

Assemblies of God  
**HERITAGE**<sup>TM</sup>

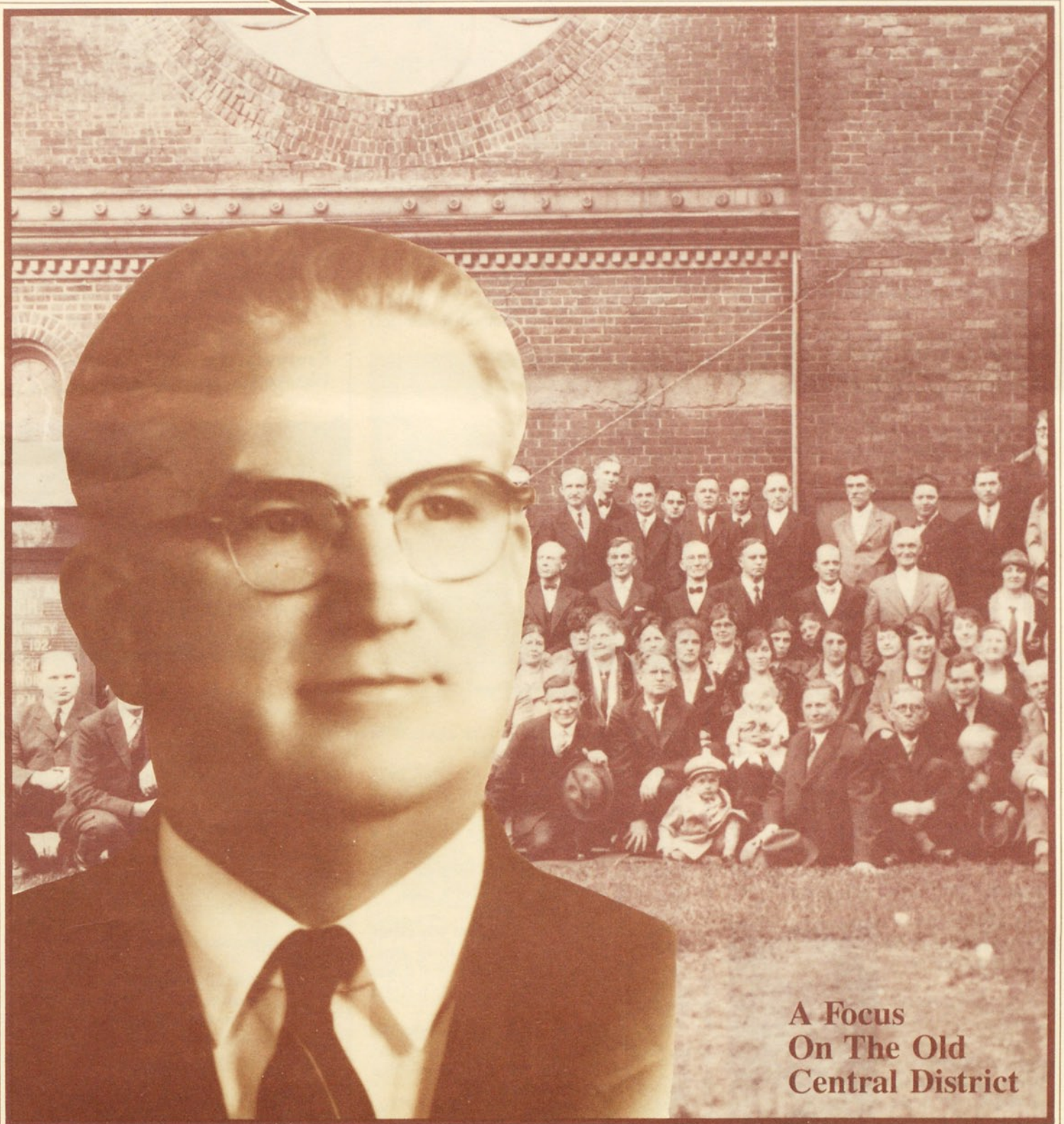
**Lillian Riggs**  
*Where Is She Now?*

**J. Narver Gortner**  
*A Key Figure in A/G*

**Morris Plotts**  
*Preaching in Iowa*

**1921 Dakota Revival**

VOL. 8, NO. 1, SPRING 1988



**A Focus  
On The Old  
Central District**

COVER: The late Gayle F. Lewis, former superintendent of A/G, and 1927 Central District Council.

# THE HERITAGE

## LETTER **Wayne Warner**

I am flattered!

That's because our readers frequently use complimentary words when they describe this publication. Some will say it's inspirational; some will say it's educational; others will say it's entertaining; while still others say it's the most important magazine they read.

I am flattered! Thank you.

No matter where you live, or what you know about our history, I think you will enjoy the stories and photographs we have selected for this, the 26th issue of *Heritage*.

I hope that you'll have trouble putting this copy down once you see stories on Morris Plotts, J. Narver Gortner, Lillian Riggs, the old Central District, and other features.

Let's talk about Morris Plotts for an example.

People who know Morris Plotts think of him as a tall, energetic, good-natured, and determined preacher on a mission, a mission to build churches and Bible schools in third world countries. Since 1955, when he resigned his pastorate in Lake Charles, Louisiana, this now nearly 82-year-old ambassador has raised the money to build 35 churches, eight houses and school buildings.

That represents more than \$3 million in offerings and more than 2 million miles on the road!

Scores will tell you that you haven't lived until you've heard Plotts tell a story about missionary needs. And they'll add that if you don't contribute after hearing him relate desperate needs in Africa, nobody could move you. His life is the kind that makes interesting books and movies. In fact, *Bwana Tembo*, *A Prince With God*, is his story on the mission field.

What you might not know about Bwana Tembo is the story you can read in this issue. That's the story of courageous evangelism in Iowa during the Great Depression. Now, that too is some story!

Part 1 of this 2-part adventure will cover the 1933 New Sharon, Iowa, revival. There scores of people were converted and the Assembly of God was established.



Wayne E. Warner is Director of the A/G Archives

Today everybody in town knows about the New Sharon Assembly of God. For one reason, it is the biggest church in town. Another is that it has ministered in this Mahaska County community for more than 50 years.

Many of the charter members still attend the church regularly; others who have moved away return from time to time to keep in touch with their spiritual roots and their brothers and sisters in the faith. The church can point with pride to the people who have been converted and nurtured here and to others who have gone into full-time Christian service.

In the next issue you'll read about Plotts and two of his musicians being thrown in jail at Montezuma, charged with being a public nuisance. You've read about Paul and Silas singing and praying "down the power," but have you read about the 20th century Montezuma jail house revival? You won't want to miss it, as we have obtained the court records and newspaper stories, and talked with people who were there (including the three men who were thrown in jail for 30 days).

When asked about persecution in those days, Plotts (a former Methodist minister)



Morris and Neva Plotts, 1981

said, "I just thought it went along with being a Pentecostal preacher."

My only regret is that we don't have some of these pioneer efforts on film or video tape. Even having some of the persecution on tape or film would be a treasure. One group of ruffians in Searsboro, Iowa, were so accurate with their egg throwing that Plotts said, "I looked like a walking omelet."

But a work for the Kingdom was established in that south-central Iowa area. Morris Plotts will tell you today that it was all worthwhile. And he would do it again if he could.

*Heritage* is only happy that we have the privilege of bringing this kind of story into your home or study. We still believe that our past is too good to miss!

Enjoy your reading.



**Thomas F. Harrison**  
(1925-88)

Dr. Thomas F. Harrison, chairman of the Biblical Education Division at Central Bible College and a member of the A/G Archives Advisory Board, died February 4 while enroute to the college. He is survived by his wife Louise.

He pastored churches in his native Tennessee and Texas and had taught at Southwestern A/G College at Waxahachie, Texas.

**COMING IN  
THE NEXT ISSUE  
A Story on the 75th  
Anniversary of Glad  
Tidings Temple, San  
Francisco  
By Dr. Everett Wilson**

### ASSEMBLIES OF GOD HERITAGE

*Heritage* is published quarterly by the Assemblies of God Archives, 1445 Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO 65802. Phone (417) 862-2781. This paper is free to members of the Assemblies of God Heritage Society. Yearly memberships are available for \$10; lifetime memberships are \$100.

Persons wishing to donate historical materials such as correspondence, photographs, tapes, films, magazines, books, minutes, etc., are urged to write to the Archives at the above address.

Wayne E. Warner, Editor

### ARCHIVES ADVISORY BOARD

Joseph R. Flower, Chairman  
Everett Stenhouse  
Bartlett Peterson

ISSN 0896-4394

©Copyright 1988 by the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, MO 65802.



1927 Central District Council, Akron, Ohio. Courtesy of Herman Rose.

# A Glimpse of the Old Central District and the Emerging Ohio District

**Beginning in 1920 With Only 20 Delegates,  
the Old Central District Area Now Has  
Nearly 900 A/G Churches**

Compiled by Roger L. Culbertson

**L**ike most other segments of the Assemblies of God, the old Central District can trace its roots back to the 1901 outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Charles F. Parham's Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, and William J. Seymour's Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles. Comprised of three states, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana, plus parts of Illinois and Kentucky, the Central District was well represented at the first General Council of the Assemblies of God in 1914.

In 1920, 3 years after the 1917 General Council, and at the recommendation of

that council, delegates from the above area met to form the district.

After appointing J. R. Kline of Detroit as temporary chairman and L. V. Roberts of Indianapolis as temporary secretary, the delegates passed their first official resolution. They declared themselves to be: "The Central District Council of the Assemblies of God in affiliation with the General Council of the Assemblies of God."<sup>1</sup>

Elections were held with J. N. Gortner, Cleveland, being elected as the first chairman. J. R. Evans was elected secretary.

Other pertinent business included:

Article I: Only male ministers who had received credentials from the General Council could vote. Women could not be delegates.

Article II: The fundamental truths approved at the General Council of 1916 were adopted. The problem of fanaticism was dealt with by declaring such expressions as fleshly evils from the human spirit through a misunderstanding of the word of God.

It was recommended that ministers discourage any such behavior and instruct the people in scriptural demonstrations of the Holy Spirit according to 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, inclusive. Guidance in personal affairs in the assembly was not by shakings and mutterings, but by guidance of the Holy Spirit in harmony with the word of God. This was seasoned by "common Sanctified grace" (Colossians 4:4,5; Titus 2:7,8; Romans 12:24).

Article III: Ministers were discouraged from allowing other ministers to preach in the pulpit who did not hold credentials with the General Council. This would decrease the risk of "tramp preachers" causing havoc in the Assemblies.

Article IV: Some were advocating at this time the doctrine of "marriage purity" disguised as "social purity." This false doctrine advocated that since the coming of the Lord was so near, married people in the church should live as though they were not married. This doctrine also held that marital relations in their ordinary design were sinful.

The district proclaimed this to be thoroughly unscriptural, and as being "deplorable in the extreme"—a misinterpretation of the word of God.

Article V: The district also lashed out at the heresy of baptism in the "Name of Jesus only."

Article VI: "Seventh Day Pentecost." The brethren called it a Galatian heresy of Paul's day—an injection of legalism. The district encouraged ministers not to cater to the seventh-day heresy by admitting in any official way that Saturday was the Christian sabbath to satisfy those who have such tendencies.

And so, as the Doughboys came marching home from World War I, and America swept into the "Roaring Twenties," the Central District of the Assemblies of God came into existence. A complete roster of all who attended is as follows:

J. R. Kline, Detroit; J. Narver Gortner, Cleveland; J. R. Evans, Cleveland; C. A. McKinney, Akron; T. K. Leonard, Findlay, Ohio; A. B. Cox, Dayton; R. W. Hudson, Toledo; L. V. Roberts, Indianapolis; H. W. Espy, Akron; George E. Smith, Chicago; J. M. Campbell, Bloomington; C. W. Pelton, Conneaut, Ohio; John Waggoner, Warren, Ohio; Harry Long, Zion City, Illinois; J. B. Gordon, Elyria, Ohio; H. E. Bowley, Jasonville, Indiana; Fred Vogler, Martinsville, Indiana; Percy McGill, Muncie, Indiana; J. J. Sell, Cleveland;

**The new district went on record opposing women voting, fanaticism, tramp preachers, "social purity," baptism in Jesus only, and sabbath worship.**

Mrs. J. B. Gordon, Elyria, Ohio; Mrs. J. R. Evans, Cleveland; and Ella Ryan, Detroit. Visitors: B. K. Robbins, Conneaut, Ohio; and missionary A. V. Cook, Danville, New York.

Thus, the Central District Council came into being with a voting constituency of 19 men, three non-voting women credential holders, and two visitors.<sup>2</sup>

For the next 26 years the old Central District held district councils annually and survived the hardships of the Great Depression and the second World War. During this time each individual state became more and more autonomous. In Ohio the Home Missions committee would oversee the planting of new churches; the Camp Committee would conduct camp meetings and eventually purchase the camp grounds at Big Prairie, Ohio; and the Christ's Ambassadors president would oversee the youth program.

Because of the Great Depression and the second World War, however, each local pastor operated very independently with little fellowship with others and almost no supervision from the district officials. During these early years of the movement prejudice against "those Pentecostal Holy Rollers" ran high. It was a time when

## How Pentecost Reached Ohio in Dec. 1906

When Claude A. McKinney heard about the Pentecostal outpouring at the Azusa Street Mission in 1906, he wanted to go to Los Angeles. But his wife told him that it seemed reasonable to think that if the outpouring was of God, that He would see that Akron received its portion.

And that's the way it happened.

Ivey "Iva" Campbell lived in East Liverpool, Ohio, where she was a leader in the Broadway Mission. In 1906—during the first sparks of the Pentecostal outpouring—Iva went to Los Angeles. While in Los Angeles, she attended services at the Azusa Street Mission and was baptized in the Spirit.

Iva wanted others to know about her experience and what was going on in Los Angeles, so she wrote to McKinney. McKinney asked her to visit his church when she returned to Ohio. She did, on December 5, 1906—about 8 months after the initial outpouring in Los Angeles.

Iva and her sister gave their testimonies that night and then invited interested people to pray for the baptism in the Spirit. Two women, including McKinney's mother, were baptized in the Spirit that night. Some men from Hawaii who were in the service said that Grandmother McKinney spoke in their native tongue.

That was good enough for Claude McKinney. He too was baptized in the Spirit in 1906.

Iva also held meetings in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Springboro, Pennsylvania. She worked with McKinney and a former Friends minister, Levi R. Lupton, in June 1907 in a Pentecostal camp meeting near Alliance, Ohio. This meeting had a major impact on the spread of Pentecostalism in the northeastern part of the U.S.

Iva Campbell seems to have gone into obscurity after her initial activity in the

antagonists threw rotten eggs and rotten tomatoes, but it was also a time when believers fasted and prayed.

In spite of these hardships, there were many men and women who were faithful to God and the ministry He had given them. Some excelled and established great churches that are still in existence today. In the larger cities of Ohio this was especially true, and these men eventually became the "bishops of their own religious dynasties." The following is a sketch of a few ministers from this period:

**Thomas K. Leonard:** The man who named the Assemblies of God. Introduced to Pentecost in 1906 by C. A. McKinney, Leonard sold his farm so he could purchase a tavern in Findlay, Ohio, and



This line drawing of Ivey Campbell appeared in an Ohio newspaper accompanying a story on the Pentecostal outpouring.

Pentecostal movement. A. A. Boddy, editor of England's *Confidence* magazine, wrote that he saw her in Los Angeles in 1912 but indicated that she was in poor health. She died in 1918 at the age of 44.

McKinney, who had been a missionary and minister with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, became an important figure in the Pentecostal movement.

Adapted from "Ivey Glenshaw Campbell," by Gary McGee, in *Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, to be published in the fall 1988; and "Our Heritage" (story of First Assembly, Akron, Ohio) by Nellie Sparlin, 1965. Used by permission.

convert it into a church. A student of the Word, he believed that the King James version was incorrectly translating the Greek word "ekklesia" as church instead of assembly. Apparently no one remembers the exact date Leonard began to teach this, but written records show that in 1912, two years before the first General Council, the Findlay Apostolic Temple was renamed "The Assembly of God."<sup>3</sup>

The role Leonard played in the first General Council is well documented. Suffice it to say that the Council not only adopted his name, but also E. N. Bell and J. R. Flower accepted his invitation to move their office and print shop to Findlay. So, thanks to T. K. Leonard, Findlay, Ohio, had the honor of being the first



home of the International Headquarters of the Assemblies of God.

**A. B. "Daddy" Cox:** Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Cox arrived in Dayton on a warm Saturday afternoon in September 1918. After holding tent meetings, cottage prayer meetings, and street meetings, Cox and his small congregation established their first permanent location in a store room overlooking a canal near Fifth and Stone streets.

Revival fires soon broke out, and Cox preached every night for the span of 3 years, supporting his family by contracting electrical work during the day. The church was further expanded in May 1920 when Evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson conducted a revival in Memorial Hall. Such tremendous throngs packed the hall it was necessary for Cox to minister to the overflow crowds on the steps outside. Large numbers were saved, healed, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Cox pastored Dayton's Bethel Temple for almost 28 years. During this time approximately 40 pastors and evangelists entered the ministry from the church. Lula Bell Hough, a missionary to China, was also being supported by the church.<sup>4</sup>

**Dewey P. Holloway:** He was born April 16, 1898, in Coffee Springs, Alabama. The eighth of nine children, he accepted Christ at the age of 13 when evangelists came through the area conducting Pentecostal revival meetings.

D. P. (as he was affectionately called) practiced preaching in the peanut fields on his father's farm. At the age of 16, he began traveling with W. B. Jessup in tent meetings. Prior to coming to Ohio in 1935, Holloway traveled as an evangelist, served as Mississippi District Superinten-

### The Remarkable Conversion: From a Tavern to a Church Building

When Pastor T. K. Leonard (seated at left) needed a church building in Findlay, Ohio, shortly after the turn of the century, he sold his farm and bought this tavern. Here volunteers are renovating the structure. Notice the bottles and signs still in evidence. According to *The Vineyard*, a history of the Ohio District, nothing was wasted: "The card tables became communion tables; the billard sticks became handles for collection baskets made from the pockets of the pool tables. One slot machine became a container for freewill offerings, another the pulpit. The bar rail once used by drunken men for support, became an altar rail where they could cry out to God for mercy." Leonard's group held their first service in the converted tavern in March 1907. Courtesy of Naomi Leonard Simpson and Dwight Snyder.

dent for 5 years, and pioneered churches in Meridian, Stonewall, and Vernon, Mississippi. The move "up north" was like moving to another country for the entire family. It was a world filled with snow, coal bins and furnaces, icy streets, tall skyscrapers, and a church made up of 29 different nationalities.

Holloway pastored the First Pentecostal Church of Cleveland, Ohio for 16 years. During this time he served as general presbyter and then assistant superintendent of both the old Central District and the Ohio District Councils. When the office of nonresident executive presbyter was created, Holloway was elected to serve in that capacity, an office he held until his death.

One of the things which endeared D. P. to his friends was his sense of humor. At times he even resorted to practical jokes. He liked to tell about the time he slipped a piece of hot pepper chewing gum to Daddy Cox during a business session at a district council in Dayton.<sup>5</sup>

**Oscar E. Nash:** He was saved in Milwaukee under the ministry of Joseph Wannemacher. Through mutual friends

in Milwaukee and Cincinnati he was asked to pastor the Cincinnati Christian Assembly in 1927.

Two years later Nash felt called to conduct a missionary outreach in the Kentucky mountain area. By 1931 when the first worker's conference was held, seven full-time missionaries were serving under his direction. As a result of this ministry, a Bible school was established to prepare native Kentuckians for mountain ministries. Later an orphanage and a Bible school were established. When the state of Kentucky became a district of the Assemblies of God, Nash served as its first District Superintendent while continuing to pastor his church in Cincinnati.<sup>6</sup>

**T**ime and space does not permit the telling of the hundreds, yes even thousands of human interest stories connected with these pioneers of Pentecost. It was a time of laughter and tears, a time when the pastor responded to each knock on the door with a mixture of hope and fear. Sometimes the caller brought an answer to prayer in the form of a financial gift, a live hog, or a pot of leftover soup.

At least one pastor, Dale E. Neller, experienced all of this and more. On one occasion he opened the door only to have the caller point a gun at his head and say, "If you don't get out of town, I'll blow your head off."

In spite of all the hardships, God blessed. By 1946, the old Central District had come a long way from its inception. It started with 22 ministers who came from 5 states. The portions of Illinois and Kentucky originally included had long since become part of their respective state district councils. In May 1945, ministers and delegates in Michigan had formed their own district. Indiana and Ohio would soon follow their lead.

As the delegates returned home from the 1945 General Council in Springfield, Missouri, they began to think about the need for yet another change in the Central District. G.F. Lewis, their beloved superintendent, would soon be leaving them for Springfield as an assistant superintendent, and many saw it as the perfect time for change. Resolutions to this effect were circulated among the churches. The issue was settled at the 27th annual District Council held in Bloomington, Indiana on May 6-9, 1946. The delegates voted unanimously to dissolve the Central District to form separate districts for Ohio and Indiana.

Thus, the Ohio District Council came into being on May 8, 1946. Earl E. Bond, who had served as the last superintendent of the Central District was retained as Ohio's first district superintendent. D.P. Holloway became its assistant superintendent, and T.E. Hartshorn its secretary-treasurer. Ohio's first presbyters were W.J. Domm, Cecil M. Good, C.W. Hahn, and D.G. Scott.

Not above showing their affection and appreciation to the early pioneers who were now attaining the rank of elder statesmen, the new Ohio District Council selected Flem Van Meter, A.B. Cox, and O.E. Nash as honorary presbyters.

While records are unavailable to show how many churches were in Ohio in the spring of 1946, we do know there were 230 credentialed ministers. At the same time the missionary force of the Assemblies of God was over 600. The national missionary budget was approximately \$132,000 per month.

Because of the important nature of its business, the final district council of the old Central District was packed with emotion. Recently elected Assistant General Superintendent G.F. Lewis returned home to serve as the evening speaker. Before the district ceased to exist, one final tradition was observed. In the closing service, the following were ordained into the ministry:

Anne Eberhardt, Edna Dice, Carl Malz, Donald Manley, James Miller, Ethel Nor-



## Ohio Personalities

Far left, O.E. Nash pastored the Cincinnati Christian Assembly and sponsored a Kentucky mountain ministry; near left, Earl E. Bond was superintendent of the Central and Ohio Districts; bottom left, the A.B. Cox family in 1937; bottom, Peniel Bible Institute (Dayton) 1932 graduates: Myrtle Clark, Reba Norcross, and Helen Branch Johnson; the men are Fleming Van Meter and James Hartshora.



ris, Mrs. Flem Van Meter, William L. Thornton, W.H. Day, Clarris Horst, Gordon H. Matheny, Leonard R. Nowell, Paul E. Paino, Thomas Paino, Jr., Steven J. Rech, and Lawrence Shaw.<sup>7</sup>

Since its inception in 1946, the following men have served as superintendent of the Ohio District:

**Earl E. Bond:** Born and reared in Indiana, Bond had served as district secretary for the Central District from 1938 to 1943. He died while serving as superintendent at the age of 42, March 14, 1950.

**James W. Van Meter:** He became Ohio's second superintendent when Bond died. Two months later the district council elected him to the office. Van Meter was the son of Flem Van Meter who served as a district superintendent in the old Central District from 1920 to 1930. James Van Meter resigned from office on September 15, 1954.

**C.W. Hahn:** He was elected Ohio's third district superintendent at a special district council held when Van Meter resigned. Rather than just assume the duties of office, Hahn asked for a special district council to be held for that purpose. Hahn remained in office until he resigned at the end of his seventh term in 1968. He died of cancer in 1982, leaving "my companion," as he so often called Mrs. Hahn, to mourn his passing.

**Arthur H. Parsons:** Elected to the office of district superintendent in May 1968, he came to Ohio from Kentucky in

1949 and served as pastor of the Springfield, Ohio, Assembly of God for almost 20 years. Prior to becoming district superintendent he served many years as a district presbyter and also as the assistant superintendent. Parsons resigned from office in 1983.

**Robert Crabtree:** Ohio's present district superintendent, he was elected in 1983.

### Notes

1. Official minutes of the first annual Central District Council, 1920.
2. Roster of the first annual Central District Council, 1920.
3. From a personal history of the nation's first Assembly of God. Prepared for its 75th anniversary by Dwight Snyder.
4. A personal history of A.B. Cox written by David W. Flower for *The Vineyard*, Ohio District Council anniversary book, 1983, p. 24.
5. "Recollections of her father, Rev. D.P. Holloway," for *The Vineyard*, p. 28.
6. A personal history of Oscar E. Nash, compiled by Roger L. Culbertson for *The Vineyard*, p. 29.
7. Official minutes of the 27th annual Central District Council, May 6-9, 1946.

Roger L. Culbertson is pastor of First Assembly, Alliance, Ohio, and a frequent contributor to the *Pentecostal Evangel*.



Now You Will Know...

## Whatever Happened to Lillian Riggs?

By Glenn Gohr

Lillian Merian Riggs was born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 18, 1895. She was one of six children born to Swiss immigrants, August Samuel Merian and his wife Elise. Lillian attended Salvation Army meetings with her mother when she was quite young. Later the family attended Dr. A. B. Simpson's Christian and Missionary Alliance church at Jersey City, New Jersey. Lillian made a decision to serve the Lord at age 17. Then in 1915, at age 20, she enrolled in Beulah Heights Missionary Training School at North Bergen, New Jersey. While attending the

Early in 1920, Lillian became the secretary for a young missionary named Ralph M. Riggs. It turned out that Lillian and Ralph had many mutual friends. Later that same year, they were married in South Africa by their co-worker, George Bowie.

As husband and wife, the Riggses served in South Africa 6 more years. They primarily worked with the tribespeople in an area called Vendaland. In 1925 they took a furlough to the United States. Both were anxious to return to South Africa, but the Lord began to show Ralph that there was work for him to do in the states. During the next 3 years, Ralph pastored a church at Syracuse and one at Ossining, New York.



Ralph Riggs and Lillian Merian were married in 1920 while serving as missionaries in South Africa. The photo of Mrs. Riggs on the right was taken on a recent birthday. Courtesy of Grant Wacker.

school, she decided to devote her life to missionary service. Lillian's older brother, Ernest Merian, was already serving as a missionary with the China Inland Mission. He ministered in China for 40 years. Another brother, Fred Merian, served with his wife as a missionary to India.

The next year, Lillian sailed for Johannesburg, South Africa, to work with George and Eleanor Bowie. After working for a short time as secretary for George Bowie, she worked for 2 years with Mrs. Anna Richards in a mission church about 30 miles outside of Johannesburg.

*It has been a few years since she has been seen in an active role in Assemblies of God functions, but don't think for a minute that Lillian Riggs has lost touch with her denomination. She is still very much aware of happenings in the Assemblies of God and proud of her heritage. We hope you will enjoy reading this feature on Lillian Merian Riggs who just celebrated her 93rd birthday on March 18. —Editor.*

Then in 1928 he was asked to teach at Bethel Bible Training School at Newark, New Jersey, to fill a vacancy left by Edgar Personeus. During that year, Ralph also pastored the Bethel Church. Bethel merged with Central Bible Institute in 1929, so Ralph and Lillian moved to Springfield, Missouri. This was the beginning of 30 years of service in the headquarters city.

Ralph Riggs was chosen as pastor of Central Assembly at Springfield in 1931. Lillian acted in a supportive role as a minister's wife at Central Assembly and in other places where her husband served. Under Ralph Riggs' leadership, the people of Central sent out various families to start outreach churches in different parts of the city. He pastored the church for 8½ years.

Next Riggs was elevated to the post of district superintendent of the Southern Missouri District Council. He was raised to the position of assistant general superintendent for the denomination in 1943 and

Continued on page 18

### THE APOSTOLIC FAITH

Pentecost Has Come

Los Angeles Being Visited by a Revival of Holy Salvation and Pentecost as Recorded in the Book of Acts

**Your  
Apostolic Faith  
Collection Is  
Incomplete  
Without This New  
Author-Subject  
Index**

Historians and others interested in the Pentecostal revival at the turn of the century became excited in 1981 when the old Azusa Street Mission *Apostolic Faith* papers were reprinted.

Only one problem. There was no index published with these periodicals.

But now the Assemblies of God Archives has done something about the problem. We hired a professional indexer to produce an author-subject index. It is set in type, easy to read, and punched for a 3-ring binder.

If you have a copy of LIKE AS OF FIRE (1906-08 issues of *Apostolic Faith*), you can now complete your important collection by ordering our new index. Send your check for \$4 to address below and ask for Index, order no. 750-048.

**Assemblies of God  
ARCHIVES**

**1445 Boonville Ave.  
Springfield, MO 65802**

Copies of the collection LIKE AS OF FIRE can be ordered from Gospel Publishing House (#03-1915).

**Morris Plotts attracted all kinds of people to his 1933-34 revivals. Some came for salvation while others came to pelt the preacher with eggs. Oldtimers will tell you that Iowa hasn't seen anything like it since.**

# Pioneering Churches in South Central Iowa

By Wayne Warner

*One day to our little town  
God sent the Word of life,  
Through a brash young man in overalls,  
With a family of six and a wife.*

*This bold young preacher, with his  
guitar, stood out on the street to sing,  
And folks would listen,  
embarrassed like,  
To the gospel he wanted to bring.*

*Night after night, they filled the tent  
While spectators laughed  
or complained.*

*But nothing could stop this  
new-found joy,  
Nor the inner peace they had gained.<sup>1</sup>*

And so goes the ballad of a famous revival conducted during the Great Depression. The man in the overalls was Morris Charles Plotts, an itinerent Pentecostal

*Morris Plotts began his preaching career in a Methodist church in Nebraska. After being baptized in the Spirit, he began holding meetings in Iowa. This story is about the meetings he conducted in New Sharon, about 50 miles southeast of Des Moines. The next issue of **Heritage** will continue the story, centering on meetings he conducted in Montezuma, Iowa, in 1934. In those meetings Plotts was arrested and stood trial for being a public nuisance.*

*For the past 32 years, Plotts has been raising money to build churches and Bible school buildings on mission fields. Although he will be 82 years old in June, he is still actively working with the Assemblies of God Division of Foreign Missions.*

preacher, and the little town was New Sharon, Iowa.

Hundreds of people flocked to Plotts' meetings during the summer of 1933—some driving a hundred miles or more. Scores were saved and baptized in nearby North Skunk River. Others reported that they were healed or baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Conservative Iowans, for the most part, were more used to taking their religion quietly and with a lot less emotion than

---

**Restitution was common, as new converts returned stolen chickens, cows, dogs, and at least one gun.**

---

the type Plotts was offering. Many rejected the new revival movement, but others looked at the day Morris Plotts rolled into the Heartland's New Sharon as the greatest day of their lives.

There's still a sizeable number of people still living who remember the tall, skinny kid preacher who took this south central rural section of Iowa by storm. They also remember when Plotts was thrown in jail when he ventured into neighboring Montezuma to spread the good news. The climax of that evangelistic effort came when a jury decided that Plotts was guilty of being a public nuisance with his loud music and gospel preaching, which sometimes went on until 3 a.m.

The judge in Montezuma sentenced Plotts to 6 months in the Poweshiek County Jail but then suspended the sentence pending good behavior.

Plotts has many friends who will vouch that he has been on good behavior ever since.

**T**imes were tough in 1933. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had just inherited a near bankrupt economy from one of Iowa's best-known sons, Herbert Hoover.

In one small Iowa town a New York Life Insurance Co. agent was threatened by a lynch mob if he refused to raise the company's bid at a farm foreclosure sale.<sup>2</sup> It was typically the mood of financially strapped farmers, many of whom lost their farms.

People were willing to do almost anything to earn a few dollars to feed families and livestock, buy fuel and clothing, and pay rents and mortgages.

It was into this kind of setting that the former Methodist Morris Plotts made his way, intent on establishing a Pentecostal church in New Sharon. What he didn't know was that his name soon would be splashed across the front pages of local and Des Moines papers and that wire services would also pick up the story. Indeed, the revival was big news, and most of the residents had strong opinions about activities going on around the normally quiet farming communities of south central Iowa.

Plotts had started a church in Oskaloosa





Above, while the congregation on the bank of the North Skunk River sang, nearly 100 people were baptized during this service in 1933; Morris Plotts is on the right, and Harold Raines is on the woman's right. Below, the New Sharon congregation dedicated this tabernacle in 1934. Courtesy of Hazel Groves and Alma Smith. Right, newspaper story in Des Moines Register, Aug. 24, 1933.



From Omaha, Neb., came this evangelist, Morris Charles Plotts, whose revival meetings at New Sharon, Ia., have aroused the town. He calls himself a "house-d preacher" and "former Methodist minister."

"If the meetings can keep some people from revving around nights doing harm, they're all right with me," said Dr. C. E. Wallace, who has been attending New Sharon patients for almost 50 years.

### All New Sharon Excited Over Revival Meetings

Power of Evangelist Baffles Residents; Discord Heard.

By Velma Stool.  
Times Staff Writer.

Tells of Mrs. Lucile Boyer of Newton, who had a vision of the Garden of Eden; and Grace Christensen, who has had the "gift of tongues" since last Thursday; and of little Madeline Barry who went into a trance at the meeting Monday night.



but lost the building in which his group was meeting. In May 1933 he decided to test the waters up the road about 12 miles in New Sharon. His efforts began on the street, with singing and preaching.

Mayor A. J. Hollebrands met Plotts and cordially invited him to conduct his services at the New Sharon city park. Plotts accepted the invitation and for a while used the bandstand for his platform. Later an auctioneer lent Plotts a mule tent which was used until it became too small and the weather got too cold.

With Plotts assembling a kind of rag-tag Salvation Army type orchestra and preaching a powerful gospel message, it didn't take long for New Sharon to experience a revival. Crowds numbered as high as a thousand, including the curious and the sincere seekers for spiritual renewal.

At the 50th anniversary of the New Sharon Assembly, the church Plotts started, he looked back and said that certain signs of revival included repen-

---

**New Sharon was divided over the revival meetings. While some threw eggs at Plotts, others were converted.**

---

tance and restitution. The records show that New Sharon had plenty of both in 1933.

A service station operator was converted during the meetings and later became convicted about a dog he had which didn't belong to him. So he took the dog back to its owner, a farmer, who lived a hundred miles away, but the farmer said, "I've never seen that dog before." The new convert told the farmer that he just didn't recognize his own dog. "I stole him when he was only a pup," he confessed.

Long overdue bills were paid, chickens, cows, and other stolen items were returned to their owners as a result of the genuine conversions that were taking place in New Sharon. A New Sharon doctor saw Plotts in a coffee shop one day and asked him to go with him to his office. There the doctor showed Plotts a gun which had been stolen the year before, and told the preacher a fascinating story. After the thief had been saved in the tent meeting, he knew he had to return the gun to the doctor. The doctor, who was not involved with the evangelistic meetings, thanked Plotts for the part he was playing in the changing of lives in the area.

Like so many other revivals in history, the New Sharon revival seemed to touch every strata of society and from the young to the elderly.

Alma Smith was 13 when Morris Plotts began his street meetings in New Sharon.



**New Sharon's 50th Anniversary.** Upper left, Morris Plotts speaks to 50th anniversary crowd at New Sharon Assembly of God, March 1984; right, Bruce Bachman, one of the musicians in 1934, sings at anniversary; bottom, charter members at anniversary. Photos courtesy of Alma Smith.

She and her girlfriend, Velda Mae Klinker, went for the fun of it, but they were converted and became charter members of the new church.

The Friends minister in New Sharon was interested in the meetings and attended a few until his church members let him know that they disapproved. "He stopped me on the street one day," Alma recalled, "and asked me questions about the baptism in the Spirit and what I had experienced."<sup>3</sup>

Some of the Friends people challenged Plotts to preach all the gospel—and to them, that included feet washing. Plotts accepted the challenge at an Oskaloosa prayer meeting, and it isn't likely that he'll ever forget it. Plotts got happy during the service and started to dance around the room. He suddenly lost his balance and toppled into the small tub of water they were using for the feet washing service.

Since the group had to drive back to New Sharon in one of Iowa's bitter winter nights in an open car, Plotts was almost frozen before they got home.<sup>4</sup>

---

**From New Sharon, Plotts and his party swept into other Iowa communities.**

---

A big man who was a foreman in a nearby coal mine was saved and soon became an enthusiastic witness for Christ and the evangelistic effort. After his conversion he came into the tent service one night, threw his cowboy hat into the air, and declared joyously that he had gotten religion.

Another man who was more regular at the tavern than he was in church decided to attend a service one Saturday night instead of going to the tavern. He was convicted and was soon at the rough altar praying the penitent's prayer. The next Monday morning he was at his regular job digging a sewer line. Some of his old tavern friends who had heard about his conversion came by to taunt him about becoming a Christian. The converted ditch

digger took the abuse for awhile but then threw his shovel to the ground. He told his tormenters that he was going to lay his Jesus aside long enough to whip them and then pick Him up again.

Obviously, Plotts and his workers had a big job making saints out of their converts.

Vivian Jackson Warren, who now lives at Maranatha Village in Springfield, Missouri, remembers Plotts staying at her parents' hotel in New Sharon. She did not see her need for salvation until 1934 when Plotts was conducting his Montezuma meeting. By this time Vivian was married to Porter Warren, a young man who had very little church background.

After the Warrens were converted at Montezuma, they offered to help in the meetings. "It was all so new and wonderful," Vivian, a former Methodist remembers. They traveled to neighboring towns with the Plotts party, helped set up tents, cleaned out and whitewashed old vacant buildings for services, and helped the Plotts family in any way they could.<sup>5</sup>

New Sharon had never seen anything like the Pentecostal invasion during the summer of 1933. Converts were being numbered by the scores, and many were baptized in the Holy Spirit. People were driving to the meetings from many miles away, and then they didn't want to go home, staying often until long after midnight.

The revival results thrilled Plotts and his coworkers, Patience Lewiston (now Hastie), Louella Adams, Bruce Bachman, Harold Raines, and Eddie Manges. It was what they had prayed for and believed God would send to New Sharon. And it made the harsh realities of the Great Depression a little easier to handle.

For some unknown reason—perhaps from political pressure and because of the noise the meetings generated—Mayor Hollebrands changed his mind about having Pentecostals loose in New Sharon. "Get out of town within 24 hours," the mayor warned Plotts, "or we'll tar and feather you."<sup>6</sup>

Plotts faced a dilemma. How could he leave when people were being saved, healed, and filled with the Spirit? Who would disciple the new converts? "I read the New Testament," he told the 50th anniversary crowd at the church in 1984, "and leaving New Sharon didn't look apostolic to me."<sup>7</sup>

The night after the mayor had issued his ultimatum, a man came into the tent and interrupted Plotts' altar call, whispering to Plotts that the mayor wanted to see him outside. When Plotts walked outside, he was confronted by the mayor and a big crowd of people. The mayor said, "You know what I told you. Turn out the lights; you're done."

Plotts responded that he was sorry but he couldn't. God had called him to New Sharon, and he hadn't heard God tell him to move on. With that, the tall, lanky preacher turned and walked back to his altar call, leaving a startled and angry mayor.

As Plotts faced his most critical hour in New Sharon, an unlikely band of men came to his aid. Some of the town's rowdies heard about the mayor's threats and spat out a warning of their own: "You'll not touch that preacher!" They meant it, too, escorting Plotts to the place where he was staying and then returning to guard the tent the rest of the night. The crowd of ruffians decided they liked being the guardian angels of tent preachers and



Plotts and daughter Shirley

Courtesy of Margaret Manges Boggs

### Searsboro ruffians greeted Plotts with a barrage of eggs. "I looked like a walking omelet," Plotts said.

stayed around all summer.

"Some of these men were bootleggers and jailbirds," Plotts recalled, "but God began to get ahold of them and saved some." One of the men, Paul Sexton, had earlier planned to throw eggs at Plotts while the service was in progress. He was saved and became a preacher in South Dakota.<sup>8</sup>

Figuring he would have more room and freedom in a nearby pasture—but which was still in New Sharon's city limits—Plotts moved his revival meeting away from the city park. In August 1933 a Des Moines *Register* writer, in a front-page story which was accompanied by six photographs, wrote: "Into a small tent on a 12-acre pasture lot Evangelist Morris Charles Plotts has brought the 'power of his God'—a power which, to the people of New Sharon, where there are already

four churches, is so baffling that the entire population is confused and anxious."<sup>9</sup>

The "confused and anxious" kept pouring into town and into the tent—if they could find room. Those who couldn't get in stood around outside, hoping to at least see and hear what was happening.

One man told the *Register* reporter that one of the services attracted the biggest crowd he had ever seen. Three tents would not have held the crowd that night, he said. "And I don't mind them at all," he added. "I live next door, and they don't bother me. I'm in favor of any church that will do anybody some good. I believe this preacher is a good man."<sup>10</sup>

The reporter, however, found that not everyone agreed with the man. A groceryman didn't want to be quoted for fear that Plotts' supporters would boycott his store. Other business people shared his fears.

Dr. C. E. Wallace, a long-time medical doctor in town thought the meetings were reaching a certain class of people who wouldn't ordinarily go to church. But the doctor was concerned about the emotional effect the meetings could have on children who were speaking in tongues and going into trances.

Several citizens thought the meetings should have been stopped because of the noise and the late services. Others, however had high praise for Plotts and the meetings.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, New Sharon was a polarized community.

A Baptist preacher in a nearby town reportedly announced that his sermon the next Sunday morning would be titled, "What's Wrong With Morris Plotts' Doctrine?" An unexpected guest—Morris Plotts—showed up at the service, causing a sudden change in the announced sermon.

The meetings continued night and day despite the criticism and the sensational feature in the Des Moines paper. When the weather got too cold for services in the tent, Plotts obtained an old garage building for the congregation's first building. Later, a rough tabernacle—with a sawdust floor and a pot-bellied stove—was constructed by volunteer help.

For Plotts to stay in one small town would be out of character for him. He frequently loaded up their musical instruments and took his group of workers into other towns which he believed needed his brand of the gospel. One of these preaching points was Searsboro, about 12 miles northwest of New Sharon.

The reception in Searsboro was hardly a red-carpet treatment. A gang in Searsboro threw so many eggs at the young preacher and his troupe that Plotts later joked that he looked like a walking omelet.

A carnival was in town at the same time,

Continued on page 20

# TIME FRAME

A QUICK LOOK INTO THE PAST

Each issue the editor selects items of interest for this column from the *Pentecostal Evangel*, *Latter Rain Evangel*, *Apostolic Faith*, *Word and Witness*, and other publications. Comments and suggestions from our readers are invited.

## 10 Years Ago—1978

E.L. Newby, former superintendent of the old Texas District (1931-36), died at the age of 88. He was ordained in 1916.

Bethany Bible College, Santa Cruz, California, has named Richard Foth as the new president, succeeding C.M. Ward. Foth has been pastor of the Assembly of God, Urbana, Illinois.

## 20 Years Ago—1968

A 10-acre piece of ground at Phoenix has been dedicated as the new campus for the American Indian Bible Institute. Charles W.H. Scott, executive director of Home Missions spoke on "Vision and Task."

*Revivaltime* speaker C.M. Ward has selected one of America's most visible businessmen to feature in the 1968 *Revivaltime* witnessing booklet. He is Colonel Harland Sanders, founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken. The booklet is titled, "Colonel Sanders Begins a New Life." (See photo below.)

## 30 Years Ago—1958

R.L. Brandt, superintendent of the North Dakota District, is the new executive director of the Home Missions Department, succeeding Victor Trimmer who has accepted the pastorate of Central Assembly, Wichita.

The Northern California-Nevada District has dedicated its new administration building in memory of W.T. Gaston. Gaston served as district superintendent (1944-56) and as general superintendent (1925-29). J. Roswell Flower, general secretary, spoke at the dedication.

## 40 Years Ago—1948

Missionary E.L. Mason, Liberia, was decorated as a Knight Official of the Humane Order of African Redemption by Liberian President William Tubman. The honor came for Mason's service to the country as a missionary and as a pilot. Only three other Americans have received the honor. Mason is the first missionary to be so honored.

March 3, 1948, was a special day in Springfield, Missouri. That's when ground was broken for the new Gospel Publishing House printing plant on Boonville Avenue. The plant is being constructed on the site of the old White City Amusement Park.

## 50 Years Ago—1938

P.C. Nelson, in writing of a 2-week ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans at Southwestern Bible School, Enid, Oklahoma, reports the new auditorium was filled for the evening meetings. The usual Pentecostal manifestations were in evidence, he said, plus a long prophecy given in poetic form by a woman in the Enid congregation.

After a few months of furlough, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Jones are returning to Africa, taking with them two new missionary families: Mr. and Mrs. Paul Moore, Ohio; and Mr. and Mrs. Paul L. Kitch, Illinois.

## 60 Years Ago—1928

Good reports are coming out of Great Britain regarding the ministry of Evangelist Stephen Jeffreys. In Bristol, the city auditorium was packed to capacity, and more than 1,500 people responded to the altar call.

George Bowie, well-known pastor of the Pentecostal Church of Cleveland (now First Assembly, Lyndhurst), died of cancer. He had served in Africa as a missionary for 12 years and had pastored the Cleveland church for the past 3 years.

## 70 Years Ago—1918

*Trust* magazine published a report from Ralph M. Riggs, pastor of Grace Tabernacle in Syracuse, New York. Riggs had taken a divided congregation and said that God brought the people together, baptizing 12 people in the Spirit within the past 9 months.

The 2nd World-wide Missionary Conference of Pentecostals met at the Stone Church, Chicago, May 12-19. Their immediate aim is to educate Pentecostals through publications about the great missionary needs around the world. D.W. Kerr, Cleveland, was elected chairman for the coming year, and Miss Zella Reynolds was elected secretary.

## 80 Years Ago—1908

A Whitsuntide Conference is being planned at All Saints' Parish Hall, Sunderland, England, June 6-11. *Confidence* magazine states that the conference is open to people who can "whole-heartedly sign the declaration 'I am in full sympathy with those who are seeking Pentecost with the Sign of Tongues.'"

After a burglar was saved at the Azusa Street Mission, Los Angeles, he threw his skeleton keys under the altar bench. He was later sanctified, baptized in the ocean, and baptized in the Spirit.



Courtesy of *Revivaltime*

Colonel Harland Sanders, founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken, autographs a photograph in this 1968 meeting. Looking on are Lee Shultz, secretary of the Radio Department; C.M. Ward, *Revivaltime* speaker; and Waymon Rodgers, pastor of the Evangel Christian Life Center, Louisville, Kentucky. Shultz and Ward were in the Colonel's Louisville home to interview him for a *Revivaltime* miniature.

## PART 1

# J. Narver Gortner

## *The Early Life of a Key Figure in the Assemblies of God*

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM GORTNER  
COLLECTION, A/G ARCHIVES

By Wayne Warner

Mention the name Gortner today and most people will associate it with the one-time child evangelist, and now movie actor, Marjoe Gortner. But anybody who has been around the Assemblies of God since the 1940s will associate this name with the former Methodist and later Assemblies of God minister, J. Narver Gortner. He just happened to be Marjoe's grandfather.<sup>1</sup>

From almost the very day in 1919 that Gortner joined the Assemblies of God, he was recognized as possessing outstanding leadership abilities, having a keen mind, and being deeply spiritual.

These qualities would be used in his various roles as an executive presbyter, as an important committee member, as a writer and poet, as pastor of some of the most influential churches of the period, as

*J. Narver Gortner (1874-1961) was born into the home of a Methodist minister, Joseph Gortner. After pastoring in Illinois and Nebraska, Joseph responded to a missionary call to Liberia in 1887. Three months later—just a hundred years ago in March—Joseph died of African fever. J. Narver became a Methodist minister but then was baptized in the Spirit and joined the Assemblies of God in 1919. Part 1 of this two-part article centers on his early life as a Methodist. Part 2 will cover his ministry in the Assemblies of God. Just last September his son Vernon donated four boxes of historical materials to the Assemblies of God Archives. Vernon died February 13 at the age of 85.*



J. Narver Gortner, Mrs. Gortner and their son Vernon, about 1914.

a Bible school teacher, and as president of Glad Tidings Bible Institute (now Bethany Bible College, Santa Cruz, California).

As an example of how church leaders accepted him at the outset of his association with the Assemblies of God, he was asked to speak at the very first General Council he attended. That was in Chicago in 1919.<sup>2</sup> From there he went to Cleveland to speak at a missions convention in one of the outstanding churches in the denomination, the Pentecostal Church of Cleveland (now First Assembly, Lyndhurst).

---

### I'd Rather

*I'd rather serve my God and live  
On a bowl of soup a day,  
Than reign as king upon a throne,  
And not know how to pray;  
I'd rather live in poverty,  
And Christ my Saviour love,  
Than be a multimillionaire,  
And have no home above.*

J. Narver Gortner

---

Much to his amazement, Gortner was invited to assume the pastorate of the Cleveland church, to follow the venerable D.W. Kerr who had resigned to join Robert and Mary Craig and their Glad Tidings Bible Institute in San Francisco.<sup>3</sup>

But being invited to the Cleveland pastorate was not the end of surprises for this new Assemblies of God leader. When the Central District (Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and parts of Illinois and Kentucky)

was organized in 1920, the delegates looked to J. Narver Gortner as their first superintendent.<sup>4</sup> In 1921 he was elected as a member of the Executive Presbytery, a position he kept until his resignation in 1947 at the age of 73.

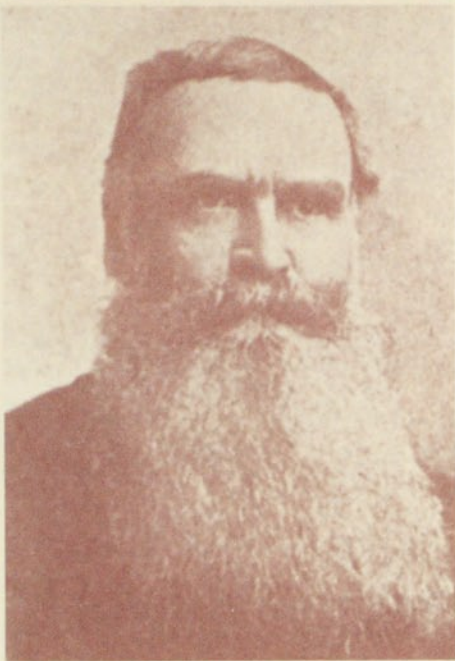
J. Narver Gortner could trace his family roots to the 18th century when his forefathers came to America from Germany and settled in what later became Pennsylvania. The family was a traditional Lutheran family; and like so many other German emigrants, they had come to America looking for new opportunities.

In the 19th century, J. Narver's father—Joseph Ross Gortner—broke family tradition by attending a Methodist revival meeting. He had never really known true conversion, but he—and several other family members—found it at the Methodist revival.

Not only was Joseph converted, but he also was called to preach. Becoming a preacher, however, wasn't that easy, for his fiancée Louisa—and later his wife—was not interested in being a preacher's wife. So, after their marriage, Joseph compromised for several years and became a school teacher.

But the more Louisa Gortner thought about her husband's call to the ministry and her own need of surrendering to God's will, the more she prayed about it. It was a happy day when both she and Joseph were convinced that God wanted them in the ministry.

Little could either of them guess that their ministry's path would take them to Liberia, Africa, and that Joseph would not return.



Methodist Bishop William Taylor enlisted many missionaries in the 19th century.

J. Narver was born in 1874, joining an older sister. Soon after his birth the family left Pennsylvania and settled in Hampshire, Illinois, some 50 miles northwest of Chicago. Here Joseph continued to teach but also preached part-time.

The year 1881 was an impressionable time for the 7-year-old J. Narver. His father felt led to take up a homestead in Nebraska and minister to the many settlers who were moving into the area. It meant leaving an established community and constructing a sod house on the lonely prairies of Holt County.<sup>5</sup>

After contacting the Methodists in Nebraska, Joseph was given a circuit and preached in sod school houses or wherever else he had opportunity.

For 5 years the Gortners lived in their sod house and eked out a living. In 1885 a second son, Ross Aiken Gortner, was born to give the sod house an entirely new atmosphere.

The training J. Narver received in Nebraska could be described as loving but strict. But he never regretted the strictness in his later life. His father's beliefs and preaching never failed to impress him: "He was a holiness preacher of the old school; he believed in miracles and in manifestations of the Spirit, and his ministry was 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.'"<sup>6</sup>

During the mid 1880s, Methodist Bishop William Taylor called for missionary volunteers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. The appeal reached Joseph Gortner through the bishop's articles in church magazines.

Joseph had for several years believed that God would send him to a foreign field,

so it was only natural that he seriously considered Taylor's appeal. Soon he offered himself as a missionary to Liberia, a country that was labeled "the white man's grave"—and for good reason.

Again Louisa Gortner was slow to follow her husband's call. She thought the sacrifices in moving into a sodhouse on the prairies of Nebraska were sufficient. Now her husband talked of faraway Liberia! Not the least of her concerns was the welfare of her children; she would have to leave a married daughter and take her sons to Africa. The choice was not easy.

But late in 1887 she reached a point in her life where she agreed—perhaps reluctantly—that God wanted them in Liberia. One incident which happened while the Gortners traveled to New York bound for Africa helped her to know that God cared about them and would meet their needs. While they changed trains in Chicago, a woman in the depot struck up a conversation with them; when she learned that the Gortners were on their way to Africa, the woman placed \$5 in their hands.

If God could use a perfect stranger in their support, surely He would use their friends to provide for them.

From New Jersey the Gortners sailed November 5, 1887, on the *City of Richmond* to Liverpool, England, and then on to Cape Palmas, Liberia, aboard the *Niger*. One of the missionaries to greet them on their arrival, December 10, was the noted black American evangelist, Amanda Smith.

Thirteen-year-old J. Narver did the best he could in this cross-cultural adjustment. Some of the Liberians thought his white skin had been artificially treated. One woman even rolled up his sleeve to see if he was white all over. She then wet her finger and tried to rub off the white, all the time jabbering in her tribal tongue.

**T**he Gortners were in Liberia for no more than a week when Joseph Gortner became seriously ill with African fever. Although the devoted Amanda Smith nursed him back to health, the sickness was an indicator of things to come.

After the New Year rolled around, the Gortners took up their new assignment at Garraway; but it was soon evident that even though their hearts were prepared to minister in Liberia, their bodies were not ready for the challenge.

By March they were all deathly sick. A single missionary, a Miss Meeker, was the first to die. It looked as if the African fever would wipe out the entire Garraway mission family. On March 2, 1888—just a hundred years ago last month—young J. Narver wrote in his diary that he was sick, but he sat by his father's bedside. He would never forget the agony of his father's last few moments:

Just before midnight Father turned his face toward me; consciousness returned for a moment, and he tried to speak. I bent over his dying form, and listened, but those vocal organs that had so forcibly and so frequently preached the Word refused to give utterance to a dying request or admonition. There was another effort, and the eyes slowly closed.<sup>7</sup>

J. Narver and the Liberians took lumber from a partition in their house and built a crude coffin for Joseph Gortner and buried him, just 3 months after their arrival in Liberia. A second coffin was built for Miss Meeker.

When J. Narver told his mother that her husband and his father had died, Louisa Gortner moaned, "We are all alone, all alone!" Then she quickly changed her attitude. "No, no, we are not alone; Jesus is with us."<sup>8</sup>

On March 10, Bishop Taylor arrived at Garraway only to find that Joseph Gortner had died and his family was very sick. By this time Louisa Gortner had given up all hope.

J. Narver watched and listened as Bishop Taylor exercised faith and took charge of the desperate situation. "You



**J. Narver's father died as a missionary to Liberia only 3 months after they arrived. The 14-year-old J. Narver helped build a coffin for his father.**

must live!" he said to Louisa. "For the sake of those boys, you must live! Lay hold of God with me!"

Then the Bishop fell to his knees and began to cry out to God, lifting his hands toward the heavens. It was a long process; but with the bishop's praying and nursing, Mrs. Gortner did get well and lived another 17 years, long enough to raise J. Narver and Ross Aiken.<sup>9</sup>

After Mrs. Gortner was strong enough to travel, she took her two sons and returned to America and the farm in Nebraska.

**I**t would seem that after the hardships of pioneering in Nebraska and then in the sorrowful experience in Liberia that J. Narver would be open to any career except the ministry. But his diary and life story present a different story as he reflected on God's dealing with his life.

"He gave me a definite call to the ministry," he wrote, "and I believed it was the will of the Lord that I should take up the work my father had laid down."<sup>10</sup>

Bishop Taylor wanted J. Narver to return to Africa with him, but he felt a pull toward pastoring in Nebraska after his schooling at Garrett Biblical Institute in Evanston, Illinois (now Garrett Theological Seminary).

The first pastorate in Nebraska for the young preacher was at Inman in 1893 when he was only 19. How his emotions must have stirred when he was appointed to this church, for his father had at one time also pastored the Inman congregation. J. Narver was indeed taking up the ministry his father laid down.

But the Inman congregation soon learned that their new young preacher would not depend on his father's reputation nor live in the past. A revival took place at the church, and 40 people were converted.

J. Narver Gortner was on his way as an evangelical pastor.

His second pastorate was at Newman Grove, beginning in 1894. He was ordained as a deacon here; but more importantly, he married Della Hayden in 1896—a marriage that would last for 64 years.

J. Narver pastored four other churches in small Nebraska towns at the turn of the century—Osmond, Elgin, Creighton, and Tilden—before being appointed to Omaha's McCabe Memorial Church in 1907. While the Gortners were in Creighton in 1903, their only child Vernon was born.

In addition to his preaching, Gortner began writing articles and poetry for publication. Through the many years of his ministry, he became a prolific writer for religious publications and authored several books.<sup>11</sup>

Gortner enjoyed his ministry in



J. Narver Gortner preached his first sermon in this church building near Page, Nebraska.

Nebraska, but his wife's ill health in 1911 forced him to ask for a transfer to Southern California. The request was granted, and Gortner took up his new assignment at Calexico Methodist Church, just across the border from Mexicali, Mexico.

But the Southern California climate didn't seem to improve Mrs. Gortner's health. She grew steadily worse until Gortner had to give up his pastorate temporarily to place his wife in a Los Angeles hospital. Doctors offered them

---

**"I believed it was the will of the Lord that I should take up the work my father had laid down."  
—J. Narver Gortner**

---

little hope that Mrs. Gortner would ever be well.

As J. Narver sat by his wife's bedside, no doubt his mind went back to Garraway, Liberia, and his father's deathbed experience. Would history repeat itself? Would he be left with his small son Vernon?

Vernon would play an important part in giving negative answers to both of those questions.

It happened that the house where J. Narver and Vernon were staying while Mrs. Gortner was hospitalized was too far from a Methodist church, so Vernon attended a nearby Christian and Missionary Alliance Sunday school. One Sunday Vernon rushed home and excitedly told his father that the Sunday school teacher said Jesus could heal his mother.

Perhaps encouraged by his son's enthusiasm, J. Narver attended a prayer meeting to ask prayer for his wife. She had not been able to sleep for several days, but that night Mrs. Gortner slept soundly.



Three ministers in the old Central District in 1920: J. Narver Gortner, Owen "Irish" Lee, and J.R. Evans.

The little group continued to pray for Della Gortner, and Dr. F.E. Yoakum and the Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor called on her at the hospital. They prayed, and it wasn't long before she was out of the hospital bed and on her way home—much to the surprise and happiness of the doctors.<sup>12</sup>

With the Pentecostal movement spreading throughout Southern California at this time, J. Narver began to read some of the literature being published. The more he read, the more interested he became in the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In 1914 he read about a camp meeting scheduled in the Redwoods near Cazadero, sponsored by Carrie and George

Montgomery of Oakland. One of the speakers was the noted English evangelist, Smith Wigglesworth.

These meetings would dramatically change Gortner's life and ministry. He would receive a marvelous physical healing and be baptized in the Spirit.

It's a great story, but it will have to wait until the next issue of *Heritage*.

#### Notes

1. The primary source for this article is a series of articles by J. Narver Gortner, "The Story of My Life," which appeared in *The Christ's Ambassador Herald*, 1938-39. Other sources included a Gortner diary (1887-91) and a scrapbook; minutes of Methodist conferences; *Pentecostal Evangel*; and an oral history tape with Vernon Gortner, Sept. 27, 1987.

J. Narver Gortner was only one of many ministers who were trained in other denominations before taking leadership positions in the Assemblies of God. Others included A. P. Collins and E. N. Bell (Southern Baptist), M. M. Pinson and H. G. Rodgers (Holiness), D. W. Kerr and J. W. Welch (Christian and Missionary Alliance), Robert Craig and George Eldridge (Methodist), S. A. Jamieson and W. F. Garvin (Presbyterian), plus many foreign missionaries.

2. Gortner, "How God Answered by Signs," *Latter Rain Evangel* (Nov. 1919), pp. 8-10.

3. Gortner remained in Cleveland for 5 years and then was drawn back to California where his ministry was based for the rest of his life.

4. See article in this issue on the Ohio District.

5. While passing through a small Iowa town, the Gortners learned of the death of President Garfield. Just outside of Oskaloosa, Iowa, they heard a loud explosion. Three boys had been warned not to shoot into a dynamite storage building. They refused to listen, and a bullet caused an explosion, killing the three boys. Gortner would use that incident many times later as a sermon illustration.

6. Gortner, "Story of My Life," *The Christ's Ambassador Herald* (Sept. 1938), p. 14.

7. *Ibid* (Jan. 1939), p. 10.

8. *Ibid* (Feb. 1939), p. 10.

9. *Ibid*. Louisa Gortner died in 1905. Ross Aiken Gortner, who was only 3 years of age when the family was in Liberia, became a scientist and for 25 years was chief of the Division of Biochemistry at the University of Minnesota. *Science* magazine (Oct. 30, 1942) devoted three pages to his obituary.

10. *Ibid* (Mar. 1939), p. 8.

11. From the very beginning of his preaching ministry in the 1890s, Gortner carefully outlined his sermons on 5½" x 8" paper and preserved them in

envelopes. This collection of sermons was given to the Assemblies of God Archives by Vernon Gortner last Sept. Also included in the donation were scrapbooks, photographs, recordings, books, and other materials.

12. *Ibid*; taped interview, Wayne Warner with Vernon Gortner, Sept. 1987, A/G Archives.

One of Mrs. Gortner's doctors asked J. Narver to write to him after they left Los Angeles and returned

to Calexico. J. Narver did write after a few months to tell the doctor that his wife was well and had gained 30 pounds.

Dr. F.E. Yoakum had been a medical doctor who had been healed of a serious injury after a team of doctors had offered him no hope for recovery. He founded Pisgah Home, Los Angeles (now Christ Faith Mission).

## LETTERS FROM OUR READERS



### Women in Ministry—Winter Issue

Let me congratulate you for the *Heritage* (Winter 1987-88) which featured women preachers. Many of these I knew either personally or by reputation.

The story interested me for two reasons: I am in the age bracket of the ones featured, and, secondly, I think it's high time to get women back into the pulpit.

I feel there's still a need to keep this subject alive until we can see more young ladies applying and being accepted for ordination.

Jewell (Mrs. T. C.) Cunningham  
Tyler, Texas

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for the article on my mother, Edith Mae Pennington. The article was factual, interesting, and very well written.

It is encouraging to see that her ministry had "fruit that remained" and that it had a lasting effect on the lives of those she reached for God. Her goals in the ministry were to point souls to the cross, to build in Christ, and to give God the glory. I believe this is the reason the souls she reached are still going on with the Lord.

Edith Lorraine Pennington, Pastor  
Full Gospel Temple  
Shreveport, Louisiana

The article on Sister Edith Mae Pennington was of very special interest to

me. The article was well featured and expertly written and captured the great evangelistic zeal of my former pastor.

As an army enlisted man at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, at the close of World War II, I visited Sister Pennington's church. Then when discharged from the army, as a young sergeant, I spent the summer of 1946 in Shreveport where I lived in the Pennington home, almost as one of their family. I helped work on building of their new church, and spent much time in seeking the will of God for my life.

It was at a family prayer meeting in Sister Pennington's living room that I received a definite call to the ministry.

I can never forget Sister Pennington's great ministry in prayer and her emphasis on holiness in life and heart. You are correct: There will never be another Edith Mae Pennington. God did indeed use her mightily in evangelistic work over the nation after her conversion from the glamour of the stage and Hollywood. The spiritual depths I entered that summer in Sister Pennington's home and church have gone with me all through the years since.

Talmadge F. McNabb  
Chaplain (U.S. Army) Ret.  
Browns Mills, NJ

I have found the winter issue most inspiring, especially your article on Edith Mae Pennington's ministry. It meant so much to me as I was a member with my family of Bethel Temple in St. Louis and recall the wonderful revival with Sis. Pennington (in 1931). It was exactly as I remember it. Needless to say, it had a dramatic and lasting impression on me.

I had been saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit for about a year when the tent revival with Sis. Pennington took place. I was 11 years old at the time and already felt the call of God on my life to preach the Gospel.

Since retirement, I have been preaching where I have an opportunity.

Fern O. Hunt  
Waxahachie, Texas

*Mrs. Hunt's father, James Edward Willhite, was an early A/G minister. She began preaching when she was 13. Her first husband was Glenn W. Gilder, an A/G*

*Continued on page 19*

## COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE: Part 2, J. Narver Gortner, by Wayne Warner

"I am still a Methodist. I have not forsaken the faith of my fathers. My contention is that my critics have. If Methodism were what it was a hundred years ago, I verily believe it would gladly receive—receive with open arms—this mighty Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit."

—J. Narver Gortner



By Fred G. Frank

It was my privilege to be present in 1921 when a religious awakening reminiscent of the earliest days of Pentecost swept over a large rural community about 30 miles northeast of Bismarck, North Dakota.

This mighty Holy Ghost revival began in a men's prayer meeting on a Saturday night in January 1921, when 12 of those men were gloriously filled with the Spirit according to Acts 2:4. Some said they were sure the schoolhouse where the meeting was held was shaken as by an earthquake. All felt lifted in spirit into the very presence of God.

Mrs. Andrew Trygg was keenly disappointed that she was not allowed to attend that Saturday night prayer meeting with her husband. She had never witnessed anyone being filled with the Spirit, but her heart was hungry. As she retired for the night she humbly asked the Lord to fill her with the Spirit. She went to sleep, but about the time her husband was being filled with the Holy Spirit in the men's prayer meeting, she awakened and she was filled also, speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance.

After the initial outpouring, the revival fires grew to such great proportions that the boards of two rural schools decided to dismiss school every day at noon so that teachers and pupils could attend afternoon tarrying meetings in private homes.

For weeks these daily meetings drew such crowds that there was scarcely room for the people to kneel. Members of some of the leading families in that area were swept into this glorious experience of the fullness of the Spirit.

The Andrew Tryggs' teen-age son Elmer received the Holy Ghost during these meetings. For many years he was a pastor in the Montana District.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Trygg was one of the 12 who received the Baptism in the men's prayer meeting. His daughter Mildred taught in a school which was dismissed at noon during the revival. This gave her an opportunity to be in the prayer meetings. She was wonderfully filled with the Holy Spirit and was a great blessing to other young people. Later she spent a number of years in ministry with her husband Roy Smuland, who passed on to his reward some years ago. Mrs. Smuland served as national secretary of the Assemblies of God Women's Missionary Council starting in 1960.<sup>2</sup>

*This article was first published in the Pentecostal Evangel, July 30, 1967. Fred G. Frank was a Quaker minister until he was baptized in the Spirit. He pastored churches in North Dakota, Washington, Montana, and Colorado, and was an evangelist. His ministry with the Assemblies of God lasted for more than 50 years. He died in 1979.*

## A Revival That Closed The Country Schools



Three revivalists "bringing in the sheaves" in a promotional pose in North Dakota during the 1920s. Left to right, Mabel Stake, Etta Reckley, and Blanche Brittain. The spiritual sheaves were brought in as reported by Fred G. Frank. Courtesy of Ellen Johnson.

Herman G. Johnson, North Dakota District superintendent for many years, also received the Baptism during this revival. His three sons, Samuel, Daniel, and Joseph, are Assemblies of God ministers today.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the revival, Mrs. Frank and I went to that community to preach the Pentecostal message at the invitation of some people who had attended our meetings elsewhere several months before. The man who was to be our host came for us in his Ford touring car. After riding 20 miles over bumpy roads and trails in that Model T, side curtains flapping in the cold January wind, we arrived at their humble home.

The two-room house consisted of a kitchen, which afforded the only entrance, and a large living room. The side of a hill had been cut away to provide part of two

walls for the kitchen, which had a concrete floor.

The meetings were held in a school house. A pioneer minister in those days could not expect someone else to do the "chores" for a Pentecostal meeting in a new field. Walking the three miles to stoke the furnace several hours before meeting time gave me a wonderful opportunity to pray for the meeting each night.

Crowds gathered every night, singing by the light of kerosene lamps while Mrs. Frank played the reed-type pump organ. Behind the organ our little daughter Eunice (now Mrs. Paul Trulin) slept soundly each evening on several horse blankets.<sup>4</sup>

The blessing of the Lord was upon the services, but we had yet not had a real "break." In answer to prayer, we were able to get Mrs. Etta E. Reckley of Baltimore

to come for a week. She was one of the outstanding women preachers of that day, greatly used of God in pioneer gospel work.

Our host extended her a cordial invitation to share their home, and she came to live in that already overcrowded two-room home which had no modern conveniences whatever. Since our host and his wife occupied the only bed, and Mrs. Frank, our little daughter and I occupied a davenport bed at the other end of the room, with a thin curtain as a partition, we wondered where more sleeping space could be found.

### Schools would dismiss classes so students and teachers could attend afternoon tarrying meetings.

Regardless of how one looked at it, there simply was not room for anyone else to sleep in the living room. Then, remembering my consecration to "do what You want me to do, dear Lord," I looked at the concrete kitchen floor. There was enough room to spread blankets and make myself a pallet. While I considered the subzero temperature, the fact that the floor would be cold, and that there was not much resiliency in concrete, the assurance came from the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you." After all, I had come to propagate the gospel of Christ and not to enjoy a holiday in luxurious surroundings.

Living arrangements thus settled, we proceeded to work and plan for the meetings. Night after night, under the mighty anointing of the Holy Spirit, Mrs. Reckley laid a scriptural foundation which prepared the people to receive the Baptism.

At the close of the first week of meetings with Mrs. Reckley, the Lord led us to announce a Saturday night prayer meeting for men only. This was something new for that community, and a good crowd of men gathered for the occasion.

Although the people were generally receptive to the Pentecostal message, some hesitated to seek the baptism in the Spirit because of fears built up in their minds by unsympathetic preachers.

After a brief exhortation on overcoming such fears, we went to prayer that Saturday night. Each man responded to the Lord in heartsearching and deep humility. God filled 12 with the Spirit that night and they became a kind of firstfruits of a revival during which others were saved and filled, some were healed, and many prayers were answered.

Mrs. Reckley returned later and was a great blessing to the many souls who sought the Lord in the afternoon meetings.



Fred Frank, the author of this article, is seated at the right (with hat) in this picture taken during revival meetings in Wilton, N.D. in early 1920s. Man standing on left is Frank Lindquist, an upper Midwest pioneer preacher. Courtesy of Eunice Frank Trulin.

On this occasion she was entertained in the very comfortable home of the Andrew Tryggs.

None of us had any idea at that time how far-reaching would be the influence of that revival, born of prayer and sacrifice, and the fire of God poured out upon receptive, humble hearts.

#### Notes

1. Elmer Trygg now lives in Hillsboro, Oregon, where he operates a locksmith shop.
2. Mildred Smuland retired in 1972 and now lives in Maranatha Village, Springfield, Missouri.
3. Herman Johnson died last year at the age of 90. Mrs. Johnson lives in Tacoma, Washington. Their son Sam is the pastor of the PTL church, Heritage USA.
4. The Trulins live in Sacramento, CA.

## □ Lillian Riggs/from page 18

served for 10 years. During this time, he also served as secretary of education. At the Milwaukee General Council in 1953, he was elected to be general superintendent. He never dreamed he would hold such a high office, but it was a time of growth for the Assemblies of God under his 6-year term of office. He supported the *Revivaltime* radio broadcasts which went on the ABC Network in 1953 with C. M. Ward as the speaker. Riggs was a great promoter of education and Sunday School work in the fellowship, and he carried much of the burden for establishing Evangel College in 1955.

He left the office of general superintendent in 1960, and soon afterwards Cordas C. Burnett asked him to teach at Bethany Bible College. He continued to further the cause of education and served on the faculty there for 10 years. Ralph M. Riggs passed away January 13, 1971, at the age of 75.

Since her husband's death, Lillian has continued to live near Bethany Bible College at Scotts Valley, California. One of her favorite pastimes is playing scrabble with Mrs. C. M. Ward who lives closeby. Mrs. Riggs has fond memories of the 30

years spent in the Missouri Ozarks. She is also proud of her family which includes two daughters, Venda and Merian, and five grandchildren. One grandson, Grant Wacker, Jr., is professor of religious studies and director of undergraduate studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He has written numerous articles concerning Pentecostal history.

Lillian's daughter, Venda is married to Donnel McLean. Following the missionary heritage of Ralph and Lillian Riggs and of Ernest and Fred Merian, the McLeans have served as missionaries in Japan and Taiwan since 1965.

As in years past, Lillian Riggs and her family are making a lasting contribution for the kingdom of God.



Glenn Gohr is a staff member of the A/G Archives.

## LETTERS

continued from page 16

pastor who died in 1962. She later served as secretary to two presidents of Southwestern Assemblies of God College, Klaude Kendrick and Blake Farmer. Mrs. Hunt has sent gift subscriptions of *Heritage* to her son-in-law and brother.

Now, what would happen if *Heritage* had about 5,000 enthusiastic members like Fern Hunt?

### Honoring Another Pioneer Minister

Greetings and thanks for your recent letter in which you appeal for materials for the Archives.

A few years back a tape was forwarded to the Archives of my interview with William Edgar Emanuel, a veteran of ministers. A few days ago, Brother Emanuel went home to be with his Lord at the grand old age of 93.

At his funeral service, STAR Communications (Spanish Television and Radio) played a 20-minute segment of that interview at my request and as a part of my message. It was most touching. Most of the people, including his family, had never seen it.

It's tragic that much valuable materials are lost by thoughtless descendants.

J. Foy Johnson  
Superintendent  
Peninsular Florida District

*The fine video interview Brother Johnson conducted with Brother Emanuel in 1981 is indeed a part of our video collection. We are privileged to have the story on video.*

### Remembers J. Narver Gortner

What a man of God!

He was my teacher when I attended Glad Tidings in San Francisco. Once he was teaching on Creation, the greatness of God, and tears began to come down his cheeks. He loved God.

He told us that since he had gotten older and was an Assemblies of God preacher, he didn't get into his study quite as early as when he did as a Methodist. One student asked him when he got into his office. He said 7 a.m., which shocked many of the students. Someone else asked him when he got into his study as a Methodist. He said 4 a.m. and that he studied until noon. The milkman asked him if he ever went to bed.

His sermons or teachings were either five or seven points. If he went to a sixth point, you knew he had one more.

Glad to know you are doing an article on him.

Eugene Smith  
Christ Is The Answer, Inc.  
Cheyenne, Wyoming

# Archives Activities

**Wire recordings** transferred to cassette (originated about 1949-52): Central A/G (Springfield, MO) radio programs; district superintendents meeting; panel discussion on Pentecostal worship (Bartlett Peterson, J.R. Flower, Edgar Bethany, and C.M. Ward); Sydney Bryant, speaking to missionaries; some sessions of 1949 General Council; J. Philip Hogan, sermon; A.A. Wilson, sermon; Jack Coe, two radio programs; J.R. Flower's Sunday school class; an unidentified missionary to India; E.S. Williams speaking to Bible college students; Edgar Bethany, sermon; W.B. McCafferty, sermon; Glad Tidings (Clearwater, FL) radio program; E.S. Williams, reaction to New Order of the Latter Rain; James K. Gressett, sermon; J. Roswell Flower, talk on history of publications; Myrtle B. Beall, six radio programs; Robert Jones, talk on home missions; Gayle Lewis, report on visit to Alaska; speakers at a general presbytery meeting; Thomas Brubaker, J.O. Savell, Bert Webb, Noel Perkin, and Howard Bush; G.R. Wessell, reporting on William Branham meeting in South Africa.

**Diaries:** *George B. Studd* (1908), donated by Maranatha Studd Michael; *Carrie Judd Montgomery* (1900), donated by Jennifer Stock and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr.; *John Lake*, donated by Denver Crandall; *Edith Brown*, donated by Philip Wannemacher; *J. Narver Gortner* (1887-91), donated by Vernon Gortner.

**Videos:** DFM luncheon honoring Morris Plotts; *Springfield Scene* TV program with Richard Champion; *The Cross and the Switchblade*; *Jesus Is The Answer* (Nicky Cruz); Jimmy Swaggart; movies transferred to video: *Ambassador 1* and *1* on missionary trips; Pentecostal World

Conference (1947); missionary trip to China (Leslie and Ethel Smith, 1947-49); trip to Alaska (Strafford Anderson, 1953); Joseph Wannemacher, interview, donated by Philip Wannemacher; 80th anniversary, First Assembly (Findlay, OH), by Dwight Snyder; Frank Reynolds, retirement dinner.

**Recordings:** sermon, "The Cross and Discipleship," by Marie Brown; music by Calvary A/G (Milwaukee); violin music by Joseph P. Wannemacher; speech and music by John Alexander Dowie and F.F. Graves, donated by Philip Wannemacher.

**Correspondence:** from Mildred Smuland; from William Pickthorn, correspondence from E.S. Williams to William Pickthorn (1934-77).

**Periodicals:** *Sunday School Times* (1935), donated by Mildred Smuland; *Bridal Call*, *El Bethel*, and *Golden Grain*, donated by Arthur Beahm.

**Movies:** W.B. McCafferty, donated by Lillie B. Mundt.

**Books:** 34-vol. set by George Hawtin, donated by the author.

**Wire recorder:** donated to Archives by Joseph Flower.

**Minister's baptismal robe:** donated to Archive by Adele Flower Dalton, owned by her late father J. Roswell Flower.

**Photographs, sermon notes, books, and other material** donated by Joseph Biscoe; First A/G (Tyler, Texas); Lauren Orchard; Homer Brooks; Stafford Anderson; Gertrude Hansen; Edwin Torgerson; Talmadge McNabb; Helen Earley; Thomas DeVol; A/V Dept.; Merchandise Sales; Mrs. Irving Meyer; Mrs. James Haga; Edith Blumhofer; Andy Harris; Dorothy Hawley; Leona Key; Dwight Snyder; and Howard Kruize.



Interest in the Assemblies of God Archives is increasing as the 75th anniversary of the denomination approaches. Here Terry Terrell, coordinator of District and Church Relations of the Office of Information, researches for historical information.



## □ Morris Plotts/ from page 11

but they could attract few people because most of the townspeople wanted to hear Plotts' evangelistic services. The carnival strong man forced his way through Plotts' crowd intent on beating up the preacher to drive him out of town. But the crowd inadvertently surged against the man, pinning his powerful arms against his sides so that he couldn't lift them to take a swing at Plotts.

Because of the disturbance the meeting caused, the sheriff ordered Plotts and his group out of town. The car carrying the evangelistic group and their instruments raced out of Searsboro just ahead of an egg-throwing bunch of rowdies in another car.

As it would turn out later, the meeting in Searsboro was a picnic compared to the foray Plotts and his volunteers made into the town of Montezuma during the summer of 1934. There is ample evidence in court records that Montezuma's sinners, and believers who didn't share Plotts' worship style, were not surrendering their town without a fight.

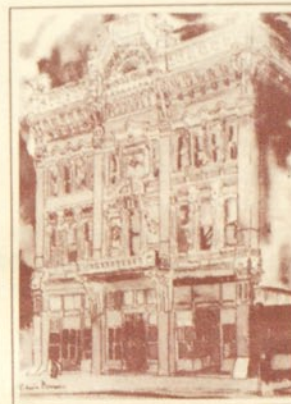
That fight ended in the Poweshiek County Courthouse where Plotts and two companions were tried for creating a public nuisance. A jury would decide whether religious liberty or citizens' rights were in jeopardy.

### Notes

1. From "Church History," poem by Mary Merrill and published in *New Sharon Assembly of God, 1934-1984*, p.6. The Plottses actually had only three children when they were in New Sharon. Their youngest child died while they were there.
2. Calvin D. Linton, ed. *The Bicentennial Almanac* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1975), p. 330.
3. Interview, Sept. 17, 1987. Alma Smith now lives in Springfield, MO.
4. Plotts, 50th anniversary tape, New Sharon Assembly of God, 1984; other stories in this article are from telephone interviews with Plotts, Sept. 18, 1987 and Jan. 26, 1988.
5. Interview, Jan. 22, 1988. Vivian Warren is a retired secretary from the Assemblies of God headquarters. Her late husband managed the GPH bookstore in Springfield.
6. Plotts, 50th anniversary tape.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. "All New Sharon Excited Over Revival Meetings," *Des Moines Register*, Aug. 24, 1933.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid. The Des Moines paper published a photograph of a 15-year-old girl who had been "mumbling in an unknown tongue" for a week. ♦



Yes, preserving our heritage is very important. Here's how you can help.

Next year the Assemblies of God will observe its 75th anniversary. There is no better time than now to support your denomination's efforts to collect historical materials before they are lost or destroyed.

If you have Pentecostal magazines, books, historical photos, recordings, films, diaries, or other historical material, please contact us today and let us know what you have.

Thanks for your support.

Wayne Warner, Director  
 Assemblies of God Archives  
 1445 Boonville Ave.  
 Springfield, MO 65802  
 Phone: (417) 862-2781

## COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Morris Plotts, right, waits in the Poweshiek (Iowa) County courtroom for sentencing, Oct. 1934. The summer issue of *Heritage* will have the story of Plotts' arrest and trial. Courtesy of Morris Plotts.