A Historical Sketch
1921 - 1970
This booklet is published on the occasion of the Fiftieth Annual General Conference of the Churches of God. It contains some historical sketches and pictures of some of the people who have, with the help of Almighty God, brought the measure of accomplishment that is ours at this present time.

1970
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The following people have served on the Board of Directors of the Church of God General Conference since its organization in 1921 through 1970. Forty-three of these are still living. Number of years some of these men served on the Board of Directors: L. T. Hanson 20, L. E. Conner 16, G. E. Marsh 10, S. E. Magaw 10, S. O. Ross 9, F. L. Austin 8.

J. A. Patrick
L. E. Conner
Mrs. T. J. Ellis
F. L. Austin
J. E. Cross
F. A. Stilson
L. T. Hanson
G. E. Marsh
Lottie E. Young
C. E. Randall
Lydia Railsback
F. E. Siple
J. H. Williams
T. J. Ellis
Earle Mogle
Leota Hanson
S. E. Magaw
Orpha (LeMasurier) Ferrell
Harry A. Sheets
C. E. Lapp
J. W. McClain
J. R. LeCrone
Margaret (Budrow) Foster
A. J. Hoke
Dale Dunbar
H. U. Krogh, Jr.
J. Arlen Marsh
Joe Lawrence
Wayne Laning
S. O. Ross

E. J. Demmitt
Harold Doan
Clark Ballentine
Willis Turner
A. G. Townsend
Don Overmyer
C. F. Pryor
Cecil Patrick
John Hayse
Willard Naylor
Francis Burnett
E. Milon Hall
Howard Shute
Warren Landry
Charles Jones
Hollis Partlowe
Elmer McChesney
Alva Huffer
E. Richard Smith
Wm. D. Lawrence
Emory Macy
C. A. Smead
Robert Huddleston
Merle Patrick
Kenneth Vancil
Dwaine Demmitt
T. M. Ferrell
Dean Urish
Vernis Wolfe
C. Jesse Pestle
1921
General Conference
Board of Directors

James A. Patrick
President

L. E. Conner
1st V. President

F. L. Austin
Secretary

J. S. Lyon
2nd V. President

Greenleaf Allard
Treasurer
Preliminaries

For some time, prior to 1920, farseeing workers in the Church of God had been in correspondence regarding the formation of a unified working body involving all the Churches of God from different sections of our country. Finally an invitation was issued to some twenty or more evangelists and pastors to meet in Chicago on September 28, 1920. Not all were able to be present, but many of those unable to come wrote letters expressing approval of the purpose of the meeting. From this nucleus sprang the Church of God General Conference as we now know it, with many growing pains in the process.

Invitations were sent to a number of active workers representing all units of the brotherhood to meet in Oregon, Illinois, on November 9, 1920, to make further study of such a union. Twenty-seven responded from places as far apart as Ontario and Texas, Minnesota and Louisiana. At this meeting there was prayerful effort to do all things as Christ the HEAD would desire. Ten workers were appointed as a committee ad interim to seek ways to acquaint the membership at large of the purpose of the activity. This committee consisted of: J. W. Williams, chairman, F. L. Austin, secretary, Leota Hanson, Rolla Hightower, Alta King, J. S. Lyon, Grace Marsh, J. A. Patrick, F. E. Siple, and D. E. Vanvactor.

Reams of paper, gallons of ink, and much midnight oil were consumed in an effort to effect a purposeful program, and in April, 1921, the committee met in Marshalltown, Iowa, at the G. E. Marsh home for the purpose of preparing a definite program to present to the brotherhood for a general organization. All members of the committee were present except J. W. Williams, whose home was in Arizona. Although he continued to work with the committee, Bro. Williams submitted his resignation as chairman at that time and J. A. Patrick was subsequently chosen to serve in that capacity. It was the business of the group to call for a general assembly of the Churches of God. They prepared a suggestive program and constitution to be considered by the membership at large before the assembly convened.
The First Conference

At the invitation of the Iowa State Conference, this assembly was held on the Church of God campground in Waterloo, Iowa, August 28-September 3, 1921. Bro. Paul Hatch has given us a description of the area: "The Iowa campgrounds covered an area approximately the size of one and one-half city blocks. On the north side was a building used for the kitchen and dining areas. To the south was a wooded area where family tents were pitched, and enough trees had been removed to form a clearing where a large tent was set up for conference meetings. It was an old tent which had been used for evangelistic work in Iowa during the 1890’s. The ends of the tent had been replaced with new canvas before this time, but the center portion was getting quite old and the leaks became more and more apparent during the many sudden thunderstorms which occurred during that historical week."

Into those seven days were crowded the consideration of God’s chosen way of conducting his business, the aspirations and dreams of those who wished his work to move forward to the unchurched, and, finally, the consideration of organization and working rules. Present during these eventful days were members from seventeen states, one province, one church, and the National Berean Society which had organized several years previously. Ten conferences and one church sent special representatives. While not all agreed in thought and principle, there was a feeling of spiritual unity present and an atmosphere of Christian love that helped to bridge the chasm of self versus the Father’s way.

The Working Body

It was at this meeting that the Church of God General Conference came into being with its parallel organization for business purposes, the National Bible Institution. The Executive Board was elected for the General Conference, consisting of: J. A. Patrick, president; L. E. Conner, first vice-president; J. S. Lyon, second vice-president; F. L. Austin, secretary; and G. P. Allard, treasurer. This Board was incorporated to serve the National Bible Institution in a business capacity, since there was a substantial number of the brotherhood who felt it was wrong for the church, as an organization, to conduct business. The presidents of the various state conferences and the National Berean Society constituted an advisory board.
The Work to be Done

The purposes of the General Conference were listed as:

a) That the evangelistic work of the church be extended;
b) That publishing facilities be provided;
c) That facilities be provided to aid in the education of those desiring to prepare themselves for the ministry;
d) That a Board of Benevolences be organized to minister to individual needs as they might arise.

Ratification of Working Rules and Constitution

The constitution and the working rules, as adopted, were sent to all Church of God members whose addresses could be secured to be studied, approved, ratified, or rejected. Members could ratify individually, or through their conferences. Voting in session was individually or by proxy. Not until 1,000 members and three state conferences had ratified did the organization become effective. Oregon, Illinois, was chosen as the headquarters over Argos, Indiana, and Waterloo, Iowa, because of the printing facilities already established there.

Annual meetings were held in Oregon, Illinois, through 1954, when the Conference moved its meeting to Quaker Haven Camp in Indiana for the sake of roomier facilities. In 1957 the meeting place was moved to Camp Alexander Mack in Indiana, where it has remained until the present time. Now, in 1970, we have come full circle and have returned to Iowa, meeting this year in Riverview Park, Cedar Falls, just a few miles from Waterloo where we had our beginning.

Publishing and Printing

The Restitution Publishing Company had been organized in 1911 and had been printing and publishing The Restitution Herald, a Sunday School Leaflet, as well as tracts and booklets. In 1922 The Restitution Herald was placed under the direction of the General Conference Board, as the official publication of the Conference. In 1926 the Conference began publishing Truth Seekers’ Quarterly for adults. Following that venture, other quarterlies were added to accommodate various age groups, and for several years vacation Bible school lessons have been available. Tracts and books have also been a part of the literary effort, prepared with the idea of reaching the general public. In 1927 The Restitution Publishing Company was dissolved and its real estate and equipment became the property of National Bible Institution.
Education

The education feature of the work was begun in a very humble way. The Bible Training School was established in the fall of 1923, with Bro. F. L. Austin as instructor, for the purpose of giving training and encouragement to those young men and women who were interested in becoming ministers or lay workers. Gradually the staff and courses were increased, until the financial depression of the 1930’s made it necessary to curtail activities for a time, and it was discontinued in 1932. However, a summer training class was held during the summers of 1938 and 1939, and in the fall of 1939 the Bible Training Class was resumed. This was renamed Oregon Bible College in 1942. These two efforts are the alma mater of most of our active ministers today, with 112 students being graduated from Oregon Bible College through May, 1970.

Benevolences

Benevolences took the form of a committee to provide for needy individuals. In the mid-1920’s Golden Rule Home was purchased in Oregon, Illinois, to be used for a retirement home. In later years the operation of this home became impractical and in 1958 the delegates of the General Conference voted to make Golden Rule Home a part of the Oregon Bible College. At the present time it is being used for a women’s dormitory.

A building program in 1950 provided roomier and more modern facilities for classes, office force, and printing plant. Since that time the building has been remodeled and reorganized to provide for even more classroom space. In 1963 a men’s dormitory was built. This was constructed on property adjacent to the former Golden Rule Home and contains a library and cafeteria.

Steady Growth

While it is true that great oaks grow from small acorns, it does not happen in a night. So it has been with our Conference. It has had a slow, steady growth since its inception. God has granted a blessing on his church, whenever its membership has stepped out in faith to do his will. If at times there seemed to be discouragements, perhaps the Father was directing us into better paths, more in keeping with his will.
Missions

By S. O. Ross

Mission work under the auspices of the Church of God General Conference really began in 1956 when the Conference began to support Bro. Roddy Pike in Digby, Nova Scotia. Since that time, the work there has grown under Bros. John Denchfield and Raymond Brown and a church building has been constructed.

After special prayers for new doors of opportunity during the 1960 General Conference, a letter was received in December from Bro. Eleodoro S. Ortigiero in the Philippine Islands. After correspondence and investigation, support was begun in September, 1961. Eight workers and their families are now active in the mission work there, a fine building has been built, a weekly radio program is carried on and many are being brought to Christ.

In January, 1963 a survey trip was made into Mexico by Bro. Dean Moore. A number of people were visited who had worked near Blanchard, Michigan, under the Bracero program for a number of years previously. The report of the trip seemed to warrant a missionary in Mexico and Bro. Moore and his family went into Mexico in September 1963 to begin mission work. Since that time, Sr. Rachel Krogh and Sr. Alice Aldrich have worked in the field together with several national workers. Bro. Francisco Martinez is now the pastor and the work is being carried on in Saltillo and other villages in that area.

The mission work in India was started by the Minnesota State Conference in the early years of this century. Mr. Charles Vedantachari of India was ordained a pastor at the 1912 Minnesota State Conference. He carried on the work for many years and a convert of his, John Manoah followed him.

At the death of John Manoah, his son S. S. Manoah was very young. The Minnesota Conference kept in touch with him and when he became old enough to begin preaching, they began to support him. In the mid 1950’s, the General Conference took over the support of Bro. Manoah, but through misunderstandings this support was soon stopped. For seven years the Minnesota Conference kept in touch with him and continued to send him some support.
After more thorough investigation, the General Conference picked up the support of the India work in January, 1964, and much progress has been made. A fine building has been built and a second church group started in Wilson Garden.

Bro. Jamal Sunna’a in Beruit, Lebanon was baptized in 1966 by Bro. S. O. Ross and he has developed a growing congregation, has over seven hundred taking the Systematic Bible Study Course in several Arab nations and has baptized some in the country of Jordan.

Another mission field is in Nigeria, Africa, where nine pastors have received support and fifteen churches have baptized over three thousand members. Ghana, Africa, is the newest mission field and is showing good growth.

In September, 1961, Bro. S. O. Ross was appointed the first Superintendent of Missions for the Church of God General Conference. In August, 1969, Sr. Rachel Krogh became Superintendent of Foreign Missions and Bro. Ross continued as director of Home Missions. Much literature is sent to many countries of the world and many projects are carried on in the Home Missions area.

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Verna Thayer began her Bible school teaching for children in 1920 at the annual Illinois Conference Bible school, at which school she taught each year until 1955. Her service as children’s evangelist among the Churches of God in the United States and Canada made the vacation Bible schools an integral part of the teaching ministry in many churches.
The Iowa Conference in 1908. This shows the campground as it was then and as it continued to appear as long as tents were used.
BIBLE TRAINING CLASS

After a stirring sermon by F. L. Austin during the 1923 General Conference in Oregon, Illinois, an invitation was given to any young men who would like a Bible training class to prepare for the ministry. Six responded. They were: Charles O. Fletcher, J. Arthur Johnson, Paul C. Johnson, Melville W. Lyon, E. Cedric Pope, and Harry A. Sheets.

The Bible Training Class began its work in the fall of 1923, with Brother Austin as teacher. The following year Sister Mary Gesin was added as English teacher. This class continued into its tenth year. Then came the great depression and it was disbanded for a time. Reorganization came in 1939, largely through the efforts of Brother Sydney E. Magaw. The name "Oregon Bible College" was finally adopted and first used the school year of 1941-1942.

The first classes were conducted evenings in an upstairs room in The Restitution Herald building. Students were housed in Golden Rule Home and in rooms about town. Later, the conference dormitory which stood behind the Oregon Church was used by Training School students. This they called "The Beanery." After reorganization of the school in 1939, a large house in Oregon was used. During Oregon Bible College days living quarters have been in the building north of Oregon for awhile, Golden Rule Home Women's Dormitory, and the new Men's Dormitory.

—Adapted from research by Evelyn H. Austin
THE BEREA N S AND T HEIR W ORK

Anna E. Drew, Dixon, Illinois, was truly the mother of Berean work in the Church of God, and S. J. Lindsay, Oregon, Illinois, was the father of vacation Bible school work. Through the efforts of these two, youth activities were started among the churches throughout the country.

The National Berean Society was organized in the summer of 1913 at the Church of God in Oregon, Illinois.

Prior to this time Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, and Michigan had state societies. These four states had worked together in the preparation and use of lesson books, and also in other matters. Leaders from these states became acquainted with each other at the annual Bible schools in Oregon. They talked about the work and the problems in their respective states and felt the need of unified action. The urge for a national organization became very keen, and it became reality at the 1913 meeting.

The name "Berean" was selected because of Acts 17:10, 11: "These [the people at Berea] were more noble... in that they... searched the scriptures daily." The name had been used as early as 1896 by an organized group of young people in Plymouth, Indiana, and prior to 1900 by a state organization in Iowa. "Berean" came to be a common name for other youth groups as they organized. Today the name is "Berean Youth Fellowship."

The home of Sister Leila Whitehead, president, and Sister Evelyn K. Harsch (now Mrs. F. L. Austin), corresponding-secretary, in Chicago, served as National Berean headquarters from 1914-1922. Since that time, General Conference facilities in Oregon have been used.

The lesson books published by the National Berean Society contributed much to the Bible study classes in many Churches of God and in many isolated groups. Many students treasure their copies of these study books.

Several Churches of God had their beginning in Berean Bible study classes.

The National Berean Society was the first organized group to officially ratify the Declaration of Understanding and the Working Rules of the General Conference and National Bible Institution at the 1921 Conference meeting.

—Adapted from research by Evelyn H. Austin
This building, used for General Conference operations since 1922, is, with a new front, a part of the present (1970) General Conference office and college facility.

Golden Rule Home, now Oregon Bible College Women’s Dormitory
Bible Training Class, 1931, left to right, standing: Roland Wright, Gerald Cooper, Cecil Smeal, Lucille LeCrone Appleby, Clarence Lapp, Richard LeCrone, Harvey Krogh, Jr., seated, Alan Dietzman, Edna Cooper Powers, F. L. Austin, Mary Gesin, John Denchfield

Oregon Bible College, class of 1940, left to right, standing: Delbert Jones, Celaine Randall, Muriel Randall Hass, Alan McLain; seated, Ellsworth Routson, S. E. Magaw, L. E. Conner, Frank Johnson

James Wilson, A. J. Eychaner, P. G. Bowman, R. S. Duggins, Albert O. Young

George Elton, A. J. Eychaner, J. L. Waggoner, Almus Adams, J. S. Hatch

COMMITTEES AND OFFICERS OF 1888 GENERAL CONFERENCE

Note that L. E. Conner, A. J. Eychaner, Almus Adams, and Mary A. Woodward were still active at the time of the 1921 organization meeting.

J. H. Willey, S. A. Chaplin, Geo. Young, A. C. West, C. C. Ramsey Geo. Work, Mary Woodward

James Wilson, L. C. Chase, N. J. Morgan, C. C. Ramsey, L. E. Conner
The Church of God building in Oregon, Illinois, as it appeared during the years (1922-1954) that General Conference used the facilities for the annual meetings.
Pictured above are ministers in attendance at a midwinter conference, with some Oregon Bible College students.
Editors of the Restitution Herald have been: S. J. Lindsay, F. L. Austin, G. E. Marsh, S. E. Magaw, James Watkins, Harold Doan, T. M. Ferrell.