co. IN  
Farmstead photo superimposed  
on present empty property

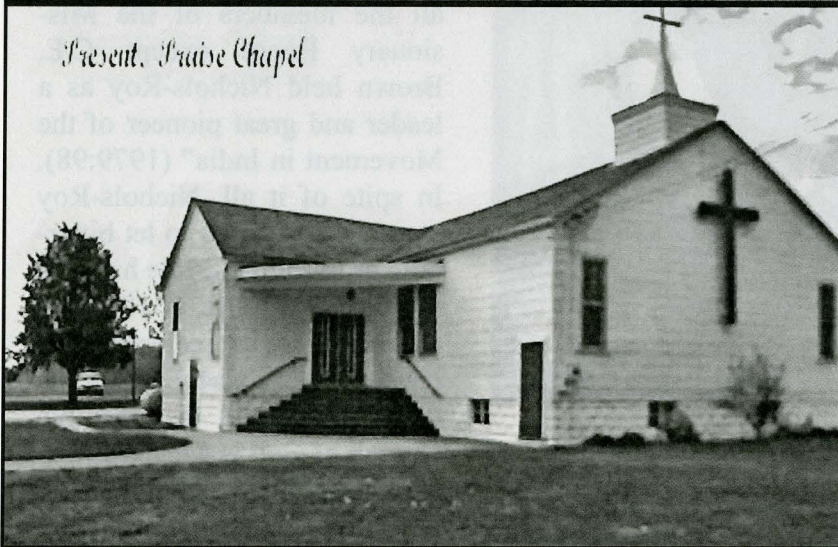


Recreation by  
Stulz Digital 2009

Praise Chapel built in 1887



Present. Praise Chapel

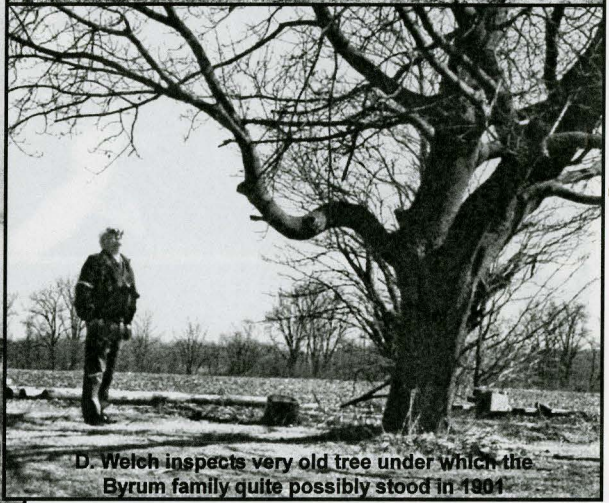


## THE PILOT'S VOICE

A few years ago, I had the privilege of visiting the Byrum home place with ninety-four year old Elizabeth Preston, the granddaughter of Fletcher Byrum, who was an older brother of Enoch and Noah Byrum.

This past year, as my wife read Isabel Byrum's book, *The Pilot's Voice*, aloud, I would stop her and tell her, "I know that place; I know where it is." By the time we had finished the book, I could not wait to head back to Randolph County in eastern Indiana to trace the story and the steps of Noah

Byrum Family c1901



D. Welch inspects very old tree under which the  
Byrum family quite possibly stood in 1901

Byrum as a teenager.

Noah had revealed to the readers of the *Gospel Trumpet* that the book his wife had written (*The Pilot's Voice*) many years before was really about himself. At first, Noah had not wanted her to publish it, but when she persuaded him it would be helpful to others—and that she would change the names of the characters in the story—he finally gave his permission. Published by the Gospel Trumpet Company in 1916, it proved a popular book.

Although it has now been more than a hundred years since the events recorded in the book actually occurred, it was a delight to find the actual places where the events themselves took place. The photos above are from our collection.

— Dale E. Stultz