

# Church of God Historian

Historical Society of the Church of God

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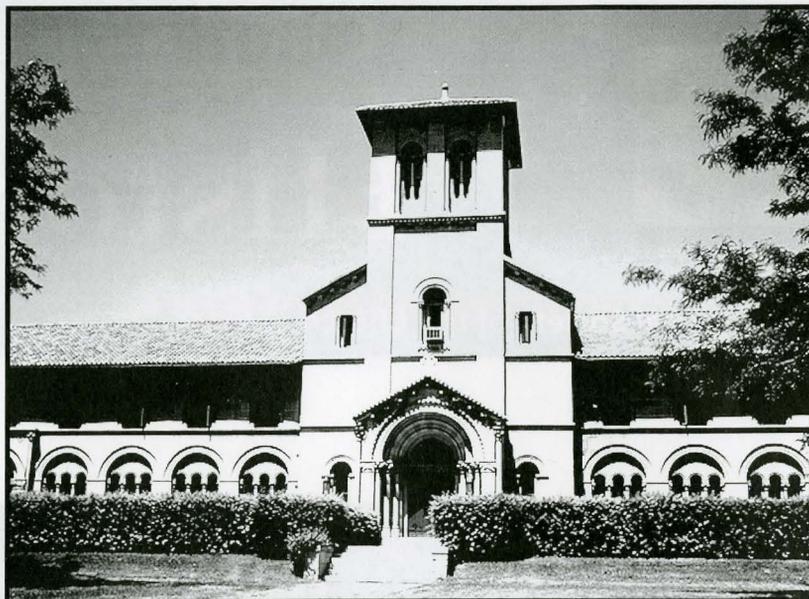
Retired veteran missionaries. L to R: Robert Clark; Sidney Johnson; Frances Clark; Jean Johnson

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

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This newsletter is published three times a year: Fall; Winter; and is managed by the Executive Committee of the Society. It is published on behalf of its members and is printed in Anderson IN. All correspondence should be addressed to: Historical Society of the Church of God, P.O. Box 702, Anderson, Indiana 46015.

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



Oberlin Graduate School of Theology

This issue of the *Church of God Historian* features the role of Oberlin College and Graduate School of Theology in the history of the Church of God (Anderson) and in Church of God missions. Our main story is written by Frances Merrill Edmonson Clark with the assistance of her daughter-in-law, Sharon Pearson. Frances and her first husband were challenged to missionary service while students at Oberlin Graduate School of Theology.

It is not often we are privileged to hear important historical 'stories' from someone who was actually there at the time. Frances is now 97 years of age and living in Anderson.

Frances attended Oberlin at the same time Bob and Jerry Reardon were there, but, according to Vivian Nieman, Church of God Archivist, several noted Church of God leaders attended there, including Anna Koglin, James Earl Massey, Gene Newberry, and Irene Caldwell. Read on!



Robert and Frances Clark and their family in Bangladesh, where they served from 1947-1962.

# The Anderson College- Oberlin Connection

by

Frances Merrill Edmondson Clark



Oberlin College of north central Ohio was a hub of social reformation among Christians from its first days. Its founder was a leader in the emancipation efforts, and many escaped slaves found safety in the 'safe houses' of Oberlin. Over the years it developed into a first-class liberal arts college attracting quality professors as well as students. As reported in the Oberlin College Archives,

From 1833 to 1966, the Graduate School of Theology at Oberlin College trained Christian ministers, missionaries, and educators in a nonsectarian, interdenominational setting. Founded for the purpose of spreading of the Gospel throughout the Mississippi Valley, the school approached theological education with the distinctive combination of evangelical

fervor and liberal outlook...

Known as the Graham School of Theology (after T. W. Graham who served as Dean from 1923-1948) of Oberlin College during the years of this particular story, the seminary became an attractive alternative for Church of God graduates from Anderson College who desired further theological training. The School offered tuition scholarships and work opportunities. Also, its progressive history of anti-slavery and commitment to help impoverished communities, concerns shared by the Church of God movement, led our ministerial students to attend, and recommend the school to others.

Bob Reardon and Warren Edmondson graduated from Anderson College in 1940. As young ministerial students they felt a need for more training in Bible, theology, and the "how to" of pastoral work. Friends and fellow Boosters at Anderson College, Bob and Warren, began their M. Div. (B. Div.) studies together at Graham.

These young men were very unlike one another. Bob Reardon's mother had the priority of keeping her menfolk turned out in immaculate and pressed clothing, ready to take their natural places in leadership. On the other hand, Warren's father, an industrial worker,

was a hands-on dad, who enjoyed having a son interested in fixing things around the home. So, Warren often had a greasy patch somewhere on a rough shirt, useful for being under a car or immersed in its innards. The two young men helped each other round off their rough or too polished places and became close friends during their year of rooming together.

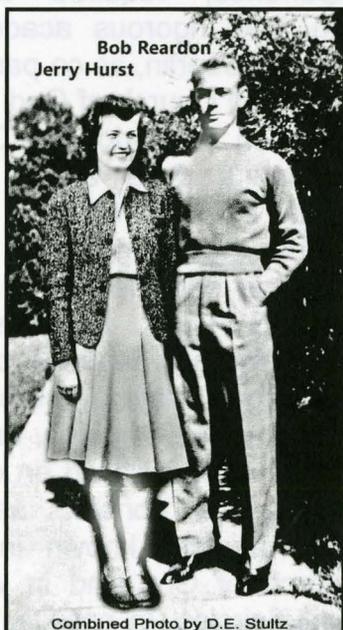
Bob had had his pick of several special girls at Anderson but fell in love with the pretty "girl preacher" Geraldine Hurst, whose gracious personality suited his own refined style. Also at the College, Warren had become acquainted with, and then engaged to, a rather different girl from the Bronx New York church, a multi-ethnic city congregation, who felt the Big Apple was the center of civilization. Frances Merrill was enchanted with this blonde, blue-eyed, deep bass singer with his can-do spirit.

Bob and Warren shared a mandatory Church leadership experience, required along with their rigorous academic loads at Oberlin, as co-pastors of a small Church of God congregation in Loudonville Ohio, an hour's drive away. The small country church welcomed the young men with pleasure, and the pay of perhaps \$5 a week. Bob was admired for his beautiful piano and organ playing there (as well as at the seminary and in town). He was called on often for classical concerts as his skill was well known in the Church of God and in wider public circles. In college War-

ren had worked off time as a carpenter for Rev. Warren Roark; he continued such work during his three years at Oberlin, mostly during the summers and vacations.



Both young men married in 1941, their new brides joining them at Oberlin. Both couples lived in the charming rental apartments furnished by the seminary for married students. I was now Frances Merrill Edmondson and began my Master of Religious Education at Oberlin (and finished it later at Hartford Seminary Foundation). The



married student apartments were small but gradually became gathering places for Church of God students, even those driving in for a class or two. Lots of laughter over riotous Rook games, and long sober discussions over theological and biblical teachings took place here among these serious Church of God students.

The widely read professors of Oberlin taught the application of critical methods to biblical study. They investigated the historicity of the narratives in the Bible, extrapolated meanings from the historical times of the teachings, and determined the interpretation of particular words in the original languages of the texts. Only after such analyses would students determine how such teachings could apply to a modern context. This was a far different approach from the strongly doctrinal teachings of C. E. Brown, E. E. Byrum, and D. S. Warner. The concerns that grew out of both schooling and ministry for these young leaders compelled much discussion and prayer.

From time to time John W. V. Smith, pastor of the Church of God in Cleveland, who was also taking classes (and who later became Church of God Historian) was part of these gatherings, along with others, including the young Bob Clark. By that time, Bob had graduated from the Albany State College for Teachers in New York; he was also a graduate of Anderson College. Bob attended several

classes at Oberlin while stationed, as a Conscientious Objector, in the Ohio Mental Hospital in Cleveland. (More about Bob later.)

The 2nd and 3rd years of the Reardon-Edmondson team at Oberlin Graduate School found Bob and Geraldine (Jerry) at Elyria, Ohio as pastors. Warren and Frances continued the ministry at the tiny church in Loudonville. Bride Jerry was an asset from the beginning as she had been called to ministry in her teens, and was at home in it. I, on the other hand, had no preparation as such, but enjoyed people and was completely behind my new husband in his work. That tiny church with limited facilities (the sanctuary only seated about 80) had a basement with an open room, and a toilet.

Warren and I decided to devote more time to the congregation and so found a metal cot and mattress and a hot plate. We spent Saturdays as well as Sundays visiting, and I continued to develop the youth group, adding a drama ministry. Warren preached and sang with the radio program out of Ashland. Warren had been a member of the Anderson College Quartet that traveled in evangelistic service on weekends during his years there. Along with his musical ability, he had quite a gift of artistic expression. As he preached a series on Pilgrims Progress at the church, he created a platform-wide illustration. The church members, on the whole, were warm and loving, serving us wonderful farm meals, which were so much enjoyed and appreciated.

Continued next page.....

After our weekends in Loudonville and retreating to the cleanliness and comfort of our apartment at Oberlin, our prayer times came to include requests for guidance in bringing our congregants to a concern for leadership and responsibility. In their ministry, we kept trying to help individual Christians be aware of the need to reach out to disciple others. This did not seem to happen, despite our concern that the church must itself be an evangelistic outreach. I said "It was when we were praying for them in that regard that the Lord seemed to say to me 'how about you? Don't you perhaps need to step out and show the way, to be God's in a deeper way?'"

Over several months of prayer both of us independently began feeling a sense of call to missionary service. When we broached the idea with each other, we discovered our common feeling was strong and we prayed earnestly together about such a call. We decided God indeed had called us to step out in faith in missionary service. We had not expected this call, so it took time to test our call and be certain of it. When the call felt completely clear, we wrote a postcard to the Missionary Board about our interest. No response came from the Board at that time.

As the Missions Secretaries of other denominations began visiting the Oberlin seminary in their annual search for candidates, Warren and I responded to two of them. The Methodists were much closer

to our doctrine and understanding but required church membership of all their candidates. Because we did not, as the Church of God taught, believe in standard church membership, we declined the Methodist opportunity. The Congregational Church representative was very welcoming to our statement of faith and belief and was most encouraging in offering an opportunity to serve as missionaries of that Church.

After considerable discussion we decided that as our own faith community did not seem interested, we would go as missionaries with the Congregational Church. In our application process our requests for references came to Sister Axchie Bolitho, my home pastor, and to Dr. Adam Miller, Secretary-treasurer of the Missionary Board of the Church of God (Anderson). When these requests reached those leaders they immediately responded. "What are you doing? Why are you planning on going outside our fel-

lowship to become missionaries?" We were invited to Anderson to talk with the Missionary Board and, as a result we were appointed as missionaries. This was, of course, what we had hoped for in the first place. The Board was most appreciative of Warren's abilities and potential and of our education, training and experience.

After this development with Warren and me, Bob Reardon, who deeply valued our abilities, encouraged us to stay in the United States. He especially did not want to lose Warren's leadership in the church in America.

But in the meantime, we had met F. W. Heinly, a short, unassuming middle-aged man who had worked for over 25 years in India. He told us of the vast number of Hindus and Muslims needing both the Gospel and also all the wisdom and help we might be able to bring. Our sense of call reached out to that sense of need and we subsequently volunteered for

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Graduate School of Theology— Oberlin College

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We arrived at the time of India's independence and violent division into India and East and West Pakistan. We completed fifteen years of service in East Pakistan, in the area now known as Bangladesh. After our return to the United States we pastored in New England. When Robert finished his Ph.D. we moved to Florida where he taught at Warner Southern College for seventeen years.

Throughout our ministry, the experiences, learning, and communities of Anderson and of Oberlin continued to be reflected. Bob and Jerry Reardon remained close friends and confidants and we continued to support and inspire each other as fellow travelers, even when far removed geographically and culturally.

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Receive a free copy of the Historical Society's movie:

**Anderson University  
Roots: The Workers  
Home Years,  
1906-1918**

Mail a donation of any amount to the Historical Society, P.O. Box 702, Anderson, IN 46015. Ask for a DVD.

## President's Pen



Dr. Gary Agee, President

Steadily guiding the work of the Historical Society for the past decades has been a giant among us, Doug Welch. His passion for the Lord, for the Church of God and for promotion of the Historical Society is an inspiration.



During his tenure he and vice president Dale Stultz were able to capture much of our past for future generations. Over the past year, however, Doug has considered who might replace him as editor of the *Historian*. Due to health concerns he recently decided it was time to take on more of an advisory role with the Society.

To fill the void John Aukerman has stepped forward to serve as the interim editor for the *Church of God Historian*. He offers much to the position. He has served, among other capacities, as a pastor and most recently as Professor of Discipleship at Anderson University School of Theology and Christian Ministry. Since his retirement John has volunteered for service projects including narrating the recent movie chronicling the

first decade of the university's history. He also created and manages the Society's Facebook page. Grateful for all that Doug has contributed to the society we seek to carry the baton forward. John will be a valuable part of this new team. He is an excellent writer and editor, and we look forward to working more closely with him.

## A Recent Project

This past year I was contacted by Liturgical Press and asked if I might pen a second biography on the life of Catholic civil rights leader, Daniel A. Rudd. I was informed that the volume would be included in the publishers People of God series which features prominent twentieth and twenty first century Catholics. The work was completed this winter and is slated to be released by the press in March under the title "Daniel Rudd: Calling the Church to Justice."

## Annual Meeting

The Church of God Historical Society's Annual Meeting will be June 10 to 12 at Timberick Woods in Anderson. You may come on Saturday evening, June 10. On Sunday morning, June 11, attend a local church of your choice. Dr. Merle Strege will address the Society Sunday afternoon and evening. Head back home on Monday, June 12. Full details and registration information in the Spring issue of the *Historian*.

## The Warren Edmondson Fellowship



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 Fifth at Chestnut — Anderson, Ind.

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Church of God students continued to be attracted to Oberlin for years. Anderson College started its own theological seminary, the School of Theology in. Oberlin's seminary, with its six faculty members and 20 students moved to Vanderbilt University in 1965. Some Church of God students have gone on to Vanderbilt for their higher education since this transition.

The close personal connection and hospitality the faculty offered to students at Anderson College, along with the strong spiritual foundation and doctrinal inspirations of the Church of God movement expressed in life together on campus were strong foundations of the later quests and successes these early students enjoyed in ministry and mission. Such a foundation, supplemented with the advanced teaching and experiences at Oberlin, were a dynamic springboard for Christian ministry and mission of many early Anderson graduates who have served around the world.

## Historical Society on Facebook



Please share this information with anyone and everyone you know who is active on Facebook. For the past several months, the Historical Society has been on Facebook, and we seek to grow our presence there.

What you see above is a screenshot of our page. The photo was taken on the steps of the Gospel Trumpet Family Workers Home, in 1907.

Every day, we post a photo from our historical files, along with a brief description of the people, place, or event that is pictured. As of the date of this writing, the page has 726 likes and 719 followers. When someone likes or comments on a post, their Facebook friends see it, too. And  some of our posts have reached more than 1,500 people.

To find our page, go to [facebook.com/CHOGHistory/](https://www.facebook.com/CHOGHistory/). Once you get there, click the LIKE button. Then share the page with your Facebook friends.

Two of our popular series have been photographs of the building and demolition of Warner Auditorium, and PowerPoint recordings of several Church of God Heritage Hymns.

All of the posts are still there. The only thing you have to do to access them is to like the page, then scroll down—all posts are in chronological order and easily found.