

# The Church of God Historian

Fall 2013

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**“Telling the Untold Stories,”** *by David Neidert, editor*

“Okay, tell me how this newsletter operates?” That question opened a treasure trove.

For the next three hours, it was my privilege to sit at the feet, so to speak, of Doug Welch and Dale Stultz as they told me story after story of the Church of God and the people who went before us. It was a time set to pass the baton of editors, from Doug to myself. But it turned into a storytelling event, one that I will long treasure because it added to my CHOG heritage and set the stage for wondering about the future of sharing historical narrative.

As Dale displayed photos of our history on two monitors that sit side by side, Doug filled in the accounts. We flipped through private journals entrusted to these two historians as we considered where we have been as a church, how it led us to the present, what stories need to be told, and what it

might all mean for future generations. Questions were followed by serious reflection, which were followed by more questions. A novice learning from two men who have spent years chronicling the church’s history from a keen sense of responsibility, integrity, and faithfulness to where the research would lead.

We eventually covered all the agenda I had in mind...number of issues per year, when are they printed, where are they printed...all those operational tasks that make something both efficient and effective. But it was during these hours that I caught a vision...along with more questions and a sense of responsibility I’d not arrived with...of

how this newsletter might continue to honestly and forthrightly archive the history of the Church of God (Anderson).

A comment from Doug captured it all and will become the ongoing focus of this newsletter I inherited... “Telling the Untold Stories.” It is a grand undertaking and challenge to tell our stories faithfully bathed in academic rigor, but one essential if we are to move confidentially into the future.

Thanks, Doug and Dale, for setting the stage. A new chapter is opening.



## Church of God

### Historian

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

Vol 14 No 1  
Fall 2013

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, Indiana.

### The Historical Society Purpose

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 concerning 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.

## When Dust Was King *by DE Welch*

The decade 1929-1939 was a very difficult time for the Church of God, both in North America and in other parts of the world. The flow of money (assuming it ever got past the trickle-stage in most of our congregations) virtually dried up. Many small rural congregations—and the Church of God then was still predominantly rural—were forced to close. Many who had attended Church of God congregations—some for many years—began to attend other ‘evangelical’ congregations, most of which were located in small towns nearby. Or, if families lost their farms and their livelihoods, as many did, they often migrated to other regions or cities or states.

The 1920s were bright with hope and prosperity in spite of some financial reverses early in the decade. Especially was this true for farm families. Mechanized farming appeared—as did automobiles and larger homes. Many of our congregations experienced what someone has called “the glory days.”

But the decade of the '30s changed all that. What had happened? What had happened was a Great Depression and a Great Drought,

leading to a devastating Dust Bowl in the Great Plains of North America, which some ‘experts’ estimate to have affected a hundred million acres and to have blown many hundreds of thousands of tons of soil into the Atlantic Ocean. Hardest hit were Oklahoma and the Panhandle of Texas, with parts of Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico being affected. The Depression and the Drought were terrible in themselves, but the Dust Bowl was the last straw (and that nearly blew away with the multiplied millions of tons of topsoil, ending up on a fence line somewhere). Western Canada, particularly the southern half of Saskatchewan and parts of southern and eastern Alberta—known as the ‘breadbasket’ of Canada—were similarly affected. Nearly two-thirds of the farm families in Saskatchewan were on government relief; men often left the farms to look for work in the towns and cities; and many families migrated, some north, some to other Provinces. Once-fertile farms ended up along fence lines or in ditches—and great clouds of grasshoppers ate everything left (including

clothes on clotheslines). Birth rates declined, immigration fell sharply, and unemployment became a ‘pandemic.’ The dust had taken over.

Many of our congregations in Alberta and Saskatchewan were severely affected by the Depression, the Drought, and the Dust Bowl. As in the US, many rural Church of God families (but not all by any means) were convinced God would intervene, rain would come, wheat could again be king, prices would rebound, and life would return to normal. So they stayed put and ‘toughed it out.’ And it happened—eventually. By the time World War II began (that was 1939 for Canada; at the end of 1941 for the USA), the prairies were experiencing a turn-around. But, for some of our prosperous rural congregations it was too late. Migrations had decimated them.

We now have a first-hand chronicle of this in the

(Continued page 7)

## Food for Thought *by Dr. Merle D. Sturge, Historian*

A comment my students at Anderson University hear with, to their minds, appalling frequency is: "This is a book you need to read before you graduate." I do read lots of books. Even if I were not a college professor I would still read books, as many as possible. I'm happy to stand in the tradition of Russell Byrum, who believed that ministers should always carry a book; they could read while waiting for the train or in any other situation where they had fifteen minutes of free time. In an issue of *Our Ministerial Letter*, a little newsletter published by the Gospel Trumpet Company for a few years between 1910 and 1917, Byrum listed more than a dozen books he thought people should be reading. In that vein, I thought I would offer a short list of very valuable books, most of them fairly recent, that shed light on such topics as biblical interpretation, American Christianity, or Christianity in general.

In a previous column I noted Thomas Bergler's study of American youth ministry, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Eerdmanns). Read this book for its analysis and to understand youth ministry as it is practiced in many quarters of the church today. Bergler asks some very important questions about that practice and its implications for the life of the church as a whole.

Douglas John Hall, *What Christianity is Not* (Wipf and Stock). Hall is a Canadian professor of theology who

asserts that Christianity is not a culture religion, nor is it to be equated with the Bible, doctrine, or a system of ethics, each of these in a chapter length discussion. This is a provocative book which raises some points with which many readers will disagree. But it also asks some serious questions and makes many valid points, including the last – but you'll have to read the book to discover what that is.

Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (Oxford). First published 24 years ago, Balmer's "journey into the Evangelical subculture" is now in its fourth edition. That's a considerable recommendation in itself. Balmer knows whereof he writes; he grew up in an Evangelical church.

Richard Wightman Fox, *Jesus in America: A History* (Harper San Francisco). Americans are fascinated with Jesus. But that fascination interprets him very differently, from personal savior to cultural hero, to national obsession. Fox's book is a study of religion in America viewed through the prism of belief in Jesus.

Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (InterVarsity). InterVarsity Press has undertaken two very large publishing ventures, each with an eye toward resourcing the theological interpretation of the Bible. The first project is now complete, the multi-volume *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*; the

second, a companion is now in publication, *The Reformation Commentary on Scripture*.

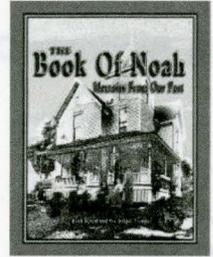
George's volume is an introduction to the latter, and a very good description of the Protestant Reformers' approach to the Bible.

Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford). Christianity is growing explosively among peoples who live south of the Equator. In several respects the Christianity of the global south does not resemble American Christianity, still less European Christianity. Jenkins' book describes the phenomenon and, especially its understanding and practice of the Bible.

George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford). If you were to read only one book on American Fundamentalism, Marsden's is the one to choose. And if you're really interested in Fundamentalism, follow up Marsden with Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford)

Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford). People tend to believe that the rebellious Sixties changed everything by departing from the received traditions of the previous generation. McLeod pokes some holes in that kind of thinking.

When you finish these, let me know. There are many more books you need to read before you graduate.



The Historical Society has a number of **books still available**. We hope you will purchase a personal copy or purchase one for your church, a family member, or a friend. These books would make a great gift to your local library. Maybe a gift to your pastor for the holidays. There are several hundred copies of the *Book of Noah*, *Old Main*, and approximately 1,000 copies of the *Gospel Trumpet Years*. We also have about a dozen books on the founding of the Church of God in India by Dr. Bakyrmen Nongpluh (\$15 each). The book covers the life of JJ Mohan Nichols-Roy and AD Khan (see the previous issue of the Church Historian for details). Check the website for details on the Historical Society books. Send your check or money order to the Society at the address listed.

## If Only Artifacts Could Talk... *by David Neidert*

The 90 minute drive put me in his office at the Salem Church of God in Clayton, Ohio, on a crisp day in November 1983. After coordinating a time for



meeting and the interview, it was about to happen. I was nervous. I knew the others I had interviewed for this project, but this was different. I had only read about him over the years; now I sat before him with pen, note tablet, and a cassette tape recorder. <sup>1</sup>

I was a graduate student taking a course on the Church of God Reformation with Dr. Walter Froese. My research topic was the impact of music and singing on the heritage of the Church of God. My work led me to interview Robert Nicholson, Robert Reardon, Harold Philips, and a brief chat with Bill Gaither after an evening church service. All except Gaither were audio

recorded so that I could eventually get it right when the structure of the research began.<sup>2</sup> The intent of the research was to gain insight into our theology and how we sang and sing our faith.

Oldham was a significant part of this heritage with what came to be known as the Christian Brotherhood Hour.<sup>3</sup> As Welch recalls his coming to the Church of God in Canada, it was "The Church of the Christian Brotherhood Hour."<sup>4</sup>

CE Brown, writing in 1951, noted how significant this ministry was since its beginning in 1947. He notes, "*the Church of God now has a coast-to-coast broadcast by means of transcriptions of the Christian Brotherhood Hour. This half-hour broadcast is given over 150 stations....The great preaching messages have been delivered by Dr. Dale Oldham, pastor of the Park Place Church of God.*"<sup>5</sup>

The pump organ displayed in this picture was owned by Oldham.<sup>6</sup> The organ, now in the possession of his daughter-in-law, Laura Lee Oldham Nicholson (seated in the photo), had been handed down through the family. The pump organ is completely self contained, in that it folds up into its own box with a handle (see the insert). According to Nicholson, Oldham "got the pump organ from an older minister." Music appraisers call this a "field organ," meant to be used in traveling or places away from

structured environments. These "reed organs" were "invented by William V. Pezzoni, a Brooklyn, New York violin maker and first introduced in April 1900 to the general market."<sup>7</sup>

As often happens, over time, the full stories of people fade from our memories. It is when artifacts like these are dusted off that research begins and gaps in our understanding begin to emerge.<sup>8</sup> Oldham was familiar with this type of pump organ as a child, when his father bought one for the family to be used in the church. Oldham also notes that as a traveling musical evangelist, preachers often brought boxes of books and other items to tent meetings.<sup>9</sup> So, it is easy to conjecture Oldham utilized this pump organ as he traveled.

If only artifacts could talk, what stories they would tell and the information we desire to know would be completed. They could possibly fill in the thoughts, trials, and joys that are forgotten, even by ones being interviewed about our musical heritage. Oldham never talked about his evangelistic music ministry during our conversation. But if the pump organ had been in the room, it might have jarred a story or two, like an old friend who begins, "do you remember the time when..."

*Author's Note: you may listen to a pump organ or field organ like the one pictured by going to YouTube and searching Antique Pump Organ.*

See the footnote on page 5

The pump organ of W. Dale Oldham



## Traveling from Home to Heritage *by Dale Stultz with David Neidert*

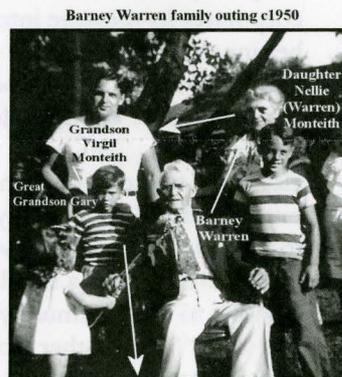
It's been in the family for years, taking a space in the basement or attic, and no one knows what to do with it. There is historical value to the artifact, but what's next?

This is the ever important work of historical societies, museums, and archives across the world. The point of their work is to hold in trust the treasures of our past, to use them for teaching, to place them in historical and visual context, and to research the stories sparked by these items. Such is the case with the traveling trunk of Barney Warren, now in the possession of the Historical Society.

Many pieces find their way to any society or museum via relationships. Dale Stultz, a visual restoration historian for the Society, began a relationship years ago with Gary Monteith, great grandson of Barney Warren. The friendship started when Stultz worked with him to bring the Barney Warren Cabin from Ohio to rest in its current location in Anderson (IN). Warren, one of the most prolific hymn writers for the Church of God, traveled extensively, often by rail. The

picture to the bottom left shows Warren as a young man with the "Flying Ministers," a singing and evangelistic troupe headed by DS Warner.

While the troupe ceased to travel, one does not dispose of a good piece of luggage...faithful for years in protecting one's belongings. It may be continually used or eventually find its way into the family at-large. Thus, in time, Warren's traveling trunk became a part of the "family" moving from one household to another.



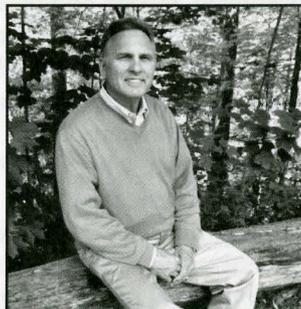
Barney Warren family outing c1950

In the end, the trunk became the possession of Warren's great grandson, Gary Monteith (*the smaller boy in the stripped shirt in the picture above*).

It is in these moments when families often make one of several decisions. Sometimes, families dispose of heirlooms in garage sales, give them to a thrift shop, or toss them into a garbage can because no one seems to want them any more. But Gary had a sense of history, the importance of his great grandfather Warren, and the value

housed in an artifact of a

Great grandson Gary Monteith 2013



trunk. Monteith, via his connection to the Society through Stultz, decided the next move for this traveling heirloom. It had traveled around the family, now it would travel to the Historical Society as a way to preserve it for future use.

What's next for this trunk? It may, in time, come to reside in the Barney Warren Cabin, a fitting location as a possible attempt to restore the home of this important figure. While the trunk's future is not known, one thing this is for sure...the Historical Society is again meeting its mission "to encourage the collection and preservation of artifacts and documents relating to the history of the Church of God."

Trunk on Dale's front porch 2013



Footnotes, *If Artifacts Could Talk* (page 4)

<sup>1</sup> Personal Interview. Salem Avenue Church of God, Church offices. Dayton, OH. November 14, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> My audio recordings and interviews are now housed in the Church of God Archives (Anderson).

<sup>3</sup> "On January 4, 1947, broadcasting from radio station KGGF from Coffeyville, Kansas, Dale Oldham began a radio ministry with a program called the Christian Brotherhood Hour (CBH)." [http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=30204039)

[page=gr&GRid=30204039](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=30204039)

<sup>4</sup> Dale Stultz and Doug Welch, "The Christian Brotherhood Hour," Gospel Trumpet Years: 1881-1961, Historical Society of the Church of God, Evangel, Nappanee, IN: 2011, 161.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Ewing Brown, When the Trumpet Sounded, Anderson, IN: The Warner Press, 1951, 379.

<sup>6</sup> Oldham's father, WH Oldham, was a pioneer worker in the Midwest as early as 1906. Brown, Trumpet, 226. Oldham was, as a child, witness to evangelistic troupes.

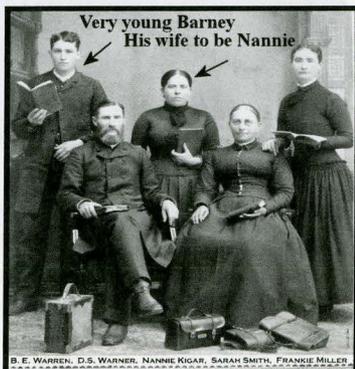
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.reedsoc.org/articlearchive/connn.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Dale Stultz was asked by the Nicholsons to get this pump organ out of its box and checked. This encounter led to this article.

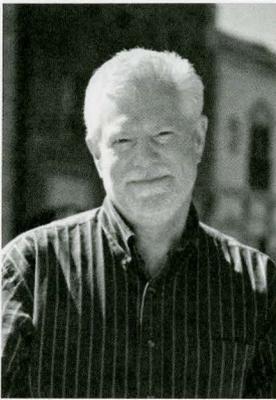
<sup>9</sup> Dale Oldham, Giants Along My Path, Warner Press, IN: 30, 32-33.

Useful reading: The Rest of the Story (Nicholson and Oldham Marriage) Historian, Volume 12 Number 3 Spring 2012

Warner evangelistic company c1886



B. E. WARREN, D. S. WARNER, NANNIE KIGAR, SARAH SMITH, FRANKIE MILLER



## Meet the new editor:

*It is an honor and challenge to step into the role of editor for The Church of God Historian. Many may not know me....so here is a snip of my background.*

*I am an author, teacher, and public speaker. It has been my privilege to teach at the university level, publish several books, write curriculum, and edit other newsletters before stepping into this endeavor. You may read all about me at <https://sites.google.com/a/anderson.edu/david-l-neidert/> Or <http://davidlneidert.com>*

*I am also a former graduate student of Doug Welch...I hope you trust he trained me well. I look forward to serving you in the time ahead.*

## Singing Faith with New Tones *by Scott Rees*

Throughout its history, the Church of God has celebrated, taught, and passed down its theological identity through its hymns. But with more and more churches using largely contemporary worship styles, what to do?

For the past few weeks, Amity Rees, a full time student at the Anderson University School of Theology, has been working to create new melodies and music forms to mold with the poetry and message of early Church of God hymns.

Rees says she was inspired while participating in an adult bible study lead by Church of God Historian Dr. Merle Strege. Strege suggested that he would like to see people in the movement re-envision some of the old songs.

"It is commonplace among reflective folks in the Church of God that people have sung their faith. Church teaching has been communicated from generation to generation primarily through the songs written by Church of God writers and composers," says Strege.

Rees agreed and immediately went home and got to work in front of her piano, working out melodies and chord progressions.

"I am only a 'first generation' Church of God participant, so my scope is limited to my experiences in Michigan and central Indiana. But, I have noticed that we seem to struggle with our identity," she says. "Part of

that is our absorption into a greater Christian culture while failing to pass on our particular theological identity. Part of it is a need to recontextualize that identity. If a congregation is largely contemporary in worship style, the music is more generic, more universal. That can be good and bad. But if we are not singing it and we're not preaching it, we are losing it."

She says right now she is just focusing on creating something - engaging in the poetry in a way that incorporates its message into her inner faith experience and she is hopeful the experience could be equally valuable to others. "I'm not a classically trained musician, but if I get the opportunity to build a team, perhaps we can record them as a small offering to the community," she says. "Maybe other worship leaders and church musicians will see the value in this idea and create something for their own churches if the gap is there."

Although Rees is relatively new to the church culture, she does not take lightly the strong connections so many feel to the hymns. "I don't want to send the message that there is something "wrong" with an old hymn, I love old hymns. My church is quite traditional and that is one of the beautiful things about it," she says.

In some cases, she found it necessary to rewrite

some verses due to old language and contemporary cultural context, and it could upset some purists.

"But hopefully, some will find a new way into our identity. I hope what I create can be a humble offering to coexist with, not replace, what we have," she says.

Strege says the danger of a mass loss of theology is very much real and the work of Rees is important because it is developing ways to keep alive the songs that convey these theologies.

"The musical idioms are more contemporary, but the words and message remain," he says.

*Scott Rees is a School of Theology MDV student & journalist.*

*Hymns and Spiritual Songs*

**1930 Hymns and Spiritual Songs:  
Gospel Trumpet Company**

form of the story of a once-prominent congregation of the Church of God in rural Alberta. In the interesting and well-written, *A Church Chronicle* (tracked down by Walter Froese), Harvey D. Johnson tells the story of the Church of God at Eyehill, a rural district south of Provost, Alberta, the congregation in which he grew up and which his family did so much to establish and maintain.

The Eyehill district, however, was in the infamous drought-and-dust bowl 'triangle.' In the early to mid-'30s, when their farmland blew away, many of the congregants were forced to out-migrate, leaving fewer and fewer to carry on. Eventually, even those few who remained—and who watched their children move to the cities to find work, or end up in a military grave somewhere in Europe—grew old and died.

The Eyehill (Provost) congregation was born about 1914 (perhaps a little earlier, perhaps a little later). Along with Edmonton

(which began in 1906) and Ferintosh (now closed) it shared the spotlight of prominence among congregations in Alberta—at least in terms of its ultimate influence in the story of the Church of God in Western Canada (and indeed the Church of God in the rest of the world, for two of its young people, Irene Engst and Dewey Johnson, later became Church of God missionaries). By 1953, however, the deadly combination of Depression, Drought, and Dust Bowl (and now a fourth 'horseman', Death) had done their work and the remaining congregation closed the doors of the small frame church building for good. In a section captioned "Exodus," Harvey concludes:

*"Perhaps the term 'dispersion' is the better long-term expression for what took place after the memorable 1937 Camp-meeting. It must have been extremely difficult for both those who left and those who stayed on....Remarkably the influence of the church did not die or fade*

*away. Rather, it spread to several new localities."*

'Dispersion'—I like that. It is much more in keeping with reality than 'death,' which is often used to describe the fate of so many of our small congregations. Eyehill, which was founded and maintained by laypersons in very difficult circumstances, is a metaphor of hope—a beacon to light our way. And it is a paradigm to remind us that the work of our hands can very easily and quickly turn to dust. In our arrogance we assume we can control the future.

Church chronicles like that of Eyehill should disabuse us of that notion.



The picture to the left is of Stettler, Alberta, Canada. This was a town near the author's childhood home. Above is a steam tractor, also from the area of Stettler.



## The Historical Society of the Church of God

### Send Correspondence to:

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Anderson, Indiana 46015

### Email Correspondence to:

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Historical Society President  
mdstrege@anderson.edu

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

Merle D. Strege, President • Dale E. Stultz, Vice-President • Sadie B. Evans, Secretary-Treasurer • D.E. Welch, Publisher and Managing Editor Emeritus • David Neidert, Current editor & webmaster.

### Society Membership

Membership to the Society is open to all who are vitally interested in what the Society desires to accomplish as stated in its purpose. Membership dues are \$15 per year (\$10 for students.) Checks should be made payable to: The Historical Society of the Church of God and sent to the Society's address listed under correspondence.

[www.chohistoricalociety.org](http://www.chohistoricalociety.org)

Haven't viewed the Society's website in a while? It has been fully updated. Visit the site often. Share the URL above with your friends and those who might be interested. Help us expand the readership.

## Where are we headed?

Mapquest asks two main questions: What is your starting point and what is your destination? As mentioned in the lead story, we have a starting point in our church founding and we have a destination, "to tell the untold stories." The space in between is the focus of this newsletter.

Over the coming months and issues, we will continue looking for the untold stories, but also consider themes or ideas that connect them together. Might there be biographies that need exposure, endeavors known only to a local congregation or region but not to the wider body, or cooperative

ventures that have changed the world? The stories are out there...our task is collecting and connecting them as we weave the memory of our heritage. ***As a reader, become engaged with us.*** Let us know what areas might be of interest, threads that need researched and reported.

While no newsletter can capture it all, we will work at combining our ideas and yours. We will also be thinking of ways to broaden the readership and audience of the Society. There is much to do and we welcome

your input. Drop us a letter or send an email to [dneidert@anderson.edu](mailto:dneidert@anderson.edu) if you have an idea for the newsletter. We are looking forward to the journey.

